



TREETOPS SCHOOL
QUALITY - EQUALITY - OPPORTUNITY

Treetops School Prospectus



*Building
futures
together...*



Overview

A welcome to our school

Treetops' reputation as one of the finest specialist schools for children and young people with learning difficulties has led to a high demand for places.

OFSTED has consistently described the school as "Outstanding" and the school has achieved specialist status in Communication and Interaction.

We are delighted you are interested in our school and while we would like to welcome every application, we need prospective parents to be aware of the reality.

The school is currently in transition. The first phase of a major new-building project that has given us a state-of-the-art facility is complete, but at the moment we are awaiting the necessary, and promised, Local Authority funding to complete the project with the facilities that we need and that the young people at the school deserve.

The Governors and the school's senior management team have produced this prospectus to enable families to understand the ethos and culture of our school and to give you an opportunity to consider whether you believe your child could benefit from immersing themselves into the Treetops Experience.

We are very proud of the success we have achieved and are very proud of the whole partnership between school and families which has led to that success.

ALAN PEAFORD III
Chair of Governors
September 2011

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The Treetops School site has room for expansion and building work is underway on the next phase of development



What we do and where we are going...

About Treetops

Treetops is a day special school for children and young people between the ages of three and 19 who experience moderate learning difficulties. The school, located in Grays, Essex, UK is a Thurrock Local Authority (LA) school and is under local management (LM).

The school operates a special verbal behaviour (VB) nursery for children on the autistic spectrum and was the first state school in the UK to adopt these teaching principles.

In February 2008, Treetops moved to its new home in Buxton Road where all the different age groups are taught in one place. The building project is ongoing and it is unlikely the full school will be completed much before 2013.

The school was planned for 210 pupils but because of high demand and careful management of available resources we have been able to extend this to 252.

Pupils can be admitted throughout the academic year but the majority will take up places at the beginning of the autumn term. Our basic philosophy for success is that we CAN achieve.

Every child that enters Treetops School has the potential to achieve. Every child has the opportunity to develop friends and to be included in a whole range of activities. We focus on what can be done rather than what can't. We work on the positive.

Our goal is to help our students pass through the school system and prepare as much as possible for specialist further education, work or independent living.

Our staff members are selected because they too believe in celebrating the positive and have a "can-do" attitude. We have certain rigidity in our systems – particularly within the VB section of the school – and we would expect parents to recognise this from the outset. A section at the back of this prospectus deals in greater detail with the demands and requirements of the VB section (see pages 18-19).

Each pupil is placed in an age or need-appropriate group. Each group has a teacher responsible for pastoral care. In addition the Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers also take great pride in ensuring pastoral care is of the highest order. We will always endeavour to answer any worries you have on the same day that you make contact.

One of the great qualities of our school is that we are relatively small. We are therefore able to know each pupil really well, and conversely they know us really well. Behaviour and discipline in school (or anywhere else) is all about relationships.

Our aim is for pupils to accept our values and become part of a whole community, which instills a sense of pride in ourselves and in each other.

The whole ethos of the school becomes a key part of the lives of the staff that work there, the pupils that attend the school and the families and carers of those young people.

Whether it is playing football or rugby, dancing and drama, learning new skills, reading, writing or language – then Treetops embraces the subject with enthusiasm.

Each year the pupils achieve new goals – and the whole school celebrates. Many former pupils regularly visit the school and participate in school events. This is testimony to the part the school plays in their lives.

We hope, if your child comes to the school, that you will embrace this same philosophy and use your involvement and interest in your child's well-being to help him or her continue to surprise you with their successes.



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All policies, practices and procedures are designed to facilitate the maximum benefit for all pupils

...The school is enjoying growing success with GCSE and other examination results – but we have not lost our key goal – to take the ‘dis’ out of ‘disability’...

TAKE A LOOK

Nothing beats seeing it for yourself

The fact that you are reading this prospectus means you are interested in what happens at the school. But no booklet – no matter how good – replaces seeing the school for yourself.

We welcome visitors and believe that by seeing how we work – from the nursery and specialist verbal behaviour (VB) unit through to our Sixth Form – you will understand what it is that makes us tick and deliver the results that we do.

Our results of value-added scores (individual pupil improvement ratings) are amongst the highest in the country. The wide and varied curriculum on offer gives our young people the opportunity to take on the new challenges that their friends and siblings at mainstream school would take... but with specialist care and support.

The school is enjoying growing success with GCSE and other examination results – but we have not lost our key goal – to take the ‘dis’ out of ‘disability’.

THE MISSION

Our promise to you

The school has a clear mission. It aims to be recognised by the authorities, by the community and most importantly by the very people it serves, as a Centre of Excellence. To do that, we have developed a clear set of goals.

