

Thornby Hall School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	928/6061
Unique Reference Number (URN)	122148
URN for social care	SC012939
Inspection number	397746
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Mark Mumby HMI

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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, 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.

Information about the school

Thornby Hall is a therapeutic community comprising a small independent school and a children's home. It is located in a village in Northamptonshire. The school is registered for up to 24 boys and girls aged from 12 to 18 years. There are currently 18 students on roll. Eleven students have a statement of special educational needs. All of the students have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and have suffered psychological trauma. The school opened in February 1986 and was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2009. It received a monitoring visit by Ofsted in June 2010. The residential provision was not inspected at the same time as this inspection; it was last inspected in May 2012.

The school aims to give each young person a second chance at learning how to grow emotionally, socially and educationally.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education is inadequate. Although the school has improved its provision for the welfare, health and safety of students since the previous inspection, the quality of education has deteriorated. There is not enough teaching which is good enough to enable the students to benefit from the satisfactory curriculum and make adequate progress. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust. The school meets all but three of the regulations for registration as an independent school.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is no better than this because planning for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is only just adequate. The curriculum is based on the National Curriculum and is broad and balanced. Students also have weekly religious studies lessons. There is a suitable focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently, the curriculum provides suitable opportunities for students to make at least satisfactory progress in their learning and acquisition of basic skills. It is planned to meet the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs. However, the progress students make is inadequate because the quality of teaching is not consistently good enough for students to benefit fully from the planned curriculum.

At Key Stage 4, all students follow a core curriculum of GCSE and entry level courses in English, mathematics and science alongside physical education and a personalised

curriculum. Sixth form students follow a variety of routes according to their individual needs. For example, some may study GCSE courses while others may progress to AS level studies. The school works in partnership with other schools to provide a wider range of options for students than the school alone could provide. For example, one Year 13 student is studying AS level English and mathematics at Thornby Hall, and AS level chemistry and biology in another school.

PSHE is integrated into the daily life of the school through twice-daily tutorial sessions. The school has a scheme of work for formal PSHE lessons, but this is currently under review prior to implementation later this term. Students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form receive suitable careers guidance. They meet with a Connexions adviser, through which periods of work experience are organised.

The curriculum is enriched with a suitable range of trips and visits to places of interest. These include, for example, cultural visits to places such as castles, museums and art galleries.

Teaching and assessment are inadequate. Consequently, students make inadequate progress. Although work seen in lessons and in students' books indicates that teaching is often satisfactory or good, too much teaching, especially in mathematics and English, is not good enough. This inconsistency in teaching impedes progress, especially in the development of basic skills.

The weakest teaching is typified by poor planning and low expectations of both behaviour and what students can achieve in a lesson. Consequently, these lessons did not have a crisp start and students were often unable to explain the purpose of their task or what they were trying to improve in their learning. As a result, students frequently became restless and gave up on their work. Teachers then spent too much time trying to manage, rather than teach, the students. On occasions, students would complete a task, such as a piece of creative writing, but would have learnt very little because they were unclear about the purpose of the task. Too little support is given to students on these occasions to remind them of the planned learning and to guide them with individual steps to improve their own learning.

The most effective teaching observed was in one-to-one teaching sessions, such as in design and technology and humanities, and in a group lesson in science. On these occasions, teachers used their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons which met the needs and interests of the students. They set clear learning objectives and made clear their high expectations of what the students could achieve. The teachers persevered patiently with the students, using questioning and encouragement effectively to draw out the best from them. Lessons developed learning from previous sessions through constant reminders and consolidation, building up a good level of understanding for the students.

Specialist music and dance teachers bring a good level of expertise into the school. The students enjoy developing their own talents through these lessons. However,

the school does not maximise these opportunities by developing these lessons to extend students' skills of composition and choreography fully.

The marking of students' work is mostly superficial. Teachers do not provide students with sufficient written guidance about individual targets or about how to improve their work.

The school staff work effectively with the residential staff to ensure continuity of learning throughout the whole day.

The school has recently implemented an appropriate system to assess students' achievement against National Curriculum levels and to track their progress. This is based on assessments made by teachers. The school is aware that it needs to strengthen this system through an appropriate moderation process. Progress assessments, based on National Curriculum levels and attainment at GCSE and AS level, enable the school to benchmark achievement against national norms.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. It is not good because students' attitudes to attending lessons are inconsistent and there is excessive unacceptable language in a few lessons.

