



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR THRIFTWOOD ACADEMY

Name of Academy:	Thriftwood Academy
Headteacher/Principal:	Georgina Pryke
Hub:	London Special and AP Hub
Academy phase:	All through specialist academy
MAT (if applicable):	SEAX Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Not applicable
Date of this Review:	17/01/2024
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	First review
Date of last QA Review:	Not applicable
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Section 8 Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	20/06/2023



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Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host academy leaders and visiting reviewers agree that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels Not applicable

Quality of provision and outcomes Not applicable

AND

**Quality of provision and
outcomes for disadvantaged
pupils and pupils with additional
needs**

Area of excellence Not applicable

**Previously accredited valid areas
of excellence** Not applicable

Overall peer evaluation estimate Not applicable

*The Quality Assurance Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades.
The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is
developmental not judgmental.*

1. Context and character of the academy

Thriftwood Academy is a dual-site specialist provision, at the heart of the Essex County town of Chelmsford. The school site's front facade, from the 1970s, hides an extended warren of additional buildings. The college site is in an ex-high school building. The fabric of both sites is fabulous, with adapted classrooms, specialist learning zones, and exciting and interesting outdoor spaces, including a 'sand barn' and forest school area.

All 262 pupils at Thriftwood have Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs). The two most common diagnoses on EHCPs are autism and speech, language and communication difficulties. Due to the pupils' complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), the curricula offered is a blend of academic, therapeutic, and EHCP outcome targets. For all pupils, the blend of each curriculum aspect may well change over time, so that it matches need.

Boys make up almost 70% of the cohort. The number of pupils in receipt of pupil premium is nearly double the national average. Pupil attendance is above the national average and persistent absence is lower. As one carer explained, 'The school is truly outstanding and has supported us 100%, we couldn't ask for more'.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders have a clear mantra that pastoral care 'is the beating heart of the school'. This allows early intervention to help support pupils, both academically and emotionally. Staff know their input is valued, and they are able to support pupils both proactively and reactively. Pupils have a clear safety net of support that means they can access their education, with support for the complex issues they may be dealing with.
- In discussions with leaders, it is clear and obvious how well they know their cohort, both as trending groups and as individuals. All refinements to the curricula offer are well thought through, planned out, and then assessed with adjustments for future proofing. Students have an evolving curricula diet each year that matches their distinct needs. As one leader explained, 'There's no ceiling at Thriftwood'.
- At Thriftwood, leaders at all levels draw on each other's expertise. Those working with the severe learning difficulty (SLD) cohort support each other across the school and college sites to further develop pedagogy and ensure consistency of approach. To achieve this, leaders ensure staff have reflection time built into the school's weekly timetable. With the staff constantly building their teaching skill

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base to match pupils' needs, pupils have every opportunity to make the most of their time at the school and college.

- Leaders know they need a specialised curriculum offer. The Fundamentals For the Future curriculum has 324 graduated targets that support pupils with both their EHCP outcomes targets and with their wider personal development. This incremental step approach means that all pupils can make a variety of progressive steps that match their level of SEND complexity. Pupils have a curriculum that matches their needs, and this means that they want to attend school to make progress.
- College leaders have a clear focus on ensuring that pupils are prepared for their next steps into education, employment, or training. This year there is an increased drive for pupils to have even more meaningful work experiences both within and beyond the college (for example, Marks and Spencer, Tesco, The Entertainer, the local leisure centre, and Circles Farm). To support this, pupils develop a live curriculum vitae from Year 9, which showcases their attributes and strengths, as well as their academic prowess. With this in place, pupils are enthused to make the most of opportunities for employment as adults with learning difficulties and gain successful independent or supported work/life placements.
- College leaders have high aspirations for all their pupils, which are reflected through relevant and meaningful qualifications linked to pupil aspirations. This in turn provides a further enhanced curriculum offer, widening learning opportunities for pupils and adding further value to their achievements.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

...leaders ensured that the website, internal documentation, and the SEF clearly outlined and celebrated the wider curricula offer at Thriftwood.

...leaders ensured they consistently use specialist sector language, so they are crystal clear on the academic, therapeutic, and EHCP blended curricula offer.

...leaders had more tracking data on ex-pupils to capture all the great outcomes they are achieving as adults, beyond anecdotal stories.

...leaders captured the changing needs of the cohort over time and recorded them for governors, the trust, and their own future planning.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well...