- » To provide a broad and balanced curriculum, differentiated to meet individuals’ needs
- » To provide and enhance the self-esteem and sense of self-worth of each and every individual
- » To provide a safe, secure, positive and happy working environment
- » To develop an awareness and understanding of the needs of the whole school community (pupils, parents, staff, governors and friends)
- » To prepare pupils for adult life. To equip them with the necessary skills and understanding to become responsible citizens, confident to take their place as valued members of the community
- » To enable every individual (staff and pupils) to achieve his/her full potential
- » To develop and maintain links with the local community (schools, colleges, business and the voluntary sector)
- » To offer support, guidance and advice to special and mainstream schools and colleges
- » To provide and promote an inclusive model of education
- » To accept, value and celebrate the unique contribution each individual makes to society
- » To work in partnership with parents, fellow professionals and all interested parties
- » To be at the leading edge of specialist provision through participation in local, regional, national and international initiatives



Left: Visual Art has a unique place in our curriculum



BEING SPECIAL

What we do to meet those needs

As a special school all pupils have special educational needs. All policies, practices and procedures are designed to facilitate the maximum benefit for all pupils, as identified in the statement or by the annual review process. (A full copy of our policies is available on request).

The school’s aim is to demonstrate that we consider all pupils to be of equal value, regardless of race, gender, religion, cultural background or ability. All pupils have individual needs and we seek to ensure they all reach their full potential.

Through the delivery of our curriculum and the general ethos of the school, all members of our community are given the opportunity to develop the social and academic skills needed to enable them to function in the wider community outside school.

As a new build, the school has been designed to allow full inclusion, with wheelchair access and clear high-visibility signage. Classroom technology includes high definition screens to allow full participation by children with some visual impairment.



SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Being there is vital

With a relatively small pupil population, persistent absenteeism by a few individuals can have a disproportionate effect on absence statistics. As in all areas of the curriculum, we rely on the close support and co-operation of parents. Parents are reminded of their legal responsibilities regarding attendance.

We recognise that many of our young people have medical conditions that may require an unusual number of visits to hospitals. However, we believe that these should be managed properly to reduce the impact that this makes on your child's learning.

We believe every child should aim at 100 percent attendance. Any non-attendance must be authorised by the school. Unauthorised non-attendances are unacceptable and may result in disciplinary action. Persistent unauthorised non-attendance may lead to your child losing their place at this school.

Holidays taken in term time constitute unauthorised non-attendance. Should a pupil not be able to attend school, parents are requested to notify the school either by phone or letter.

EQUALITY

We are all in this together

The school has strict policies in place regarding equality on race, religion and gender. Copies of those policies are available on our school website, or in writing from the school office.

We fervently believe that we all have equal rights and strive to teach our pupils, by example, that we can succeed and improve through diversity.

Discussion with regard to equal opportunities is promoted through the use of videos, outside speakers or arising through events, which take place within the school.

If sexist or racist incidents occur, they are dealt with by the class teacher or group counselling is used. We consider the maturation level of our students when dealing with specific situations.



...The school's aim is to demonstrate that we consider all pupils to be of equal value, regardless of race, gender, religion, cultural background or ability. All pupils have individual needs and we seek to ensure they all reach their full potential...

DRESS TO IMPRESS

School Uniform - it matters!

The school has a school uniform and expects the children to wear it at all times. We feel that this helps the image of the school and raises the children's self-esteem.

GIRLS' UNIFORM

- » School blazer*
- » Black or grey skirt or trousers
- » White shirt
- » Blue and white checked dresses (Summer months for younger classes)
- » Black or grey pullover
- » A school tie (Primary/Secondary ties available in the office)
- » Black shoes (No trainers)

BOYS' UNIFORM

- » School blazer*
- » Black or grey trousers
- » White shirt
- » Black or grey pullover
- » A school tie (Primary/Secondary ties available in the office)
- » Black shoes (No trainers)

*Year 6 pupils and secondary department of the school (Treetops School badges are available in the office).



The Dance Club auditions for a national TV programme

THE ARTS

Visual arts, music and drama

Music and the Performing Arts are very highly valued at Treetops. All children are encouraged to enjoy music and to actively participate in productions. The Song Club continues to play a major role in strengthening links with the community and promoting the school's positive image.

Public performances have included productions at Lakeside Shopping Centre, at music festivals, and special performances within the community.

Drama is also highly valued, with pupils learning many skills to help develop self-esteem and self-expression that they can take forward into their lives.

In recent years the school has impressed through festival performances including abridged Shakespeare.

As well as Song Club, there is also Dance Club which allows pupils to develop coordination and learn to work in a choreographed team. The club has even been selected to audition for a national TV dance programme.

Treetops produces an annual whole-school production of the highest quality to which all parents, along with various local and regional interested bodies, are invited.

