

# Inspection of Thriftwood School

Slades Lane, Galleywood, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 8RW

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Inspection dates:	15 to 16 July 2025
The quality of education	<b>Outstanding</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The executive headteacher of this school is Georgina Pryke. The school is part of the SEAX Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Ruth Sturdy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sally Lockyer.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils thrive at this welcoming school. They feel and are safe, valued and understood. Staff know pupils well. They respond sensitively to pupils' individual needs. This deep sense of safety and belonging helps pupils to engage confidently with school life. Pupils are rightly proud to go here.

Ambitious and flexible teaching supports pupils to get the most out of their lessons. Pupils are enthusiastic and show real pride in their progress. Pupils recall what they have been taught. They explain how adults help them to improve. Pupils' success takes many forms. This includes becoming fluent readers, confident communicators, taking part in community projects, workplace experiences and gaining a range of qualifications.

Behaviour is calm and positive. Pupils understand expectations, reflect on choices and develop self-regulation over time. This is due to the school's consistent approach to teaching social skills, highly positive relationships and the importance of working towards important goals. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers. They work hard and are quick to praise each other's efforts.

Across both school sites, pupils experience rich and varied opportunities for personal growth. The school ensures that these activities are meaningful and inclusive, building over time. Pupils can also take on roles of responsibility. They help to shape school life.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use their deep understanding of pupils' needs to plan rich learning experiences. This starts with the information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff closely monitor pupils' holistic development, skilfully adjusting support to meet evolving needs. They respond swiftly to any changes in mood or behaviour. Therapists and mental health professionals provide high-quality guidance and support.

Leaders have designed a carefully considered curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils, including those with more complex needs. The curriculum is ambitious and thoughtfully sequenced for all year groups. It blends academic content, life skills and personal development goals. Through providing flexible pathways to success, the curriculum ensures that each pupil receives an education that reflects their needs, interests and long-term goals.

The school knows pupils exceptionally well. Lessons consistently have a calm and focused atmosphere. Staff skilfully adapt tasks to help pupils engage and take part. For example, they may pre-teach vocabulary or use visual aids. Pupils take pride in their work and share what they know. For instance, they can explain their thinking in mathematics and use correct vocabulary in science. In practical subjects, they show what they have

learned. For example, they talk about food hygiene in cookery or safe techniques in physical education (PE).

Reading is taught systematically and consistently well across the school. Pupils at the early stages of reading benefit from well-structured phonics sessions. This includes students in the sixth form who learn with age-appropriate resources. All pupils have access to books matched to their reading stage. Additionally, their enjoyment of reading is enhanced through reading books linked to their interests. Pupils enjoy reading. They talk with enthusiasm about stories they have heard.

The sixth form prepares students exceptionally well for adulthood. Students follow personalised programmes. Classroom routines support students' independence and confidence. Students take part in personal, social and health education (PSHE) sessions that tackle complex topics in age-appropriate ways. Staff provide sensitive support. Students appreciate the more informal approach and respond with maturity. They speak enthusiastically about their careers education, which combines a flexible range of qualifications, work experience, volunteering and enterprise opportunities.

The school helps pupils learn social skills and manage their emotions. Pupils are taught respectful behaviour and how to solve problems. Clear expectations are taught through routines, pictures and social stories. When needed, staff make appropriate adjustments. For example, changes to classroom layout, allowing more time for concepts to be understood, and enhanced support for transitions. Attendance is high. The school works effectively with families to keep it that way.

The school is rightly proud of its approach to pupils' personal development. The fundamentals for the future curriculum is a golden thread through daily teaching, PSHE and wider school life. It helps pupils to develop the attributes they need to be confident, independent and healthy. PSHE is taught thoughtfully and consistently. It covers topics such as consent, relationships, diversity and safety. Pupils are being prepared very well for their next steps.

Leaders want the best for every pupil. They know each pupil's story, and plan carefully to help them succeed. Leaders regularly review provision and, when needed, make very well-considered adjustments to optimise this support. Staff feel well supported and trained. Leaders engage proactively with the wider educational community. This helps to foster mutual professional growth and continued school improvement. Families and professionals praise the school's inclusive approach and care.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137554
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10345322
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	237
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	31
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Sally Lockyer
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Ruth Sturdy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Georgina Pryke
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thriftwoodschool.com">www.thriftwoodschool.com</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	20 and 21 June 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is one of five schools in the SEAX Multi-Academy Trust.
- Thriftwood School operates on two sites. Pupils in key stage 2 and key stage 3 are based at the main school site. Pupils in key stage 4 and key stage 5 are based at a second site, known as Thriftwood College. Its address is Fox Crescent, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2BN.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. Most pupils have moderate learning disabilities. A small proportion of pupils have severe learning disabilities. A large proportion of pupils have needs associated with a diagnosis of autism.
- The school is registered for pupils from the age of five years. However, it currently has no key stage 1 pupils on roll.

- The school uses four unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the head of the school site and the head of the college site, as well as other school leaders and groups of staff. The lead inspector met with the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the director of education, the chair of the board of trustees and the vice-chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, personal, social, health and economic education, the school's life skills curriculum, Fundamentals for the future mathematics and PE (including physical development). They spoke with the leaders of these areas of the curriculum. They also visited lessons, looked at samples of pupils' work, held discussions with teachers and talked with pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including policies and analyses of pupils' behaviour, attendance and destinations data.
- Inspectors spoke to some pupils and staff about the school. Adults were present at some of the inspectors' discussions with younger pupils to support pupils with their communication. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lunchtimes and breaktimes.
- Inspectors considered the findings of the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments, as well as the responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

## Inspection team

Hannah Stoten, lead inspector

Susan Sutton

Nicola Shadbolt

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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