

The Treehouse School

37 Wallingford Road, Cholsey, Oxfordshire OX10 9LG

Inspection dates

16–18 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in writing is inconsistent. Teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to demonstrate their writing skills in longer pieces of work.
- Pupils' mathematical skills are not embedded. They are not routinely expected to record mathematical calculations or show their understanding of a range of mathematical skills.
- Trustees do not monitor the quality of education well enough. They do not check on pupils' achievement with sufficient rigour.
- Trustees provide effective support for school leaders, but they do not question or challenge them well enough.
- Trustees' understanding of statutory requirements and the independent school standards is underdeveloped.
- Performance management arrangements are not in place. As a result, trustees do not hold school leaders sufficiently to account.
- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their mathematical knowledge by recording their findings.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are happy to go to school. They have positive attitudes to learning, persevere with tasks and thoroughly enjoy the active nature of learning.
- Pupils are resilient and resourceful. They show care, consideration and kindness to everyone. Relationships are strong.
- Attendance is above average.
- Pupils reflect on their actions and take responsibility for themselves and one another.
- Pupils feel safe. They trust the adults at school and know that there is always an adult they can talk to if they have a problem.
- Pupils listen carefully and show respect and courtesy for the views of others.
- The headteacher provides effective leadership.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase rates of pupils' progress by:
 - providing more opportunities for them to demonstrate their writing skills in longer pieces of writing
 - ensuring that pupils become fluent in using their mathematical skills and recording their findings.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by making sure that the trustees:
 - focus on monitoring the quality of education provided for pupils and check regularly on their achievement
 - provide greater challenge to school leaders to bring about further improvement
 - increase their awareness of, and keep up to date with, all statutory requirements and the independent school standards
 - effectively carry out all their key duties, including managing the performance of all staff.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Trustees do not monitor the work of the school well enough. They do not check on the quality of pupils' achievement rigorously enough, particularly in relation to pupils' progress in writing and mathematics.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. The headteacher has thought very carefully about the design of the curriculum in order to provide outdoor, practical learning experiences for all pupils. These learning opportunities inspire and motivate pupils to learn. However, some aspects, such as pupils' cultural understanding and a broad understanding of different faiths and beliefs, are less well developed.
- The curriculum is enhanced by the opportunities pupils have to contribute to the local and global community, for example by picking apples from the school orchard and making products to take to older local residents in the village and by raising money for children in Africa by selling locally cakes and crafts they have made. This encourages pupils to think about the contribution they can make to society and to take responsibility for those around them.
- Visits to places of interest, such as a local farm and museums, inspire pupils' curiosity and capture their imagination. During the inspection, a local poet visited for the morning, bringing along her parrot, which provided a focus and inspiration for pupils to write their own poetry.
- Pupils learn about technology and enjoy taking part in the 'Radio Treehouse' broadcasts. Families choose memorable pieces of music to share and pupils put together podcasts to share with each other and their families. During the Chinese New Year celebrations, pupils shared their thoughts about the most enjoyable aspects of the day, which included seeing and talking to a family in China via the internet.
- The headteacher has a strong and very clear vision for the future of the school. This is conveyed extremely well. Trustees, staff and parents share the vision and the school's approach to learning. One parent captured the view of many by saying: 'The Treehouse School offers more than just an education; it provides children with the tools for a successful and happy future.'
- School leaders place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of the environment, sustainability and healthy lifestyles. This is demonstrated by growing organic vegetables and providing healthy school lunches for pupils.
- The headteacher reviews and evaluates the work of the school regularly, taking educational research into consideration when setting out the curriculum and assessment framework. The well-being of pupils is a high priority and all staff encourage and aid pupils' involvement through positive praise and encouragement and an enabling environment. Pupils are encouraged to make choices, think carefully about their learning and explore their own interests. Pupils' progress is assessed through their well-being and involvement in a wide range of learning activities.

- School leaders are passionate about ensuring that pupils are given every opportunity to overcome barriers to their learning. Additional physical exercise for some pupils has supported them to improve their coordination and concentration.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is promoted well. Pupils learn to take responsibility for their actions, communicate and cooperate together effectively and make moral decisions. The 'garden guardians' support lunchtimes well. They take responsibility for helping other pupils and resolving any issues that arise.
- Pupils' spiritual development is extended by experiencing the awe and wonder of the natural world. Although pupils learn about different cultures and countries through activities such as celebrating the Chinese New Year and experiencing a Greek day, their understanding of different cultures, faiths and beliefs is more limited.
- British values are modelled extremely well by all adults. Pupils learn about democracy by voting for a fellow pupil to chair their meetings. They know that the seat of government is the Houses of Parliament and that there is soon to be a general election.
- Leaders ensure that pupils acquire a love of learning, take responsibility for their actions and develop the capacity to work collaboratively and independently. Pupils enjoy the individual contributions they make to the school journal, which they take home to complete. They think carefully about how their contribution can be of good quality and beneficial to their schoolmates, who are known as 'the gang'.
- School leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards and other requirements are met.