Pupils can become involved in rehearsing and performing at both school assemblies and at special events such as our 'sell-out' annual Carols by Candlelight performance held each December.

Visual Art has a unique place in our curriculum. The creative process contributes to the development of the whole person – exercising intellect, imagination, manipulative skills and coordination.

The art experience builds self-confidence and affords an alternative visual language through which the young person can express themselves and communicate.

Pupils have opportunities to visit exhibitions and galleries (local and national), to work on joint projects with other schools, to experience an enriched curriculum through specialist practitioners and to work towards national accredited courses.

...As well as Song Club, there is also Dance Club which allows pupils to develop coordination and learn to work in a choreographed team. The club has even been selected to audition for a national TV dance programme...

Music and the performing arts are highly valued at Treetops



PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Giving everyone a 'sporting' chance

We feel sport, in its widest sense, is of fundamental importance and should be accessible and enjoyed by all. Taking part, showing the correct attitude, and enjoyment are the main aims. PE is compulsory, the only exclusions being on the written advice of a qualified medical practitioner.

Individual and team sports are covered in PE curriculum time with pupils, on average, experiencing at least 90 minutes sporting activity per week.

Many major team games (football, netball, rugby, cricket, basketball, rounders, softball and hockey) are played and the school takes part in interschool sports. The highlight of the football season is the annual cup match against Market Field School from Colchester.

The school takes great interest in encouraging pupils to continue their sport activities outside of school hours and after leaving. In the school reception area is an England football shirt, worn in the special World Cup finals in Tokyo in 2002 by former pupil and teaching assistant Chris Kemsley. Chris donated the shirt to the school and the entire school shared the pride of his success in that winning team.

Children in the senior school get the chance to participate in other active pastimes, and by utilising an outside activity centre they take part in rock-climbing, orienteering, sailing, canoeing and team building exercises. There are a number of sports clubs that take place outside of school hours.

THE CURRICULUM

What we do in the classroom

The school offers a full curriculum throughout the young person's Treetops career. We work towards a number of recognised academic qualifications including GCSE, currently in English, Maths, Science, Art and ICT. Lessons are interactive and our teaching staff have access to the latest in classroom technology. Each class has a number of teaching assistants to enable the child to get individual support.

ACADEMIC SUBJECTS

The National Curriculum forms the main focus for the delivery of the curriculum. It is the means by which pupils are provided with a wide variety of experiences in order to practise and develop new skills and acquire new knowledge.

The core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science, together with the subjects of Art, Design and Technology, Geography, History, Music, Physical and Religious Education are taught to pupils below the age of 14, in a manner which is accessible to each pupil.

A different modern foreign language is included in each of years 7, 8 and 9. Information and Communication Technology is both taught discretely, and as part of the curriculum, throughout the school. Other curricular components at Treetops School include Personal, Social and Health Education, Citizenship, Careers and Vocational Education.

Those attending the Sixth Form study Asdan courses designed to develop independence, relevant life skills and functional literacy and numeracy.



GET THE RIGHT KIT

Fostering team spirit for physical education

Physical Education is an integral part of the National Curriculum and as such all pupils are expected to participate. Again, a consistent PE kit enhances the image of the school and fosters a team spirit, which is very important in many aspects of Physical Education.

BOYS' KIT

- » Plain white T-shirt
- » Plain shorts – black or white
- » Plain white socks
- » Plimsolls or trainers

GIRLS' KIT

- » Plain white T-shirt
- » Plain shorts – black or white
- » Plain white socks
- » Plimsolls or trainers

For lessons outdoors during the winter months, pupils may bring a tracksuit and these should be as plain as possible. Footwear such as football boots can be brought for use on the field.

THE VB UNIT AND ABA

What is ABA and why do we use it?

ABA is the science of applied behaviour analysis. It is a method of analysing behaviour in order to understand its function, and uses this information to guide treatment and change the behaviour.

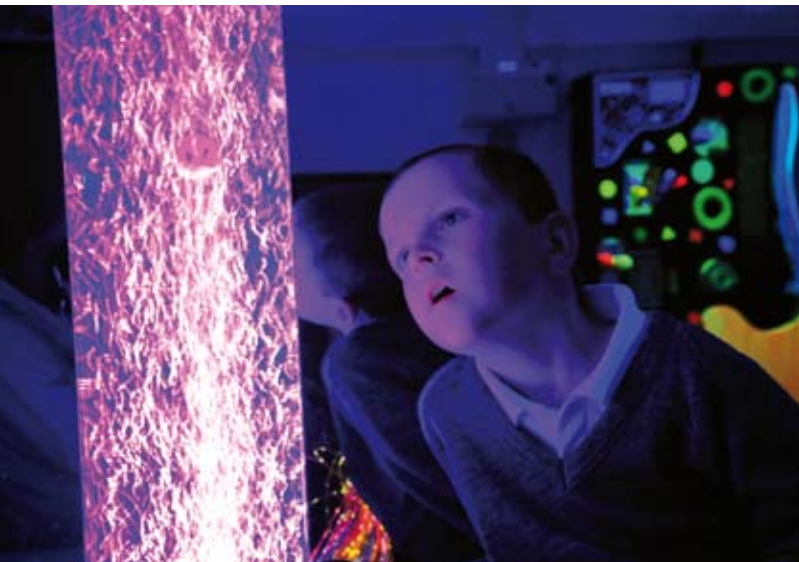
The ABA curriculum initially provides a one-to-one intensive programme that is individualised and continually monitored, to ensure that each child reaches their full potential. The teaching system follows a strict programme. It is essential that parents understand that there is no variability in the programme.

