

Thornby Hall School

Naseby Road, Thornby, Northampton, NN6 8SW

Inspection dates

9 October 2013

Context of the inspection

The inspection was undertaken at the request of the registration authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan. The school was last inspected on 3-4 October 2012 and the overall quality of education was judged to be inadequate. This was because teaching was not sufficiently good to enable the students to make adequate progress. An action plan was prepared by the school to address this issue. The plan was reviewed and accepted by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors on 21 January 2013. However, amendments were required in relation to the timescales included in the plan, and in relation to the school's methods to check whether plans were on track to be successful. This was the first visit to the school to follow up its progress, and to check that appropriate amendments had been made to the action plan. The visit was made without notice.

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

Good progress

School leaders have successfully amended and improved the school's action plan. The plan has played a key role in ensuring that timely improvements have been made to the quality of teaching. Appropriate mechanisms are included in the plan to check that the school is on track to maintain its progress.

At the time of the last inspection, the quality of teaching was not good enough to enable students to make adequate progress. The quality of teaching is now improving. This is because the school has greatly improved its procedures to manage teachers' performance. For example, leaders conduct more frequent, and detailed, checks of teachers' work. As a result, they have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each teacher. They use this information to identify improvement targets for each teacher, which are closely linked to the Department for Education's Teachers' Standards (which set the minimum requirements for teachers' practice and conduct). Consequently, the expectations of teachers have been raised. Some teachers have decided to leave the school and have been replaced by new staff, who, since beginning at the school, have responded positively to the expectations of the quality of their work. Teachers remaining at the school since the last inspection have received appropriate support and training, which has helped them to improve. As a result of improved teaching, there is evidence in students' work, and in the school's tracking system, that students are beginning to make better progress, particularly in English and mathematics.

At the time of the last inspection, teachers did not plan lessons well enough to ensure that the best use of time was made to help students to learn efficiently. Teachers now plan lessons more effectively. This is because the school has introduced a new planning format,

which requires teachers to focus more sharply on exactly what each individual student will learn to do in each lesson. Teachers also plan more effectively to identify when, and how, during lessons they will assess students' progress. Leaders, and an external adviser, check the quality of teachers' short-, medium- and long-term planning. This is helping to ensure that the new format is being used consistently well over time to improve the quality of teaching. However, some staff check that work is pitched at just the right level for students more carefully than others. This is because they make closer links to National Curriculum levels in their planning.

The teacher of mathematics has observed teaching in another school, which has been identified for its very strong practice. This has helped the teacher to discuss strategies with other subject specialists and has also supported an improved understanding of how to develop the quality of classroom displays to further promote learning. Classroom displays include key vocabulary linked to current learning, and also showcase students' work to help develop their self-esteem. Students were observed using displays to support their learning during the monitoring visit.

Teachers mark students' work more effectively than they did previously. They clearly identify the next steps of learning that students need to take to help them to improve. There are opportunities for students to write responses to teachers' marking. This is helping to further engage them in learning. There is evidence in students' books that teachers' comments are helping them to make better progress. However, on some occasions, teachers' advice appears to become forgotten over time. This is because students are not yet held to account as well as they could be in ensuring that they maintain the standards expected of them.

At the time of the last inspection, teachers did not manage students' behaviour in lessons well enough. Students are now focusing more closely on learning, because the quality of teaching is improving and is meeting their needs better. This means that they are less easily distracted, and less likely to interrupt their own learning, or that of others through inappropriate behaviour. Inevitably, students do display challenging behaviour at times in this setting. During the monitoring visit, staff were observed dealing with this confidently, and skilfully, to steer pupils' attention back to learning at the earliest opportunity.

Students are given more frequent opportunities to contribute their ideas and express their opinions than previously. This, along with improved teaching, is encouraging them to act more responsibly and attend lessons more frequently. Students have responded particularly well to the introduction of a 'rewards and sanctions group,' which has enabled them to contribute their ideas to improve the school's behaviour management procedures. As a result of students' suggestions, an increased emphasis has been placed on rewarding those students who display consistently good behaviour.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school has made good progress and now meets all regulatory requirements.

Inspection team

Jeremy Spencer, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about this 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, and opened in February 1986.
- The school is registered for up to 24 boys and girls aged from 12 to 18 years. All of the students have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and have suffered psychological trauma.
- The school was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2012. The residential provision was not inspected at the same time as this inspection; its last full inspection was in May 2012.
- Since the last inspection, three teachers have left the school. Four teachers and a higher level teaching assistant have joined the school.
- The school aims to give each young person a second chance at learning to grow emotionally, socially and educationally.

School details

Unique reference number	122148
Inspection number	421156
DfE registration number	928/6061
This inspection was conducted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005.	
Type of school	Special
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	12–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Childhood First
Chief Executive	Stephen Blunden
Headteacher	Simon Goddard
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2012
Annual fees (including residential)	£232,544
Telephone number	01604 740001
Email address	s.goddard@childhoodfirst.org.uk

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