Governance

- Trustees have a strong commitment to the school but they have not focused on their core purpose, which is to make sure that pupils are receiving what they are entitled to – the best-quality education. This is because they do not check on the quality of provision well enough.
- Trustees have not routinely kept up to date with all statutory requirements and the changes to the independent school standards.
- Trustees do not provide enough challenge to school leaders. They readily accept information that they are given and do not question or check the validity of information for themselves.
- Currently, there is no system in place to manage the performance of staff, including the headteacher. As a result, the headteacher and staff are not held to account for the achievement of pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Teachers encourage pupils to take their own safety very seriously. They carry out their own risk assessments for outdoor activities, which are validated by teachers. They are fully aware that using tools and implements during their weekly forest school activities can pose risks to themselves

and others. They have a mature and thoughtful approach when taking part in these stimulating activities.

- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and learn about keeping safe on the roads, railways and waterways because of the many trips and visits they make around the local area.
- The school has an up-to-date safeguarding and child protection policy and associated policies on its website. The safer recruitment policy is also available for parents to read on the website. School leaders understand their responsibilities to keep their training up to date and make sure that they receive regular updates with regard to safeguarding children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Pupils are not provided with enough opportunities to use their writing skills to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of English. Pupils write short pieces of information across a range of learning activities in their journals, but they do not get enough chances to practise their writing and use the spelling strategies they learn in longer pieces of work. As a result, pupils' spelling of some simple words is often incorrect and the quality of their writing is not sufficiently well developed. Their progress is inconsistent.
- Much of the teaching at The Treehouse School involves pupils in practical activities. However, the evidence of pupils' learning in some important areas, for example shape and space in mathematics, is not recorded. As a result, pupils' understanding and progress across a range of mathematical skills are difficult to determine. Pupils are not given sufficient experience of recording their findings and demonstrating their understanding. This also limits teachers' ability to assess pupils' learning in mathematics over time.
- Teaching is characterised by opportunities for pupils to develop their own interests and become actively involved in their learning. During the inspection, pupils were engaged in a survey to explore and experience eating a range of different breakfast cereals in order to encourage them to eat a healthy breakfast before coming to school. Pupils evaluated the different cereals and shared their opinions about which cereal they preferred. Pupils looked at the various ingredients from each of the cereals and, in a mathematics lesson, weighed out the different amounts of sugar in each of the cereals. Pupils were surprised at the levels of sugar in some of the cereals and younger pupils arranged the amounts in order, from the smallest to the largest. As a result, pupils developed evaluation and ordering skills. However, opportunities for recording their findings were not utilised well enough to consolidate their mathematical understanding and develop their recording skills.
- Teachers encourage pupils to work together in a range of activities. Mentors, who are older pupils, work alongside younger pupils to support their learning. During a morning meeting, pupils worked together to spot spelling and grammatical errors deliberately included in a piece of writing. Many pupils were able to identify errors successfully, but some younger pupils were too reliant on older pupils and were not able to use their own knowledge and skills well enough.

- Pupils know that, when they find learning difficult or they struggle to understand something, adults will support them. Phrases such as ‘I’m in the learning pit’ help pupils to know that there is nothing wrong with finding things difficult, but that their peers and other adults will support them to be successful and overcome their difficulties.
- In mathematics, pupils are taught in very small groups according to their ability. Teachers provide bespoke support to each pupil, helping them to grapple with new mathematical concepts and different methods of working. In one lesson, pupils were learning how to estimate by rounding numbers and then using partitioning to calculate the answer correctly. In the main, pupils were successful. However, some pupils struggled to grasp this mathematical strategy because of previous gaps in their learning.
- Teachers encourage pupils to make positive contributions to the school journal. Pupils’ contributions include a range of poems, drawings and pieces of writing, which are celebrated and shared together. During the inspection, one pupil wrote a humorous piece utilising aspects of recent experiences, such as the visit of the poet and her parrot, even including aspects of his experience of the inspection and the inspector. This captivated pupils’ attention when he read his piece of writing with interest and enthusiasm.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare is good. Pupils demonstrate effective independent learning skills. They are resourceful and resilient learners.
- Relationships are strong. Pupils show a tangible sense of care, consideration, kindness and thoughtfulness towards one another and the adults around. Their self-esteem is promoted effectively.
- One aspect of the school’s vision is to create memorable experiences for pupils. Pupils gather a range of their achievements, successes and things they are proud of to put into their own memory box. They spoke with enthusiasm and delight about the contents of their box. Pupils cherish these boxes and look forward to taking them home at the end of their time at The Treehouse School.
- Every opportunity is taken to talk to pupils about the attitudes and demeanour necessary for them to become successful learners. Effective communication between one another and adults is promoted. Lunchtime is a sociable, enjoyable time for pupils and adults. Pupils are expected to be polite, use good table manners and maintain good eye contact with each other during discussions at the dining table. Pupils’ self-confidence and self-awareness are developed effectively through aspects of the curriculum, such as ‘understanding the social world’ and ‘self-organisation and entrepreneurship’. Pupils are not afraid to take risks. They set their own goals, work hard and persevere to achieve them. Pupils reflect on their achievements and learn from their experiences.
- Pupils’ emotional and physical well-being is a high priority for the school. The school’s ethos promotes this effectively. Pupils say that there is no bullying. School logs confirm this. Pupils understand about different types of bullying, such as racist and homophobic bullying, and know that everyone, no matter what their individual characteristics, should be treated with respect.

- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They have a good understanding of keeping safe on the road and near waterways. They know how to keep safe when near the railway.
- Pupils enjoy growing organic vegetables in the school garden. They then use the vegetables they grow to help to cook the daily school lunches. Healthy eating is a priority. Pupils experience eating a range of different recipes created with a parent volunteer. Lunch is then a social occasion, where pupils learn good table manners, take responsibility for preparing and clearing the dining room and enjoy the discussion and conversation with one another and school staff. Over time, pupils have monitored the level of waste, utilising their mathematical skills to check whether amounts were decreasing. They have been delighted that the food waste has been reduced to such an extent that, for nearly two years, there has been no food wasted at lunchtime.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils treat each other and the adults around them with kindness and respect. They take care of each other and help each other with their learning. Older and younger pupils play together well and willingly take part in joint activities, such as sharing poetry books and choosing a poem that one of their peers would enjoy reading.
- Pupils have fun together and take turns during lessons and in their free time. They concentrate on their learning in lessons and know how to be successful. They are happy to celebrate each other's successes.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They look forward to the wide range of interesting and stimulating activities on offer to them each day. This is reflected in their above-average attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is inconsistent. This is because there are too few opportunities for them to record their work and demonstrate their learning, particularly in writing, and in displaying their mathematical skills.
- When pupils are provided with opportunities to write, it is often in short pieces of work, which do not furnish them with sufficient opportunities to practise their writing skills. As a result, standards of spelling, handwriting and grammar are not as good as they should be for their age and ability.
- Pupils enjoy reading. Most pupils read with interest and expression, although they do not read regularly to adults in school. This results in pupils sometimes misunderstanding the meaning of words and not fully understanding a range of punctuation within the text.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other pupils because they are provided with a suitable amount of support to help them access learning.

- During the inspection, the visit of the poet with her parrot captured pupils' imagination. They were able to write some thought-provoking, well-organised poetry, with effective descriptions using similes and metaphors
- Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They learn about what constitutes a healthy diet and know the food and drinks they should try to avoid. Pupils are encouraged to be physically fit. Outdoor activities are a key feature of learning at The Treehouse School. In addition, annual family challenges, such as the 'Leg it challenge', encourage the whole family to take exercise together in the Oxfordshire countryside.

School details

Unique reference number	138873
DfE registration number	931/6011
Inspection number	10025991

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Treehouse Trust c/o Slade Leagal
Chair	Alison Robertson
Headteacher	Lee Ryman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£0
Telephone number	01491 652 000
Website	http://thetreehouseschool.org.uk
Email address	info@thetreehouseschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–21 November 2013

Information about this school

- The Treehouse School opened in 2012. It is a non-fee-paying primary school. It was established by the headteacher and the teacher and is managed by a group of trustees from The Treehouse Trust. There is no governing body. The school's motto is 'nature, nurture, nourishment'.
- The school is registered as an independent co-educational day school for boys and girls. It is registered to accept 15 pupils aged five to 11 years.

- There are a few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are no pupils with an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- There are no disadvantaged pupils at the school.
- The last inspection was in November 2013. At the time of the last inspection, the school was judged to be good.
- The school does not provide or use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspector observed teaching and learning across the school. One lesson was jointly observed with the headteacher. The inspector also carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Meetings were held with a group of trustees, including the chair of trustees, the headteacher, the class teacher and voluntary members of staff.
- The inspector considered the views of pupils through informal discussions and during a meeting with all the pupils together.
- Observations of free time, lunchtime and the start of the school day took place throughout the inspection, including sharing lunchtime together.
- The views of parents were considered through the 10 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, including three free-text responses, and through informal discussions at the start of the school day.
- The inspector considered the views of the five members of staff and volunteers who completed the Ofsted questionnaire.
- The inspector heard three pupils read.
- A range of documents were scrutinised, including the school's own evaluation of its work, curriculum plans and schemes of work and records of pupils' achievement.
- Information about safeguarding arrangements was checked, as were the single central record, risk assessments and a range of policies.
- All the education independent school standards were checked during this inspection.

Inspection team

Ann Henderson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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