

Thriftwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115472
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311943
Inspection dates	25–26 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Smith

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	117
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ann-marie Briggs
Headteacher	Mrs Sally Davies
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2004
School address	Slades Lane Galleywood Chelmsford Essex CM2 8RW
Telephone number	01245266880
Fax number	01245 490691

Age group	5-16
Inspection dates	25–26 September 2007
Inspection number	311943

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thriftwood School provides for pupils who have statements of special educational need for a range of difficulties. They include moderate learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties and emotional and social communication difficulties. Increasing numbers of pupils are being referred with attention deficit hyperactive disorders (ADHD) and autistic syndrome disorders (ASD). Pupils come from diverse social backgrounds and are all White British. On entry pupils are working well below the national expected levels. There are just over twice as many boys as girls and currently five pupils are looked after by the local authority. The school operates a support and advice service to mainstream schools and has a specialist training centre on site. The school has retained the Sports Mark Award since 2002 and has recently achieved the Specialist Status in Business and Enterprise.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where leadership and management put pupils' well being and achievement at the heart of all decision making. The inspirational headteacher has a clear strategic vision for improvement, which is widely shared with the whole school. She is exceptionally well supported by a highly competent and well-organised deputy and a clearly focused and motivated leadership team. With a dedicated staff and well-informed governors, they continue to improve the provision and learning opportunities for all pupils. A parent, reflecting the views of many, wrote, 'The school is dedicated and innovative and they work as a team. The headteacher is a strong leader whose attitudes and work ethic is reflected throughout her team. The school is a real community, nurturing its pupils and celebrating their achievements'. The school has very effective partnerships with external support agencies, schools, colleges and the community, that ensure pupils' needs and well-being are very well met. Self-evaluation strategies are highly effective. Monitoring and review include the whole school community and development planning clearly shows that staff have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and what strategies need to be employed to achieve success.

Pupils' standards vary widely, but overall are well below average. Given their starting points, and the nature of their learning difficulties, the achievement and progress of the great majority of pupils is outstanding. This success helps to develop pupils' confidence and very effectively supports them in their next stage of learning and in their social interactions. Teaching that is consistently at least good, and sometimes outstanding, ensures that pupils' progress builds term by term to an excellent level. There is an emphasis for all pupils on independent learning, making choices and working towards success in their individual challenging targets, which most successfully achieve. Pupils' outstanding progress in their personal development is due to the excellent relationships, outstanding care, support and guidance and the good teaching and excellent support they receive for their individual needs. Staff are aware through their own monitoring of where the very best practice is to be found and understand the need to share this practice more widely to ensure that the high standards of provision and pupil achievement are maintained. Pupil assessment and the tracking and analysis of their progress are extremely effective and any underachievement is quickly spotted and addressed.

The curriculum is outstanding. It offers a wide, interesting and challenging range of relevant learning activities that effectively meet the needs of pupils and contribute towards their outstanding achievement. The programme of work related learning is exceptionally good. An outstanding feature is the school's highly innovative provision for business enterprise, which develops pupils' vocational and enterprise skills extremely well. The curriculum effectively supports pupils' outstanding personal development. Visits into the community, work in mainstream schools and visiting specialists very effectively support their learning. Additional learning opportunities arranged outside of school are excellent and greatly contribute to pupils' learning experiences and overall achievement. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are encouraged to have positive attitudes towards others and their behaviour is generally excellent. Pupils very enthusiastically take part in all learning opportunities presented to them. Parents very consistently praise the school. One wrote, 'My son loves attending the school. He feels very secure in the positive environment and is making very good progress academically and most importantly, in the development of life skills, self-confidence, appropriate behaviour and respect for others'. Exceptional improvement has been made since the last inspection and all issues have been effectively addressed through

thorough development planning and subsequent action. Governors are well informed and take an active part in monitoring, self-evaluation and in the strategic management of the school. They clearly know their school well. Leadership and management are undoubtedly having a very positive impact on the learning provision, which is enabling pupils to achieve and make continued excellent progress. The capacity to continually improve is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the very best practice in teaching and learning is shared effectively across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are well below average due to the nature and complexity of pupils' learning difficulties. However, their progress throughout the school is outstanding. Their academic progress is outstanding because of the wide range of accredited courses available to them that meet their individual needs and enable them to leave school with a range of relevant qualifications. Pupils in Years 9 to 11 attend the local secondary school for science and, by the end of Year 11, achieve a qualification. Pupils make consistently good or better progress in communication, language, literacy and numeracy as they move through the school. This is due to the strong emphasis on these subjects within the curriculum, excellent support arrangements and good teaching. They make outstanding progress in their personal development and in vocational skills, particularly through the excellent provision for business enterprise where pupils have established a limited company to produce, market and sell products within their local community. As a result, pupils' economic well-being is outstanding because they are extremely well prepared for life after school. All pupils continue their education in local colleges when they leave school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour is consistently very good throughout the school and their outstanding behaviour in lessons enables them to focus consistently on their learning. As they move through the school, pupils rapidly grow in confidence and self-esteem. Pupils understand about keeping healthy and make healthy eating choices from the high quality, nutritious school meals, and by taking regular exercise. Their enjoyment of learning is excellent and is reflected by their good attendance, their enthusiasm for learning in lessons and the high take-up of after-school and lunchtime clubs. Pupils' relationships with staff and others are outstanding due to the excellent role models staff provide. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their community through a variety of fund-raising events, through the work of the school council, and by helping and supporting each other. As one pupil put it, 'It's great here'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, with examples of outstanding practice where the wide and varied learning needs of the pupils are met very effectively. This results in pupils making consistently good and often outstanding progress. Senior managers closely monitor the quality