We believe that ABA is the only treatment programme with proven results supported by research. In the USA, ABA approaches have been used successfully with children who have autism for more than 30 years.

Further details of the VB unit and the programme can be found in the appendix at the back of this prospectus (see pages 18-19).



...Sixth Form opportunities include work experience placements, programmes at Hadleigh Training Centre, Writtle College, and a really exciting Skills for Working Life programme, which is being run on site as we get closer to our long term vision of having our own garden centre and tea room...



COMMUNICATION

The School has developed specialist status for communications. Because of the high number of pupils that have a statement of special needs requiring speech and language intervention and therapy, the school invested in developing its own Speech and Language (S&L) department with a full time qualified speech and language pathologist on site supported by two S&L assistants.

A full communications therapy centre is in the process of being planned and built at the school. Pupils in the main school receive assessments and therapy as appropriate and the communications team works with the teaching and support staff to develop techniques to help each child's communication development.

Pupils use 'Signalong' as one method of communication, and training is available to parents and carers to enable these skills to be continued in the home environment. We recognise that a child's ability to communicate individual needs is one of the greatest areas of concern to parents and we continually work to support the best method of achieving this.

RELIGIOUS AND SEX EDUCATION

Religious Education and Sex Education are taught in age appropriate ways, and parents have the right to withdraw their children if they so wish.

Following assessment of Post 16 provision in the local area for young people with special needs, Treetops elected to create its own Sixth Form. With both formal learning and vocational learning the students are able to develop additional social skills in a traditional Sixth Form environment.

We offer a broad range of courses, all of which are accredited. Courses we deliver are designed to meet the needs of individual students and aim to make them confident citizens in adult living and working life and to enable them to move on as independently as possible.

Courses include Adult Literacy and Numeracy and a wide range of Personal and Social Development and Employability courses from Entry Level 1 to Level 1.

Students have the opportunity to take part in option subjects and leisure activities, many of which are based in the wider community. We also offer a broad range of vocational and training opportunities for students to choose from.

TRANSITION TO ADULthood

Our Sixth Form is booming

These include work experience placements, programmes at Hadleigh Training Centre, Writtle College and a really exciting Skills for Working Life programme, which is being run on site as we get closer to our long term vision of having our own garden centre and tea room.

This will serve the local community and provide training opportunities for some students Post 19, as well as a vocational programme for Sixth Form and Key Stage 4 students.

Much of our teaching is conducted in the community and involves students dealing socially with a variety of people, for example, on public transport, in the shops, the leisure centre and employers at work experience.

Our aims are to make Sixth Form life safe, challenging and enriching for each individual. We want to make the experience as real as possible for the transition to adult life and work in order to allow students to leave as confident citizens, who are more equipped to interact in society and make life decisions for themselves.

...The ABA curriculum initially provides a one-to-one intensive programme that is individualised and continually monitored, to ensure that each child reaches their full potential...

In the VB nursery, the children work one-to-one throughout the day, either in class, outside, in the library or Soft Play/Sensory room



Treetops pupils also enjoy a good relationship with the local community and regularly attend a 'Kids Day Out' arranged by the local Grays Rotary Club

GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

School trips and other activities

The School arranges a series of external trips and during the summer term there is an annual whole school activity week at Stubbers (primary classes) and West Mersea (secondary classes) where all children have the chance to have a 'taste' of activities such as sailing and camping. In recent years some pupils from the VB Unit have visited Tenerife. Before any such trips are arranged the school conducts a risk assessment.

