

INSPECTION REPORT

THORNDEN SCHOOL

Eastleigh

LEA area: Hampshire

Unique reference number: 116439

Headteacher: Dr R A Sykes

Reporting inspector: Deborah Zachary
2940

Dates of inspection: 22 – 24 April 2002

Inspection number: 194346

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr S J O'Connell
Date of previous inspection:	November 1996

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	17
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	18

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Thornden School is an arts college - a school with a specialism in performing arts. It is bigger than most secondary schools, with 1311 pupils on roll. There are more boys than girls, particularly in Years 8 and 11, and about 10 per cent of the pupils are from ethnic minorities. Fifty pupils speak English as an additional language, and all but a very small number of these are fully bilingual – they speak, read and write English fluently and do not need extra support. The range of attainment of pupils who enter the school is well above average and there are fewer pupils who have Statements of Special Educational Need than would be typical of a school this size. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average, and overall the children come from very advantaged economic backgrounds. Although the school experiences the national difficulties in filling vacant teaching posts, it has been able to remain fully staffed, with temporary teachers used only when there is temporary absence.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school. Although its pupils enter with high standards in English, mathematics and science, it successfully challenges even the highest performing individuals. It enables its pupils to achieve¹ very well by ensuring high quality teaching and providing a very imaginative range of learning opportunities. It has very strong leadership, constantly striving to improve, but a leadership that is sensitive to the individual needs of pupils and staff. Its recent move to arts college status is raising the quality of what the school provides even higher. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Academic standards are high and pupils achieve very well because of high quality teaching.
- It already has outstanding performing arts, consolidating previous strengths and greatly improving others in the first 18 months as an arts college.
- The very good leadership reflects very innovative thinking, and this enables the school to enrich the curriculum and meet individual needs in very imaginative ways.
- The very good provision for pupils' personal development results in an atmosphere that strongly supports learning.
- The school is constantly trying to improve and its very strong management enables it to continually monitor and question very effectively what it does.

What could be improved

- The school has no areas of weakness significant enough to be raised here.

As there are no areas for improvement there is no requirement for specific issues to be covered in a governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1996. It responded well and since then has made very good improvements, well in excess of what might have been expected. It has maintained the high standard of its GCSE results, matching the national trend. It has improved results of national tests taken by Year 9 pupils in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, exceeding the national trend. It has addressed the last inspection's key issues well, very significantly improving teaching. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during this inspection and the proportion of very good or outstanding teaching was very high. Schemes of work now support the teaching very well as does the strong performance management, which has greatly improved. Design and technology accommodation was reviewed, and, though it was ultimately not possible to alter the accommodation significantly because of financial

¹ *Inspectors make two key judgements to do with how well pupils are doing academically. When they refer to 'standards' they mean how well pupils are doing compared to others of the same age nationally. The other judgement, 'achievement', is like 'progress', a judgement about whether the standards are high enough for the particular pupils involved, given their starting points.*

restrictions, statutory requirements for the subject are now met. Major improvements have been made in a variety of other areas, including information and communication technology (ICT) with the support of the national 'new opportunities' funding, and performing arts, through the move to arts college status.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The above table is based on the typical GCSE 'points' scored by the pupils in Year 11. The percentage of pupils who got five or more GCSE grades A* to C was also well above average in 2001. The school was in the top five percent of schools in the country for the proportion of pupils gaining at least one GCSE pass. This reflects the care the school takes to include everyone. It does not forget those who are less academic, and, impressively, last year, all gained at least 5 GCSE grades. Standards seen during the inspection reflect last year's results, despite the current Year 11 group having lower average attainment when they entered the school. The school exceeded its targets for GCSE results last year and looks set to exceed them again. It has recognised this and set a very challenging target for 2003.

The 2001 results of national tests taken by Year 9 pupils in English, mathematics and science were similarly high, as were the teachers' assessments of standards in most of the other subjects. Assessments are lower in physical education (PE), but this does not reflect lower achievement. One reason for the lower assessments is attainment on entry that is much lower than in other subjects. The standards of the current Year 9 largely match the 2001 results and assessments.