of teaching and learning and give good support to improve practice. However, the best practice is not yet shared sufficiently across the school. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensure there is a very positive learning environment, where pupils gain confidence and are encouraged to do their best and to have high aspirations. A parent said, 'I am very happy with my daughter's progress and she is encouraged to develop to the best of her ability. The staff are wonderful'. Ongoing assessment, feedback and support in lessons by teachers and very effective learning support assistants make it very clear to pupils how they might improve. Excellent teamwork and good use of resources ensure all pupils get the best out of their learning opportunities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is relevant to pupils' needs and contributes exceptionally well towards their outstanding academic and personal progress. There are excellent opportunities to enrich pupils' learning through the wide range of activities provided at lunchtime and after school and through opportunities to attend residential outdoor activity centres. These all very effectively promote pupils' enjoyment and achievement. Curriculum planning is outstanding. It ensures that skills are built up progressively from year to year as pupils move through the school and that all learning opportunities are highly relevant to the variety of pupils' learning needs. The development of individualised learning is a strength because it ensures that all pupils have full access to learning at their own particular levels. Excellent links with schools and colleges make an outstanding contribution to pupils' academic and personal development. The sharp focus on promoting the key skills of communication, language and literacy, as well as numeracy, personal and social skills, impacts positively on pupils' progress and their effective readiness for life after school. Pupils' different abilities are very well catered for through the wide-ranging opportunities for accreditation that include opportunities for higher attainers to follow GCSE courses in a mainstream school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. Clearly understood practices and procedures ensure pupils are safe and secure whilst also encouraging their personal independence. There is excellent teamwork between teachers, learning support assistants and the pastoral care manager. Together with the very effective partnership with external support agencies, the school team ensures that there are consistent approaches and effective support for all pupils. Pupils and parents know that all staff have their best interests at heart. One parent, reflecting the views of many, wrote, 'The school has a happy, safe environment where children feel secure and ready to learn. Home/school communication is extremely good and the school is friendly and approachable'. Pupils' academic progress and personal development are monitored and recorded very effectively, and pupils are clear what to do to improve. Year 11 pupils are given excellent support and guidance ensuring a smooth transition into college at the end of the year.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher gives excellent strategic guidance and encouragement to all staff who are consistent in their dedication to the pupils. The impact of everyone's work is clearly reflected in the outstanding care, guidance and support for pupils and the excellent academic and personal progress they make. Through wide and effective consultation and self-evaluation, areas for improvement and strategies for action are clearly identified. There are high expectations made of staff, their work is valued and morale is high. A newly appointed member of staff said, 'I actually like meetings here because things get done'. Performance management for all staff leads to relevant training and professional development is clearly based upon school improvement and the changing needs of the pupils. A parent summed up the feelings of many when she said, 'This school is truly exceptional, I cannot speak highly enough of the headteacher, teachers and assistant teachers, all of whom are extremely dedicated and hard working'.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thriftwood School, Galleywood, Chelmsford CM2 8RW

Thank you for making our visit to your school such a pleasure and a special thank you to the School Council who met with us and spoke about the school and their experiences. We agree with you and your parents/carers; your school is outstanding. It very effectively supports your individual needs, enabling you to make the best progress you can with your work and personal development. You have excellent opportunities to work in other schools and colleges and become increasingly more confident as you get older.

We particularly liked that:

- all staff care about your progress; they listen and treat you with respect;
- relationships are excellent and you really enjoy your learning;
- you appreciate how to be safe and healthy and you feel secure while at school;
- your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent;
- you get outstanding support and guidance and good teaching which helps to prepare you very well for when you leave the school;
- the school puts your care and personal needs first and you are encouraged to achieve as well as you can;
- the school works extremely well in partnership with others to ensure your individual needs are well met;
- the school is involved in exciting projects like Business Enterprise and the Training Centre;
- your school meals are fabulous, very healthy and very tasty;
- the school is very aware of how to make the school even better;
- the school governors know you and the school very well.

The school knows it can improve even further by:

- ensuring the very best teaching and learning in the school is shared more effectively to ensure you keep making excellent progress.

You can help too by always listening carefully in lessons and trying the best you can. Thank you for your charming company and we wish you all every future success.

Best wishes

Mike Smith

Lead inspector