



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR THRIFTWOOD ACADEMY

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

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	The school decided not to have estimates
Date of this Review:	30/04/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	N/A
Date of last QA Review	17/01/2024
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	20/05/2023

Quality Assurance Review

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

Leadership at all levels N/A

Quality of provision and outcomes N/A

AND

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

Area of excellence Not submitted for this review

**Previously accredited valid areas
of excellence** N/A

Overall peer evaluation estimate N/A

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

Thriftwood Academy is a dual-site specialist provision located in the town of Chelmsford, Essex. Learners in Key Stages 2 and 3 attend the school site, whilst Key Stage 4 and 5 learners are welcomed at the college site which is also in Chelmsford. The sites are separated by a fifteen to twenty minute drive which means that most staff are predominantly based at one site or the other.

There are 263 learners on roll with slightly more than half attending the school. About one fifth of learners are in the sixth form. All learners have education, health and care plans (EHCPs). The vast majority of learners have a moderate learning difficulty (MLD) with leaders noting that within this range the difficulties are becoming more complex. Just over half of all learners have an autism diagnosis and just under half a speech, language and communication need. Comorbidity amongst learners is increasing, especially those with an additional medical need. One in eight learners has a severe learning difficulty (SLD) with a different curriculum to suit their more bespoke needs.

Two thirds of learners are boys, and disadvantaged pupils represent just over half of the academy population.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders have a strong vision for all learners regardless of ability or need. They communicate this clearly to all staff. This leads to consistent practice in the classroom against clearly defined expectations appropriate for their role. As a result, classrooms are purposeful, happy, well regulated and highly organised environments, with displays reflective of recent learning.
- Leaders know their learners very well. They can articulate what is being taught to them at a class and individual level, and why. They understand the different approaches taken for some learners and how activities have been adapted to meet their needs. This includes movement between some subject classes and pathways to flexibly cater to strengths and 'spikey' profiles.
- Leaders are prepared to go the 'extra mile' to design their own home grown systems and curriculum collaboratively with teachers. For instance, the curriculum has been designed with their own progressive criteria and objectives that map to other frameworks and accredited sources. These lead to real world experiences and academic accreditation routes that help learners take their next steps to college and prepare them for adulthood.
- Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of their thinking and work thoroughly. Rigorous quality assurance builds a strong evidence base that is evaluative. This helps inform how to help teachers improve and develop. A culture of collaboration, ownership and support facilitates this development. For

instance, staff members have progressed from a learning assistant role to that of a teacher with mentoring and support from the academy and trust.

- There is an emphasis on learners being work ready and relating content to real life situations so that learners can function as independently as possible as they become adults. This is embodied in their strapline of 'Educate, Challenge, Prepare' which is exemplified very successfully by several alumni who are now employed as learning assistants in the academy.
- At the heart of learner development is the 'Fundamentals For the Future' programme (FFF). It is the bedrock of personal development with content that develops independence and life, personal and social skills. The multi-layered and granular nature of progression means that targets can be set that are easily tailored to suit individual needs.
- The school engages well with the local, wider and professional community. Key Stage 5 learners in the Foundation Growth Pathway (FGP) make products to sell and are regular visitors to the local dementia unit. Cultural capital is built with all learners from Key Stage 2 upwards to experience the outside world, including visits and joint initiatives with local government schemes. The academy acts as a focal point for strong practice with regular visits from trainee teachers and local SENDCos.
- A full careers programme is in place from Key Stage 3 onwards for all learners and is evaluated with fidelity against the Gatsby benchmarks.

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

- ... the academy celebrated its collaborative approach towards systemic leadership and shared best practice across the trust and wider audiences.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is well thought out and fully developed. The core and FGP pathways are built around the FFF programme, with subject specific learning interwoven throughout. This acts as a vehicle for learning life, social and communication skills. This means that what is taught helps learners progress towards their EHCP targets.
- Subjects are assiduously sequenced through every year group in the curriculum in a progressive manner. Subsequently, learners build well on prior learning. This also helps learners to transition well between topic-based learning at Key Stages 2 and 3 to a more subject oriented curriculum at Key Stages 4 and 5.
- Foundation subjects are not examined but leaders realise the importance of developing subject specific knowledge that learners can apply to real life concepts and British values. For example, in a Key Stage 3 class, the group

was learning about the persecution of women during the Salem witch trials and applying it to minority groups being marginalised and treated unfairly, whilst learning how to debate, discuss and express opinions.