Pupils' achievement is very good, both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 to 11. Although they enter with standards that are judged high and leave with standards that are judged high, this broad judgement of standards masks significant progress that is shown in detailed analyses made by the school and local education authority (LEA). National analyses in which the school's 2001 Year 11 results can be compared with results of other schools who had similarly high results for the corresponding Year 9 in 1999, show that the pupils' progress was better than average; the current Year 11 are making even better progress. A similar analysis for those pupils in Year 9 in 2001, comparing their results to schools with intakes with similar Year 6 results, indicates that their progress was well above average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are keen to work and expect to enjoy their lessons. They settle very quickly and motivate themselves.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. They are very courteous and patient. The atmosphere in the school is one that greatly supports learning.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are excellent and personal development very good. Pupils are tolerant and reflective, and take responsibility for working.
Attendance	Very high, and punctuality is very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

- Learning is also very good overall. Pupils are aware of what they are trying to achieve, because teachers are good at transmitting this. They gain a depth of knowledge because many of the teachers are particularly able subject specialists who can interpret and explain at a high level, and can use very well thought-out activities to get their points across. They work hard and fast because there is an expectation of this from teachers. A significant number of lessons are taught outstandingly well and engender a zest and joy in learning.
- The school meets the needs of most individual pupils very well. Staff are well aware of the most gifted and talented, those who are still acquiring English, and those who have special needs. They give individual attention where needed.
- Literacy and numeracy are taught well, and the one to one or small group teaching of pupils with special needs or English as an additional language is also good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. There are imaginative solutions such as the provision of a special programme for the lower attainers in Year 11, after school lessons for some Year 10 courses and unusual and stimulating extra curricular activities. There are also more traditional but still unusually wide opportunities such as three sciences in Years 10 and 11 and three languages in Year 9.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. Pupils receive very attentive individual care and good teaching, and general guidance to subject staff is very helpful indeed. Special needs staff know exactly what the particular needs of each pupil are. During the recent long-term absence of the coordinator, the school rightly concentrated on ensuring these needs were met. However, targets on formal individual education plans are too open and do not have enough detail on basic skills. This makes formal review less focussed and makes it harder for subject staff without support in lessons to contribute to basic skills teaching in a coordinated way.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory overall. The pupils who are fully bilingual make very good progress, in line with monolingual pupils. The very small number who are at earlier stages of acquiring English are well supported in learning it in their one to one sessions or when they have support staff in class. In lessons other than English without support staff, teachers are very careful to make sure the pupils understand enough to make progress in their subject work, but have less focus on structured English teaching.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Huge strengths in social and moral development, enhanced by the ethos and atmosphere in the school. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is good. Pupils have enriched opportunities to learn about traditional British culture and arts, and are successfully encouraged to understand the nature of multicultural Britain. However, though pupils are happily tolerant of a wide variety of cultures, they do not fully appreciate the enriching nature of a multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent procedures to ensure health and safety and child protection.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher gives outstanding leadership and that of senior managers and most middle managers (heads of department or year) is very strong. Management is very good overall.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Well. They support the school very well and have a very strong understanding of standards and the academic curriculum. They are aware that the school does not currently meet the requirement for daily corporate worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. Examination statistics are rigorously analysed and the performance of teachers in the classroom closely monitored and well supported. The school questions and challenges itself, which is an essential part of achieving 'best value'.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Best value principles are applied well and the school always seeks to become more cost effective. It makes detailed analysis of finances and available grants, and is imaginative in their use within the given guidelines. Consultation is in place and competitive prices are sought.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What some parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The standards and progress – the school expects their children to work hard and achieve well. • The school is well led and managed. • There are wide ranging and interesting extracurricular activities. • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school. • The dedication of the staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework – the amount (though some thought it too much and others too little), the nature and the marking. • The information about how well their child is doing, including interviews at parents' meetings. • How closely the school works with parents.

Inspectors agree with all of the strengths the parents identified. After looking into the issues they did not agree with the areas of concern. The homework is appropriate and sufficiently marked. Arrangements for reports are good, and parents meetings have recently been examined and changed, with evaluations requested from parents. The school consults well and takes the right steps to involve parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Academic standards are high and pupils achieve very well because of high quality teaching.