- Teachers are able to articulate their knowledge of pupils' abilities and use this to plan appropriate activities to meet the needs and next steps for the pupils. For

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example, in a SLD phonics lesson, the pace and structure of the lesson is adapted to ensure that the needs of the cohort are met. Resources, including adults, are used to ensure that pupils are engaged in learning, providing support where needed. Pupils understand what is expected of them and can achieve consistent, incremental progress.

- The pitch of lessons is carefully crafted to meet pupils' needs and abilities. In this way, pupils are motivated, happy, and challenged to achieve. The delivery of learning by teachers provides engagement and excitement that is hard to ignore. For example, in Key Stage 4 art, pupils could discuss the process of developing a three-colour print. They were excited to see both their work and the teachers' examples on screen and could not wait to move onto the next stage of printing a series of block images onto their chosen background colour. Pupils respond well to the challenge and the pitch of lessons and consequently get to celebrate their success frequently.
- Behaviours for learning are exceptional throughout the school. Pupils have positive relationships with all adults. This came across as a strength during the pupil voice session, where pupils were able to share favourite work they had done and could share their current class readers, including 'The Boy at the Back of the Class' by Onjali Rauf. Pupils shared their favourite class trips, and when asked if they would like to change anything at the school, they came back with 'nothing'. At Thriftwood, this stable and caring environment supports pupils to achieve their very best.
- As pupils transition through the school, their environmental and social rules and how they are taught change to match their ages. In Key Stage 2, pupils are supported in class by working walls and visual timetables, are proud to wear a school uniform, and talk to staff using the formal language of Mrs. and Mr. By the time the pupils enter Key Stage 5, the visual cluing in, may well still be in place, but discreetly, pupils talk to staff on a first-name basis, choose their own clothes for each school day, and have options to take subjects that match the way they learn best. With this clarity of provision, pupils understand that Thriftwood is a school that will support them in living an active life within their community.
- Staff work hard to help pupils become more independent. For example, when the primary SLD class transitioned into the next lesson, pupils had the opportunity to show their independence. Staff supported sensitively by ensuring that pupils were given sufficient processing time to find their own solutions, so that in the future, the pupils will be able to reduce their dependence on supporting adult prompts.
- Pupils hugely enjoy and are highly motivated by the Maths Gems programme. This bespoke assessment and achievement tool brilliantly provides the pupils with opportunities to experience success in their growing mathematics skills while simultaneously giving teachers insight into areas of mathematics understanding that require more focus. As pupils progress, this sharpened 'assess, plan, do,

review' cycle means the pupils are able to work through increasingly demanding work at pace.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

...none identified.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well...

- Thriftwood is serious about improving phonic knowledge for the small number of pupils that need it. In the school, the engagement and enjoyment of pupils in their lessons enables them to make strong progress using the school's chosen synthetic phonics scheme. In the college an adapted approach, taken from the prison service to teaching phonic knowledge to older adults, has been a real success. While very few, if any, of the current cohort will become 'fluent readers' by a mainstream standard, the aspiration is that all of the pupils will be able to access text at their level of understanding, independently, or with small support.
- Pupils are exposed to challenges, both academically and socially, no matter where they sit within the wide cognitive range of the school cohort. For example, students with dietary and sensory limitations are challenged to try and sample different foods, whereas children who struggle with the concept of winning and losing are exposed to this in a supportive and planned way. With this specialist challenge, pupils find themselves able to do more and build their confidence.
- Outdoor learning is a strong vein of opportunity at Thriftwood, where pupils can come up against unusual challenges. During outdoor learning, a scaffolded approach facilitates independence during the main teaching activity. For example, during an activity to make bird feeders, pupils had 'Communicate and Print' instructions to make choices, such as food type and resources used to make the feeder, matching the pupils' own choices. Pupils are enabled by the environment and planned activities to find their own methods to overcome the problems presented.
- When talking to pupils, they are relaxed and proud of their school and their work. They ooze confidence about how good the school is. All of the pupils had a hard time in education before joining the school, failing in the mainstream. With the provision now matching the pupils' needs, they flourish. As one pupil explained why the school is so great, 'because everyone is different in our own special way...we can be ourselves at this school.'

4.2 Quality of Provision and Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...

...all of the staff at the school had a very clear picture of the end outcomes they are trying to achieve, across the broadening range of the cohort, as pupils join with more complex SEND.

5. Area of Excellence

Not applicable on this visit.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.

Schools can access the Schools Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables academies to connect with other academies in your hub and across the national network of schools.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow academy leaders with specific improvement needs to visit an academy or attend an online webinar hosted by an academy, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.