CHARGING/REMISSION POLICY

a) Introduction

The School Governors, in agreeing this policy, accept that the funds available to the school allow little or no scope for funding school trips and excursions. However, in order to maintain a curriculum which enables our pupils/students to benefit from the rich stimuli to be found in different environments outside the school, both in the local community and further afield, the Governors strive to support the organisation of educational visits during school hours, or evening visits and residential trips.

b) Educational visits

These are organised by teachers or groups of teachers, who will attempt to negotiate reduced or free entry into places of interest, museums etc. Coaches may sometimes need to be hired for these trips where a group is too large for minibuses. On these occasions parents will be asked to make voluntary contributions to the trip. If insufficient funds are available the trip will have to be

cancelled. Evening outings: As above, parents will be asked to make voluntary contributions if entry fees are payable.

c) Residential trips

These trips are more expensive, but form an integral part of the school curriculum. Parents will be asked to make a contribution to costs of residential trips. Financial help for individual students can be sought if needed. Voluntary contributions to the school and the work of the Friends' Association help to finance school trips and journeys. These, however, cannot be relied upon.

...School security is always high up on our list of priorities. A balance has to be maintained between keeping the school's friendly and welcoming atmosphere, while ensuring that pupils, staff, premises and property are safe...



STEWART ABBOTT

d) Breakages, intentional damage to buildings and property

The School has very clear guidelines for pupils/students regarding their behaviour while on the school site and on link courses at other establishments. The Governors acknowledge that some students have emotional and behavioural difficulties, which sometimes result in loss of personal control. They also recognise the high priority given to support and guidance for all pupils within the school. They therefore feel strongly that, when damage has been done by their children to buildings or property within the school or other sites used by the school, parents should make an appropriate contribution to the cost of repair.

KEEPING SAFE

School security, bullying and child protection

School security is always high up on our list of priorities. A balance has to be maintained between keeping the school's friendly and welcoming atmosphere, while ensuring that pupils, staff, premises and property are safe. The school continually keeps its systems under review.

CHILD PROTECTION

The school has a statutory obligation to liaise with outside agencies should there be any reports or suspicions of abuse. A copy of our policy is available in school.

MEDICAL ATTENTION

Should a pupil be ill or need any treatment during school-time every effort will be made to contact parents or carers and we will appreciate your support in these matters. If your child needs medicine while attending school it can be administered at your request. Medicines should be clearly marked and handed in at the start of each school day. Parents will be expected to complete the necessary request forms.

BULLYING

The school has a zero tolerance policy towards bullying. Our ethos is that pupils should support each other. We will not tolerate bad language or violence aimed at any person – parent, pupil or staff alike – and appropriate action will be taken.



We reward all progress in a variety of ways; this is reflected in our behaviour policy

ACCESS ALL AREAS

School policy and curriculum documents

Access to a wide range of documents – including all of the school's policy documents, Department for Education Circulars, Governing Body's Annual Reports, external qualifications and our most recent results – can be obtained by contacting the Headteacher at school. The policy documents, and other key information, can be found on the school's website – see back page for details.



OUTREACH

Helping to share best practice

At Treetops, we believe we should be involved in supporting people with special educational needs throughout the area.

As well as hosting the local authority's early-intervention portage service for toddlers, we also have a programme supporting other schools via mentoring and training for teaching and support staff who are assisting pupils with special needs through the mainstream education system.

A separate booklet explaining the portage services is available through the school.

We believe in praise and rewards to build self-esteem, self-confidence and self-belief