1. National statistics for standards tend to focus on GCSEs at grades C or above, but the school also excels in a less commonly used measure – the number of GCSE grades of A or A*. Last year, of the subjects taken by 50 or more pupils at GCSE, the percentage of Thornden entries gaining A or A* grades was at least twice the national average in all but one subject. In some subjects the proportion was more than three times the national average. Since pupils make option choices and do not take GCSEs in every subject, the actual number of top grades depends on the earlier attainment levels of the pupils who choose that course. However, the consistency of the proportion of high grades shows that higher attaining pupils are doing very well. They also achieve very well in Years 7 to 9. The tests and teacher assessments carried out in Year 9 last year show that, again, the proportion of pupils reaching at least level 7 (three years or more ahead of what would be expected for their age) is above the national average in the majority of subjects, and well above in mathematics, science, design and technology, history and music. Fewer pupils than average reached these very high levels in ICT, modern foreign languages and PE. However, there are factors that explain this. ICT is a subject area that the school has been developing. It is now very effective thanks to developments in the curriculum, teaching and resources, but there was some ground to catch up. Languages are not studied at primary school, so most pupils are starting from scratch and the school does well in the proportions that reach expected levels and levels just above this. In addition, the national expectation in languages was recently revised. Teachers nationally are inexperienced in assessing the standard pupils reach against the new definitions of levels so the statistics are less secure. In PE the lower standards on entry restrict numbers reaching higher levels as well as expected levels.
2. The very strong performance of the lower attaining pupils is not just reflected in the way so many gain at least five GCSEs. These results build on the very good work being done lower down the school and the levels reached in Year 9. Last year results and assessments for the different subjects in Year 9 show the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 or higher (the lower level of the national expectation) significantly exceeding the national average in all subjects, with the whole cohort reaching this level in some subjects. Pupils of different abilities, both boys and girls, and pupils from different backgrounds all achieve very well overall at Thornden, and the key reason for this is the strength of the teaching.
3. Teachers are very aware of the ways pupils with special educational needs must be helped to gain access to the learning required in the separate subjects. The information about pupils' behaviour and disabilities provided by the special needs department is very helpful in this. The subject teachers take pains to give extra help and ensure that pupils understand. Where pupils are receiving extra support in class or in withdrawn groups the support staff are adept at ensuring their involvement. For example, in an English lesson the support teacher used the simple device of a ruler held under the text to guide a pupils' vision. The special needs teachers also work well with subject teachers to devise effective ways of simplifying worksheets or to produce their own prompts. The Year 11 'challenge' group was taught very well in the lesson observed. Particularly well planned activities and well prepared resources, with well judged interventions from teacher and learning support assistant meant that the pupils experienced success and good teamwork, qualities that could then enhance attitudes to other lessons.
4. Many of the teachers are particularly able subject specialists. Their rich depth of knowledge means that they teach with an air of authority, and have the confidence to encourage and deal with wide ranging points from pupils. In an outstanding history lesson, for example, the teacher challenged pupils to think hard about Hitler's use of propaganda, censorship and terror. The delivery was inspiring, the pace high, but the use of groupwork also allowed the pupils themselves to contribute significantly to their own learning. This capacity to inspire pupils was also evident in an outstanding English lesson, where a lively introduction with jokes, questions

and references to current news and football was underlaid by a real focus on the purpose of the learning that the teacher wanted to achieve. The pupils were riveted by the presentation yet by the end really understood the effect that using active or passive verbs had on a reader. This rapid progress in knowledge and understanding engendered by subject specialists who can put across their own depth of knowledge benefits pupils of all abilities, but is particularly significant in challenging the highest attainers. The teachers also have a very good understanding of what a pupil must demonstrate to examiners in order to reach high grades. The consistently very good teaching seen in science gave the pupils a particularly clear understanding of this, and teachers in a whole variety of subjects were adept at clarifying examiners' expectations as they developed a subject theme.

5. The best teaching allows the pupils to become involved in their own learning. This can be risky for the teacher, in that it may mean a lesson departs from the original plan, but many of the teachers take this risk to very good effect. The result is that there is often a high pace to the learning that is driven as much by the pupils as the teachers, though teachers certainly transmit their expectation that pupils give all their attention to what is happening. In an outstanding German lesson, the pupils were enabled to choose their own form of answer to questions about what food they eat or beverage they drink. The highest attaining knew they must construct a more complex sentence mentioning the name of the meal, whilst others knew they must mention either two items or one item of food or drink to reach a middle or lower level. They did not take the easy way out, and this concern of the pupils to understand how to reach higher levels of language proficiency was evident in much of the language work observed during the inspection.
6. Examples of very good or outstanding teaching were seen in a very wide range of the subjects sampled during the inspection – in performing arts, English, mathematics, science, special needs, art, history, modern foreign languages, ICT, PE, design and technology and in personal and social education. None of the teaching sampled was less than satisfactory, but what distinguished the very good teaching from the satisfactory was this element of risk taking. The pupils are for the most part very ready to learn. They will listen to teachers and take notes, but in some lessons opportunities are missed to make activities more stimulating and involve the pupils in a wider variety of ways of learning.

