

TreeHouse School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	309/6085
Unique Reference Number	131708
Inspection number	316969
Inspection dates	3-4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	George Derby AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

TreeHouse School is a day special school for up to 65 pupils aged from 3 to 16 with autism. It opened 10 years ago in Bloomsbury, in London, and was founded by four parents. Pupils come from Haringey and 12 other local authorities. Pupils have severe or profound learning difficulties and require high levels of staffing to support their learning, health and safety and to reduce their often extreme levels of anxiety. Nearly all have a statement of special educational needs. A large number of new staff started work at the school during August 2007. The school has moved location six times and is now in temporary accommodation in Muswell Hill. A new school, using £11.5 million of fund raising from TreeHouse Trust registered charity, is being built behind the current premises and is scheduled to open in June 2008. The school has the Autism Accreditation award and its vision is *'to transform through education the lives of children with autism and the lives of their families'*.

Evaluation of the school

TreeHouse School provides a good quality of education and pupils thoroughly enjoy learning. They make good progress overall and outstanding progress in their communication skills and in the way they *'learn to learn'*. The school is particularly adept at removing their considerable barriers to learning and, as one parent put it, *'it has been a life changing experience'*. The care the pupils receive is outstanding. The curriculum, while satisfactory, does not always enable pupils to gain a sufficient depth of experience. The school meets nearly all the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is highly individualised and focuses on the key things pupils need to learn to enable them to be better included in society and to make the most of learning. This aspect of the curriculum is extremely successful. It is also particularly effective in the way in which pupils learn to communicate by using symbols, signs and, sometimes, through spoken language or electronic aids. Although the pupils' progress overall is good, their progress in their ability to communicate is outstanding because of the expertise of staff in ensuring that pupils generalise their skills in a wide range of ways and because of the quality of support the pupils get from therapists.

All this opens up pupils' opportunities to benefit from the wider curriculum on offer. This includes the National Curriculum, as required by pupils' statements. However,

the wider curriculum does not always provide the pupils with the depth of opportunity. While all subjects are covered by the activities, the planning is not linked to topics or schemes of work systematically enough to ensure that pupils learn all they can in areas such as science, humanities and information and communication technology. Individual subject policies do not reflect the way the curriculum is organised and although revisions to planning are now taking place, not all subjects are supported by schemes of work. A new approach is the introduction of the Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network award in the recently opened Key Stage 4 department. This is preparing pupils appropriately for their future lives through a wider range of vocational, academic and practical skills.

Teaching is good and highly effective methods used during individual sessions enable pupils to begin to learn in an exceptional way. Occasionally, a weakness with new staff is that pupils are not moved onto new learning quickly enough because the programme is adhered to too rigidly. The effect both of extremely positive reinforcement by staff and their excellent relationships with pupils is seen in the pupils' delight when they have achieved a task. Those who have difficulties with their behaviour are managed exceptionally well. A particularly strong feature is the way the pupils are taught to practise what they have learned in individual work in other situations, with excellent support from staff. This is why their learning is so successful and something which they have found immensely hard to do previously.

The high degree of analysis of a pupil's development, behaviour and communication in these individual sessions leads to meticulous planning and a programme which is implemented throughout the day and day by day. The extremely high levels of staff are crucial in the relentless and effective pursuit of pupils' improvement in learning. Given pupils' complex learning difficulties, the barriers to progress take time to remove and such learning does not happen overnight. Nevertheless, the ruthless quest collecting information, adjusting individual programmes and consistently applying the principles of the programme result in exceptional achievement.

Teaching is also good in the wider curriculum work, especially where specialist teachers are employed, as with music and physical education. Teaching is lively and enthusiastic and grabs pupils' attention in way that supports them to learn and respond. Pupils' communication is always excellently supported. Occasionally, group work is not always best matched to individual needs. For instance, the length of an activity is occasionally too brief, because although one pupil may need a short session, not all pupils do. In addition, the assessment and recording of learning in the curriculum areas are not as rigorous as the excellent practice in the individual work; at present. As a result this does not lead to a system where the school can track pupils' progress in all areas over time. This is why assessment overall is satisfactory.

The school is reviewing the way it plans the curriculum to ensure that there is a better balance between individual, group work and the wider curriculum. Plans are in place to integrate the high levels of information gained from individual work into a

wider range of ways of assessing and tracking progress. The new management structure, supported by a core of qualified teachers, is better placed to monitor the implementation of the new developments planned.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and for pupils' spiritual development it is outstanding. This is because the school is highly successful at inspiring the pupils with confidence and with the self-knowledge that they can learn to do things. As a result, they have extremely positive attitudes to learning because they are able to build on their success each time. Pupils' behaviour and their moral development are good and the improvement in behaviour from their starting points is exceptional. This is because of the rigorous application of routines and regimes which are consistently followed. There were many examples of pupils managing their own behaviour during the inspection, knowing when they were getting angry and taking themselves away to calm down. Attendance is excellent, but some pupils still arrive late because of transport problems, as they did at the time of the last inspection.