MONITORING PERFORMANCE

Reports, progress and communication

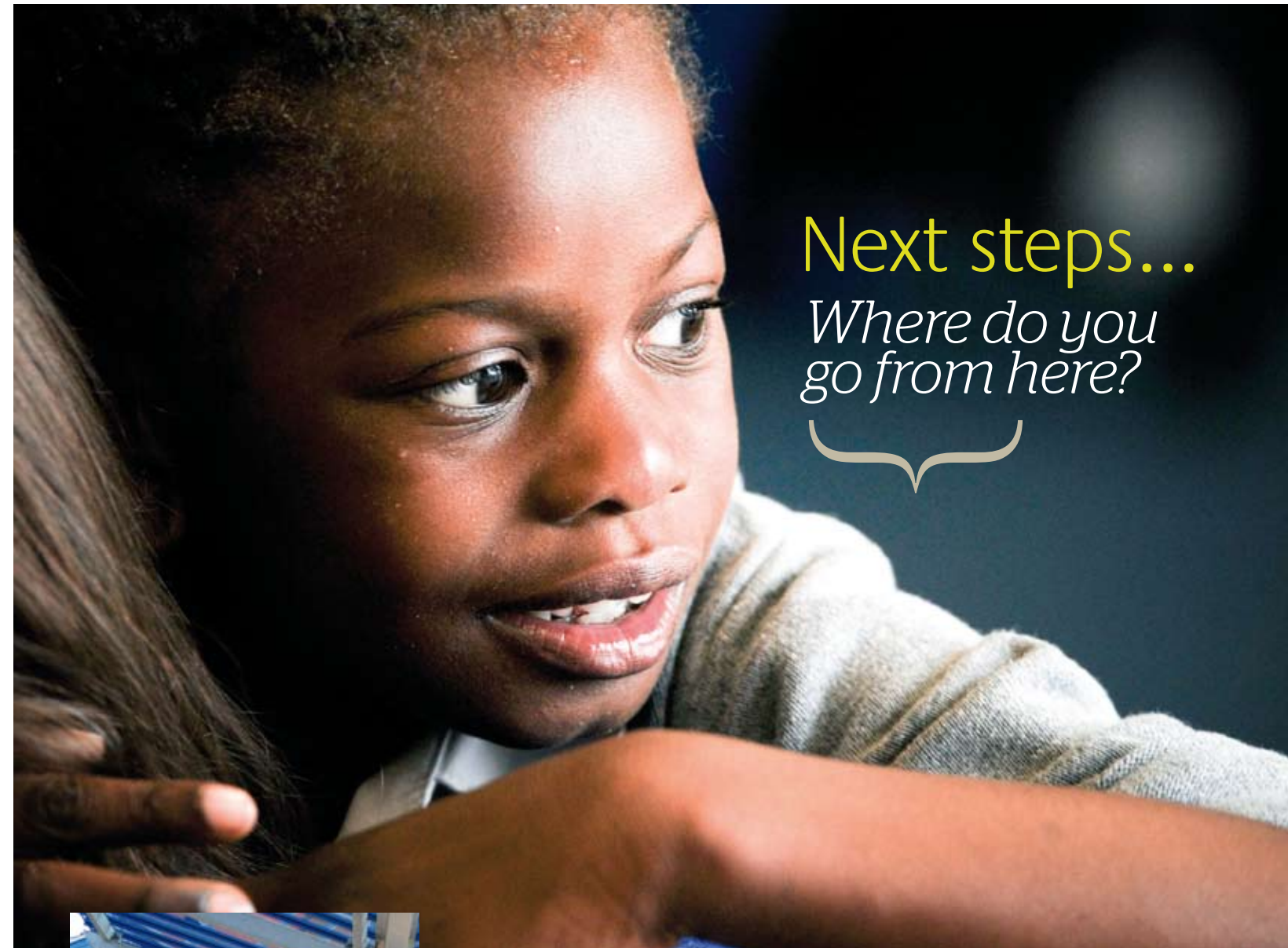
There will be an annual school report on your child which is normally published in July. Pupils' achievements are celebrated continuously and each week an assembly is designed to this end. We believe in praise and rewards to build self-esteem, self-confidence and self-belief.

We reward all progress in a variety of ways; this is reflected in our behaviour policy. There is a home/school book for all primary aged pupils. Each secondary aged pupil is issued with a home/school diary or planner and we hope that parents will work with us to deliver the best possible learning outcomes for our pupils. Each pupil will have a class group and the class teacher has pastoral responsibility for the group.

Each pupil/student will have a statement, which must be reviewed at least annually. Advice will be written by teachers and any other involved professionals. The pupil and parents are also asked to put forward their thoughts.

A review meeting is then called at which time decisions can be made to ensure that the pupil's needs are being met. Decisions on integration will be made at these meetings. Between reviews each pupil will have termly targets set by the class teacher (IEP – Individual Education Plan). Parents are welcome to contact the school with any concerns at any time.

...Pupils' achievements are celebrated continuously and each week an assembly is designed to this end. We believe in praise and rewards to build self-esteem, self-confidence and self-belief...



Next steps...
Where do you go from here?



You have read the prospectus and we invite you to visit the school before considering any application. This can be arranged by contacting the Headteacher to make an appointment.

We must stress that the number of places currently available at our school is 252 and places are severely limited. Pupils will normally have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or be undergoing a formal assessment.

If parents believe their child meets the criteria for a place at Treetops they should contact:

Special Educational Needs Service
Education Department,
Thurrock Council,
PO Box 118, Grays
Essex, RM17 6GF
☎ 01375 652 652

Pupils can be admitted throughout the academic year but the majority will take up places at the beginning of the autumn term.



Treetops Verbal Behaviour (VB) Department

Introduction

The Treetops School VB Department first opened in September 2003 with Nursery places for eight children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder or identified difficulties in social communication. The Nursery was unique in that it was the first LEA Nursery of its type in the country. The service for children with ASD has now expanded to all Key Stages within the school, and we have recently developed provision in the Sixth Form, providing ABA programmes for more than 50 children. It has been developed as part of the LEA's SEN strategy to meet the needs of children with ASD in Thurrock. We provide quality Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) services, guided by Skinner's Analysis of Verbal Behaviour (VB), delivered through one-to-one intensive therapy for the main part of the week, and always using the principles of applied behaviour analysis.

What is ABA and why do we use it?