It already has outstanding performing arts, consolidating previous strengths and greatly improving others in the first 18 months as an arts college.

7. The school became an arts college specialising in the performing arts in September 2000, after a period of consultation and fundraising culminating in government approval. It built on established strengths in music – high standards were noted at the time of the last inspection, when the orchestra and wind band were also well established with 'high participation rates'. The dance programme, in contrast, was very limited. Drama was taught, but at the time of the bid there were staffing concerns, which were resolved with new appointments; the department became fully staffed last September. Extra-curricular clubs have been extended over the last 18 months and new 'twilight' lessons (lessons after school) in dance and music are now provided to extend the options available to Years 10 and 11. In tandem with improvements to the curriculum, a major building project is under way to create a new facility for the performing arts – new classrooms and performance space, also to be the base of the Hampshire County Youth Orchestra – which will provide an exciting range of new technical equipment and resources.
8. Standards in music are very high. In 2001 nearly half of the pupils entered gained the top possible grade – A* - with more than two thirds gaining at least a grade A. The pupils achieve very well because of outstanding teaching which is lively and brisk and pitched at just the right challenging level. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, a stimulating start consisted of a listening exercise in which the pupils had to identify what the teacher had changed about the piece being played. The follow up questions prompted very deep thinking and set the tone for the excellent learning that took place. The teacher was not afraid to give the pupils the opportunity to experiment with instruments, constantly but subtly keeping them concentrating and guiding their thinking. In a Year 10 lesson on 'minimalist music', the teacher displayed a great depth of

subject knowledge, explaining concepts in an interesting, challenging, authoritative and quite inspiring way. The pupils then used the instrument of their choice, reaching very high standards in composing their own pieces in a similar minimalist style.

9. Standards in drama were well above average last year, reflecting the support given to the teaching by senior management and temporary staff. Now that staffing is permanent, numbers participating in the subject are increasing and the curriculum widening. The new head of department has made a very good start, raising the status of the subject with an enterprising whole school production in the spring term. The teaching is more secure - at least good during the inspection, with very good teaching seen in Year 10. Here the key features were the very helpful way the teacher evaluated pupils' practical work, showing pupils how they should be evaluating each other's work, and the great sensitivity he showed in handling difficult issues such as schizophrenia. These features led to very good gains in understanding for the pupils of both the particular technique - non-naturalistic dramatic interpretation - and of the ethical and emotional dimensions to the lesson. A significant number of pupils were reaching the highest standards of convincing characterisation, indicating that they are on target to reach A or A* grades in GCSE.
10. Pupils were not entered for dance GCSE last year, but standards were high in the Year 10 lesson seen during the inspection. Though the lesson took place after school, the pupils were very highly motivated and the teaching was excellent – very strong in all areas. The lesson was very well planned, with objectives that were both artistic (refining phrases of a dance and creating new images) and technical (developing understanding of a range of techniques that can be used to compose a dance, such as 'unison' or 'fragmentation'). The teacher had the confidence born of deep subject understanding – she enabled the pupils to experiment and evaluated what they were doing expertly, taking their understanding forward rapidly and producing performances of high quality.
11. The strength of the performing arts is not only seen in the quality of the teaching, although half of the lessons seen were outstanding. The energy and commitment of the staff and pupils is also reflected in the wide range and quality of the extra-curricular work that takes place. This provides opportunities for all to develop both interests and expertise. Activities include the well established full orchestra and wind band, and the smaller wind and string quartets, a very well attended dance club for younger pupils and a high quality Year 10 session on dance routines, and drama work that focuses on performance – including theatre visits and pupils' own productions. The new building will provide the opportunity to give pupils experience of the technical side of backstage work as well as performance itself and will make the outstanding strengths of the school's performing arts available to a wider audience.

The very good leadership reflects greatly innovative thinking, and this enables the school to enrich the curriculum and meet individual needs in very imaginative ways.