Students' behaviour is satisfactory. This judgement recognises the improvements to students' behaviour since joining the school. They are making positive progress in managing their anti-social behaviour. They are mostly courteous to one another and socialise together in friendship groups. Their attitudes to learning have improved from previous placements. However, a minority of students still find it difficult to arrive at lessons on time or concentrate on learning for a whole lesson. This behaviour is inconsistent and much of it can be put down to the quality of teaching in some lessons. Aside from these occasions, the school manages behaviour well and this is evident in the reduction of significant incidents recorded in the school's logs, showing how behaviour has improved over time. Attendance levels are monitored rigorously for each student. Although these fluctuate, attendance improves considerably when students join the school and continues to improve while they are on roll.

Students develop a sound understanding of different cultures through the religious studies curriculum as well as celebrations of festivals from different cultures. For example, they celebrated Eid for one of the Muslim students. Students are taught to respect others regardless of their background, and they respond positively. Displays around the school, which are changed regularly, represent celebrations of a range of festivals from different cultures and religions. Students gain an understanding about the United Kingdom through celebrations of topical events such as the Queen's diamond jubilee and the London 2012 Olympic Games. Students met one of the torch bearers in school and they visited London during the games.

Good relationships between the education and care staff mean that students have opportunities to go out into the community on visits, which help to develop their social skills in the wider community. Within school, they share their talents with one another through such things as a music and dance performance at the end of the school year. Students raise funds for charity, for example through participation in the Sport Relief Mile 2012.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is satisfactory. The school has a comprehensive range of policies, which are reviewed sufficiently frequently, to safeguard students. As a result, students are well cared for and feel safe. Levels of staff training in child protection and first aid meet requirements. Integrated policies and procedures to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying are up-to-date and are focused on the specific needs of the students in this school. These are mostly implemented well. Each student has an individual behaviour plan which is reviewed every six months.

The school pays rigorous attention to assessing and minimising risks to students. Detailed risk assessments for activities and check sheets for visits off-site ensure a good level of safety for students. They behave safely in lessons and teachers ensure that resources are used appropriately. For example, tools are kept locked away when not in use and students are only allowed access to the internet when supervised.

The school has carried out a suitable fire risk assessment and followed professional advice with regard to the storage of fire extinguishers. The school's records show that appropriate checks of equipment and fire evacuations are carried out.

The school supports students to lead healthy lifestyles through weekly physical activities which are planned to meet the students' interests. Although a number of students smoke, the school has successfully supported some students to quit the habit.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school carries out all of the required checks on staff and members of the proprietorial body prior to their appointment and maintains a single central register in line with requirements.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is housed in the former stable and garage blocks of Thornby Hall. These buildings have been refurbished to provide extensive and appropriate accommodation for the school. Students benefit from specialist rooms for most subjects including an art room, food technology kitchen, science laboratory and a design and technology workshop. There are two small halls and a drama workshop. The extensive grounds provide ample space for recreation. Good use is made of external facilities for physical education, including watersports.

Provision of information

The school provides all of the required information for parents, carers and others. Parents and carers are provided with clearly-written and informative annual reports about the attainment and progress of their children.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly-written complaints procedure which fulfils the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

- ensure that all of the teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 3(a))
- ensure that all of the teaching involves well planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and appropriate management of class time (paragraph 3(c))
- ensure that all of the teaching utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encourages pupils to act responsibly (paragraph 3(h)).

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education				✓
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs				✓
How well pupils make progress in their learning				✓

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of pupils			✓	

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special		
Date school opened	February 1986		
Age range of pupils	12–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 8	Total: 18
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 9	Girls: 2	Total: 11
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 10	Girls: 8	Total: 18
Annual fees (residential)	£222,124		
Address of school	Naseby Road, Thornby, Northampton NN6 8SW		
Telephone number	01604 740001		
Email address	s.goddard@childhoodfirst.org.uk		
Headteacher	Simon Goddard		
Proprietor	Childhood First		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 October 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Thornby Hall School, Northampton, NN6 8SW

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school this week. I enjoyed talking with you and visiting your lessons.

I was pleased to see how much more you are getting out of your education now you are attending school at Thornby Hall. Although some of you still find it difficult to get to lessons on time or always to behave well, your attitudes and behaviour are much better than they have been in the past. You all seem to get on with each other and the staff for most of the time.

Unfortunately, the quality of teaching is not as good as it needs to be. Too many of your lessons are not good enough to enable you to learn properly. This is because some teachers do not always plan activities well enough to meet your needs and they do not always guide you through your learning in lessons. Some of the teaching is better than this. For example, I saw some of you making good progress in one-to-one sessions and also in a group lesson in science because your teachers were very focused on what you needed to learn.

Your school has made some improvements since the last inspection. Procedures for keeping you safe, for example, are much better than they were.

Please try to attend all of your lessons and do your best so that you get the most out of your education.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mumby
Her Majesty's Inspector