ABA is the science of applied behaviour analysis. It is a scientific way of analysing behaviour in order to understand its function, and using this information to guide treatment and change the behaviour. The ABA curriculum initially provides a one-to-one intensive programme that is individualised and continually monitored to ensure that each child reaches their full potential. ABA is the only treatment programme with proven results supported by research. In the USA, ABA approaches have been used successfully with children who have Autism for more than 40 years.

Guiding principles

1. We believe every learner has the potential to develop skills beyond their current level and should be free of behaviours and activities that cause injury, pain, or limit opportunities for full community involvement.
2. We will teach functional communication skills and other skills that will lead to rewarding personal relationships, well-being, vocational productivity and self-determined daily activities.
3. We rely on the literature of the science of applied behaviour analysis and its underlying assumptions to guide our analysis of learner needs and our recommendations of effective treatment and instruction.
4. Functional communication is the foundation that supports the development of skills in all areas and therefore BF Skinner's analysis of verbal behaviour, and the supporting empirical work, guide our treatment and instructional recommendations.
5. The choice of instructional methods will be guided by reliable data which are gathered and analysed on a schedule sufficient to make informed decisions.*
6. We recognise that parents/carers are the child's first educators and that their expertise about their child is of paramount importance to us.
7. The link between home, school and external agencies are crucial to fully support the all round development of the child.

*Principles 1-5 are also those which underpin the philosophy behind the 'Carbone Clinic' in New York.

Aims

- » To provide quality ABA (VB) services to children with ASD or difficulties in social communication, offering a curriculum that recognises children as individuals and allowing each of them to reach their full learning potential.
- » To provide a safe and secure environment where children have the confidence to develop new relationships and experience new learning opportunities.
- » To foster the partnership between home and school, including (where appropriate) programme development in both settings and in the community.
- » To teach socially significant behaviours, enabling the children to integrate as fully as possible into the curriculum.

Teaching procedures

1. We pair teaching environments with reinforcement and use competing reinforcers.
2. We mix and vary instructional demands.
3. We reduce learner errors by using teaching methods that ensure high levels of correct responding.
4. We intersperse easy and difficult tasks.
5. We fade in the number of demands.
6. We fade in effort/difficulty of tasks.
7. We use extinction for problem behaviour when needed.
8. We immediately deliver reinforcement.
9. We pace instruction properly, at a fast pace.

The curriculum

Children are assessed on the Assessment of Basic Language and Learner Skills (ABLLS Partington and Sundberg 1999), and the VB-MAPP, within the first two weeks of starting a programme. This assessment is used to form the basis of the child's individual curriculum. We also follow the Foundation Stage curriculum in the Nursery and Key Stage 1 class, and appropriate National Curriculum targets at each child's individual level. The main focus of each child's programme is to develop functional language and communication skills. Children are taught to use vocalisations (speech) which may be supported and encouraged through the use of sign language. Other areas of the curriculum include play skills, group activities and self-help skills.

Data and record keeping

Assessment in the VB department is an on-going, daily process. As previously mentioned, the children are Baseline assessed on the ABLLS and VB-MAPP within their first two weeks of starting the school. This assessment is updated in full every four to six months. The following data records are also kept on each child:

- » MAND DATA. This records the times in a day that a child asks for an item. Requests may be recorded as prompted and unprompted (spontaneous), and data recorded and graphed. The level of prompt required is also recorded for some children.
- » PROBE DATA. This is recorded for the first time a skill command is given in a day. The child must respond in time and correctly to score positively, and a criterion for mastery is set individually.
- » Weekly targets mastered in each skill area are recorded and results graphed.
- » Behavioural data is recorded individually. ABC data sheets are used for this.
- » Video data is kept regularly on each child. The use of digital photography is also used as a method of recording some activities.
- » Children are also assessed on the Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals (Nursery and Key Stage 1) and then on the P-Levels for the National Curriculum throughout the rest of the school.

Staffing

The VB Department is run and managed by Lesley Love, Deputy Headteacher at Treetops School who has had extensive specialist training in Autism, and also has Early Years expertise. She is a Board Certified Associate Behaviour Analyst (BCABA)

and is mentored by Dr Vincent J Carbone and Gina Tirri (both from the Carbone Clinic, New York).

The Nursery has ten full time tutors who work one-to-one with the children, and each Key Stage has places for eight full time students. Each class is managed by a Class Teacher/Instructor, and training is also provided by a Senior Tutor in each class.

Tutors who have had more extensive training also provide Outreach support to children with Autism in other settings. All the staff have training in ABA (VB) methods. In addition to this, staff may also have additional nursery qualifications (NNEB, CACHE, NVQ) and many have other relevant skills (BSL, First Aid, Psychology qualifications).

The Department also calls on the professional expertise of a speech therapist and a physiotherapist who work in the main body of Treetops School, to offer support and guidance when necessary.