12. At the time of the last inspection the school was effective, popular and well respected. The challenge it faced was to continue to improve the standards of a high attaining intake, whilst maintaining its many strengths. To a large extent it faces the same sort of challenge now – to get continuous improvement for an already high quality education. The innovative approach and imaginative thinking of the school's leadership - not just of the headteacher but of those elsewhere in the management structure whom he empowers to do so well - have been and remain crucial factors in what is being achieved.
13. The move to arts college status is an example of a major change that was identified and implemented within 18 months, and more importantly which provided both enhancement and solutions to a range of areas identified for improvement. The governors and staff remain committed to comprehensive education, and once it was evident that being a specialist school did not involve any compromise on this ideal, Thornden began to look seriously at an application. The headteacher speaks of an overriding concern of 'How will this help OUR pupils?', that enabled them to weigh up what they would achieve with an application. By choosing performing arts the school was able to celebrate a strength in music and enhance it

with a move towards 'state of the art' accommodation. It was also able to plan more realistically to improve dance and drama, which were already identified for development. The alterations to the facilities would also have a 'knock on' effect in release of rooms for other purposes, enabling developments to accommodation not a part of performing arts. The school consulted widely and raised the necessary sponsorship whilst, significantly, continuing a coherent programme of school development in other subjects.

14. The curriculum is a continuing challenge for many secondary schools, in that they must provide breadth and opportunity for the individual without diluting the depth to which pupils must study. Ongoing review in Thornden allows senior managers a clear picture of what they want to be able to offer, and they take into account the particular needs of individual year groups as well as national developments. Through a carefully constructed PSHE programme the staff teach what is required in a comparatively brief time slot. ICT teaching is also unusual in that the subject is taught directly in Years 7 and 9 but not in Year 8. Neither of these two decisions have adverse outcomes and they enable the MFL curriculum and performing arts curriculum to expand to very positive effect. In Year 10 after school lessons enable the pupils to take extra options, and the new provision of a half GCSE in ICT, covered in one year during time thus released, is working very well. ICT will be further enhanced with the introduction of a vocational course next year.
15. The school also responds with great imagination to the needs of smaller groups or even individuals. A group of Year 11 boys who were showing signs of disaffection have been given a specially created series of activities during the time equivalent of two GCSE options. They have been given practical training and enhancement activities, such as a residential visit, aimed at improving their commitment to and inclusion in the school. The pupils appreciate these opportunities, and those who teach them speak of their improved attitudes. Another example is that of a pupil who arrived at the school speaking no English and speaking a home language comparatively rare in the local area. Though the school has a very limited experience and expertise in this area, wide ranging exploration has been made to find an interpreter. One has now been employed using the school's own budget, to supplement the efforts of the support staff.
16. Apart from the formal curriculum the school deliberately plans enhancement of the curriculum through an outstanding range of extracurricular clubs. They provide opportunities for pupils in all year groups. These are not only in a wide range of sports and physical activities, and not only in wide variety of activities related to the school's specialism of performing arts. There are basic skills or homework support activities such as ICT at lunchtime or an after-school spelling club. Groups also work on in-school projects such as the production of the 'yearbook' for the Year 11, involving managing a budget and making editorial decisions to a tight timescale. A particularly unusual example of the extra-curricular activities on offer is the investment club. One facet of this is the 'real money' club whose members contribute small amounts and learn about investment of their funds on the stock exchange. In a further development, a small group of Year 11 pupils entered a competition requiring a 'virtual' investment of funds in which they had to identify opportunities, justify them and track their funds in terms of money that would have been made. In a very notable success they made the greatest 'profit' out of any of the teams entered nationally – over 10,000 in total.

The very good provision for pupils' personal development results in an atmosphere that strongly supports learning.

17. The extra-curricular clubs play a significant part in enhancing pupils' personal development, but they are just one facet of the commitment shown by staff at all levels. The pastoral system and the special needs department also play key roles, and the emphasis on a learning ethos that is so well established in the school is the result of strategy set by the headteacher, senior managers and governors.
18. Heads of year move up with their year groups through the school, where possible. They know their year group well and are well placed to talk to pupils and parents about personal as well as academic successes or needs. They, as well as senior managers, take year group assemblies.

They are closely involved in monitoring pupils' academic performance and so are enabled to intervene to discuss learning with pupils, and indeed any personal issues that might be affecting learning. The PSHE programme is taught by specialist teachers and by form tutors and involves a significant element of study skills or learning how to learn.