Although pupils have a reasonable range of opportunities to learn from, about, and with each other, there are occasionally missed opportunities to engineer situations to promote better their social development, especially given the nature of their needs. For instance, at snack time, while communication with adults is supported very well indeed, the opportunity to get pupils to pass each other items or to communicate with one another is sometimes missed. Pupils learn satisfactorily about each other's cultures and faiths through activities such as making food from different countries, assembly activities, festivals and stories. They learn to get along harmoniously with others from different cultures and faiths.

A key focus for the school is the independence of pupils. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to do a variety of jobs during the day, thus making a positive contribution to school and to their personal development. Pupils are expected to help themselves as much as possible, even those who at a very early stage of development. Many pupils have lessons in local mainstream schools, and local school pupils have sessions at TreeHouse; this benefits pupils' personal development considerably. Some pupils have had vocational skills training and supported employment opportunities. The school ran a mini craft fair as part of secondary pupils' enterprise education, where goods made by the pupils were sold to parents and staff from the company's wider organisation. Pupils take part in activities such as car washing for staff, making tea, and shopping for and making their own lunch. All this supports effectively their skills for the future.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

High levels of supervision and support, underpinned by excellent systems, ensure that provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. Extremely

thorough risk assessments, child protection arrangements, first aid procedures and behaviour plans mean that pupils are exceptionally well protected from harm. The excellent routines pupils undertake help them to learn to keep safe. The school's priority for training, especially for new staff, ensures that they are well versed in the health and safety procedures of the school. These are reviewed regularly. All aspects of fire safety are in place and are checked systematically. An emergency fire evacuation due to a false alarm during the inspection was managed outstandingly well and pupils kept extremely calm. The school has a thorough plan for improving accessibility to the premises, the curriculum and information.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has very thorough administrative systems in place for the appointment and vetting of staff. However, it does not comply with the regulation to ensure that all trustees have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau and that the information is recorded on the school's central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's temporary accommodation is good and the excellent routines and effective management of pupils mean that they are not affected by the changes that have taken place to the accommodation or site. Despite narrow corridors in some areas and small rooms for dining, assembly and physical education, pupils and staff manage exceptionally well. The outside play area provides pupils with excellent, challenging play equipment.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

There is a good range of general information for parents and there is a very useful prospectus and website. However, not all regulations are met. An excellent depth of information is regularly reported to parents by the school's team of programme specialists, class leaders, teachers and therapists about how pupils are learning to communicate, use number, socialise, and improve their self-help skills; occasionally other subject areas are covered. There is highly detailed feedback about pupils' progress towards their personal targets. However, there is no annual report which evaluates pupils' progress over all aspects of the curriculum taught. In addition, parents and others do not have essential information about welfare and educational provision for pupils who are learning English as an additional language.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's detailed procedures fully comply with the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that subject policies reflect the work taught and are supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work which are implemented effectively (paragraph 1(2)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- ensure that all trustees have had an enhanced check with the Criminal Records Bureau (paragraph 4B(4 and 5))
- ensure that all the necessary information about the trustees and the checks made on them, as required by the regulations, are recorded on the school's single central register (paragraph 4C(6 and 7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- ensure that parents receive information about particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f))
- provide parents with an annual written report of the progress and attainment of each registered child in the main subject areas taught (paragraph 6(5)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure that the curriculum is effectively planned so that pupils gain a depth of experience in all areas taught and that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum
- ensure that information from rigorous assessment in all areas of the curriculum is used to build a picture of pupils' progress over time and that this

is monitored and evaluated to make any necessary adjustments to planning and teaching.

School details

Name of school	TreeHouse School		
DCSF number	309/6085		
Unique reference number	131708		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1997		
Age range of pupils	5-14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 50	Girls: 9	Total: 59
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 49	Girls: 9	Total: 58
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,881 (primary) £71,664 (secondary)		
Address of school	Woodside Avenue Muswell Hill London N10 3JA		
Telephone number	020 8815 5424		
Fax number	020 8815 5420		
Email address	info@treehouse.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Gill Bierschenk		
Proprietor	Lord Clement-Jones, Chair of Trustees, The TreeHouse Trust		
Reporting inspector	George Derby AI		
Dates of inspection	3-4 October 2007		