We have regular visits by an external consultant, Carole Roxburgh BCABA (associate of Dr Vince Carbone) who provides specific advice to the staff working on individual programmes with students. Dr Vincent J Carbone (BCBA) visits the school on a six monthly basis to support the development of ABA Verbal Behaviour services at Treetops and to train and advise staff.

Nursery entry criteria

Any child entering the Nursery will meet the following criteria:

- » Have an autistic spectrum disorder and require daily access to staff trained in Verbal Behaviour ABA.
- » Whilst the main presenting need will be ASD, it is likely that children may have other special educational needs including speech and language difficulties, learning difficulties, or have the potential to be a high achiever.
- » Be aged between two years and five years.
- » Where no specific diagnosis of ASD has been made, it is anticipated that children will present with the triad of impairment affecting social interaction, social communication and imagination.

Admissions to the nursery

Admissions will be made by Thurrock Council's Education Department. It is accepted that not all children will have a Statement of Special Educational Needs prior to admission. In these circumstances a placement for assessment will be considered with the statutory assessment commencing within a term of admission. All applications for placement at the Nursery will be considered by the SEN Case Management Panel, where the decision about suitability for placement will be made. All potential admissions will be in consultation with the Headteacher and Governing Body of Treetops School.

Starting nursery

Before the children start school they will be invited in for a taster session, and will also receive a home visit. The purpose of this visit will be:

- » To establish first contact with the parent/carer and the child.
 - » To spend some quality time with the child.
 - » To exchange information.
 - » To begin to build a valuable relationship between the school and the parents/carers.
- The child's 'reinforcers' will also be discussed, and any problem behaviours that may be interfering with the child's learning.
- The first few weeks of school will be used to get to know the child and to pair effectively with them. Pairing is a time when the one-to-one tutor gets to know the child. They will give favourite items unconditionally in order to pair themselves and their voice with reinforcement. The first few weeks will also be a time of assessment.

And after nursery...

It should not be assumed that children who have a place at the VB Nursery will automatically transfer into Treetops School. Each child's progress will be carefully monitored and an informed decision made by the parents, and all those involved in supporting the child, as to the appropriate school placement. This may be a continued place at Treetops School (either in the VB Department or in the MLD class of that age group), a place in a mainstream school with support, or another school place.

Day to day...

The week

The Nursery children receive 20 hours of individual therapy a week, consisting of five hours a day from Monday to Thursday. In other Key Stages the Verbal Behaviour classes run a five day week. Although the setting for this will mainly be the VB Classrooms, home programming may take place where appropriate and parents will be invited into school for training regularly when necessary.

The day

Children attend school from 9.00am-3.00pm. The children work one-to-one throughout the day, either in class, outside, in the library or Soft Play/Sensory room. The day is broken up into small sessions of Natural Environment Training and Intensive Teaching at the table.

Children have the opportunity to work in small groups (where appropriate) in order to teach them to respond to a teacher within a group. When they are able to access learning in this way, opportunities are provided for them to integrate into the MLD classrooms or another appropriate setting. (For example a Mainstream Nursery).

Dinner and snack times are an important part of the therapy session. The children bring their own snacks from home, along with any other reinforcing items that the child may need to learn to ask for. They will ask for their favourite foods and drinks at snack times, but their reinforcers will be available to them throughout the day.

Tidying is an important part of the daily routine, and is used as a teaching and learning opportunity. Children are taught to tidy their space before moving to the next activity.

Clothing requirements

Nursery children are not required to wear uniform, although Treetops embroidered t-shirts are available from Sue's Schoolwear for all of our younger pupils. Children may need spare clothes for messy play, swimwear and suitable weather clothes for outdoor activities. All clothes should be clearly labelled. All other VB classes wear school uniform appropriate to their age. (See School Uniform requirements in the main prospectus p09.)

Toilet training

It is quite usual that children entering the VB department may need extra support with their toileting. This will be targeted at a suitable time in their programme after the child has paired well with their tutor. We use the guidelines set out by Foxx and Azrin (Year and Citing). We have excellent toilet and nappy changing facilities, and a shower.

Handling difficult behaviours

Children with autism can display challenging behaviours, which may interfere with their learning, and disrupt the learning of others. When dealing with these behaviours staff will follow the guidelines set out in the Treetops behaviour policy. Our aim is to reduce unwanted behaviours and teach appropriate replacement behaviours through encouragement and positive reinforcement. Where a child is in danger of harming themselves or others, they will be safeguarded.

The parent/carer role

We feel that the link between home and school is an essential part of the child's progression. This is achieved through the use of home/school link books, and the child's current target folder which is sent home weekly. We expect parents to support their child's programme by following the basic principles of ABA and implementing parts of their programme at home guided by our team of tutors. Support and training will be provided to help parents do this effectively. This will ensure that their child will learn appropriate behaviours and new skills at a faster rate, and generalise them into the home setting.



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