- Reading is prioritised across the school. All staff have phonics knowledge and training that they use successfully in the classroom. In a Key Stage 4 English class, reading intervention was incorporated into the classroom lesson; this maintained access to the curriculum and led to learners making progress with their reading skills. A banded reading scheme across the school encourages a confidence in reading as learners know they are making progress when they 'move up a colour'. Learners say this motivates them well.
- There is a real world approach built into learning at every opportunity to make it purposeful, meaningful and relevant to what they understand. In a Key Stage 5 FGP mathematics lesson, the teacher explained the term 'survey' using examples of the catering team collecting lunch choices from learners every morning. Learners consolidated this further by completing their own real life survey of cars in the school car park.
- Learners retain knowledge well because of the progressive and sequential nature of the curriculum. They are able to remember and apply previously taught knowledge to new learning, such as how to use tallies and bars to complete surveys accurately.
- An internal electronic assessment system has been meticulously developed and continuously refined over a number of years to provide an excellent tool to precisely measure progress in all areas and in subjects, linked explicitly to key knowledge from schemes of learning. It is highly evaluative and informs planning by analysing input to identify areas that need revisiting or 'bottlenecks'. This makes quality assurance straightforward for leaders and helps them moderate judgments with teachers through the triangulation of work scrutiny and lesson observation. This system is worthy of sharing to a much wider audience as it can be adapted for any rubric.
- Learners have established clear accreditation routes for Years 11 and 13. Sometimes they do this sooner, if ready. In English and mathematics, the majority of learners achieve Entry level qualifications, whilst roughly a third of the cohort are entered for level 1 or 2 functional skills examinations. Rigorous assessment means that predictions are close to achieved results.
- Learners also achieve awards in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, sports leadership, essential digital skills and digital functional skills that help almost all learners access college placements or further study elsewhere. Tracking, early identification and follow up support are in place for those who are in danger of not being in education and training after they leave.

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

- ... all staff were able to articulate the curriculum content with regard to how it relates to the end points for learners.

- ... teachers applied a consistent approach, including the use of language, to common pedagogical strategies, such as reading structures and the use of concrete, pictorial and abstract (CPA) modelling.
- ... teachers continued the roll out of the communication, language and literacy strategy across the whole school and college.

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

- The Communication, Literacy and Language strategy (CLL) in Key Stage 2 and 3 is improving learners' use of language, comprehension skills and their ability to retrieve, recall and summarise information.
- Access to resources for specific learners' needs are in place in all classrooms. In a Key Stage 4 English class, two learners using 'turning pages' resources had the right coloured paper (pink/yellow) that was enlarged and used writing slopes to improve the quality of their writing. In another Key Stage 4 English class, a learner was using thera-putty to support her sensory needs and, as a result, was able to regulate and remain highly engaged in the lesson
- The school has developed a strong curriculum for the increasing number of SLD learners who attend the academy. The curriculum is now fully in place and benefits from the same structure as the core curriculum but with several key adaptations that make learning more accessible.
- There is an increased focus on communication, independence and social skills. Over time this means that learners can express their preferences and choices with more agency, with less reliance on adult support.
- The pace of learning is suitably adapted to match the cognitive processing of learners with overlearning and repetition strategies woven into lessons. This means that knowledge does become 'sticky' over time.
- Class environments have a higher ratio of support. Consequently, learning is focussed as staff are on hand to support regulation. For example, a learner with severe anxiety was supported well by a learning assistant to engage in the survey activity after initially not wanting to join the class. The choice of activity with a real world context outside the classroom made it easier for the learner to engage fully with the task and access learning.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...

- ... the academy ensured that all initiatives are considered for the most vulnerable learners first.

5. Area of Excellence

The academy did not submit an area of excellence for this review.

Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse content reports from across the hub networks including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)