19. There are comparatively few pupils with pronounced special needs, and very few pupils who are at early stages of learning the English language. However, the special needs teachers and support assistants successfully establish the atmosphere of security that is so essential for learning to take place. The example set by staff is picked up by pupils, who are sensitive to peers in need of support. In a drama lesson, for example, a group of pupils tried very hard to help and include in role play a pupil whose needs included autistic tendencies.
20. Many teachers use groupwork and discussion as a way of learning, and encourage skills of reflection and respect for others' opinions. In a very good French lesson, for example, the attitudes of pupils in Year 9 were outstanding. The teacher had successfully established an atmosphere in which all valued each other's contributions, and as a result all were willing to try out new language and not feel threatened by mistakes. In a very good art lesson the Year 8 pupils willingly discussed the work in hand, advising each other with maturity.
21. The pupils themselves show a very strong commitment to their own learning. They enter lessons expecting to learn and to be successful. As a result they respond very well to challenge, yet are willing to ask for help. They make full use of the opportunities they are given. In a very good ICT lesson the Year 10 pupils were working individually on spreadsheets from a particularly well-prepared handout. They were willing to work alone, but also did not hesitate to ask for help in a mature way, and they accepted that all were at different stages of understanding.
22. Assemblies reflect the school's strengths in moral and social education. For example there was a very strong moral message about respect for others in a Year 9 assembly on the meaning of names, and effective moral and social messages for Year 8 in an assembly about dealing with anxiety and where we go for help. Importantly, moral and social development is consistently reinforced through the teachers' expectations of behaviour – to which the pupils respond particularly well. Assemblies generally include time for reflection. The school's failure to meet the requirement for daily corporate worship is more to do with lack of accommodation rather than the school not recognising the importance of reflection in the assemblies that do take place. The pupils who discussed spirituality with inspectors demonstrated very good levels of understanding, referring to examples from a variety of subjects. An example of a good link to spiritual development was seen during the inspection in a very good design and technology lesson. Here pupils' research included notes on food from the Far East and, in particular, the concept of harmony between man and nature. The very well constructed scheme of work for religious education (RE) gives strong support to teachers. It helps them to plan for pupils' spiritual development as well as their greater understanding of the subject as a whole. However, the theme of spiritual development is not consistently addressed in subject planning.

The school is constantly trying to improve and its very strong management enables it to continually monitor and question very effectively what it does.

23. The headteacher and senior managers are reflective, seeking to improve all aspects of the school and willing to draw on expertise and analyses from a wide variety of sources. They work together, all contributing to strategy meetings and to reviews of the school's work. They make sensible decisions about the use of time, recognising that only a limited number of developments can be done well, yet adeptly blending national and school priorities to benefit the pupils at Thornden.
24. The analysis of examination results and the use of predictive cognitive tests such as 'CATS' tests are well established monitoring devices used at Thornden. National and County statistics are well used to indicate how well particular groups of pupils are making progress. The relative performance of different subjects are appropriately analysed and the results of analysis well used to inform discussions with heads of department. The way in which money is spent in

terms of its allocation to different budget heads is also compared to the county picture, as part of the ongoing drive to achieve best value. Finances are appropriately allocated, with a significant amount of money carried forward this year in order to fund expenses concerned with the building of the new hall.

25. Recent national initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 Numeracy and Literacy Strategies, the New Opportunities funding (NOF) for ICT and the introduction of Performance Management to replace the national appraisal system have been implemented very well. The staff have a knack of taking a national development and amending it to have a particularly effective impact in the school. The literacy and numeracy strategies, for example, have been very well implemented, particularly in terms of the cross-curricular impact they have had. In a very good PE lesson with Year 7, for example, the teacher's high expectations ensured that pupils were using concepts of ratio well to think about the link between pace judgement and distance in running 100, 200, 300 and 400 metre races. Knowledge of the strategies has generally opened up a wider range of teaching strategies in other subjects and in mathematics and English lessons higher up the school. The numeracy strategy, in particular, has also been instrumental in consolidating links with primary schools and involving more teachers in visits to them. The new scheme of work for literacy reflects a very effective focus on higher order reading and writing skills, with clearly defined objectives very useful in ensuring a consistent approach.
26. The development of ICT in the school and the use of NOF grants were planned to coincide with the appointment of a new head of department in 2000. NOF grants have been used to provide two additional ICT suites and to train teachers in the use of ICT within subjects. An effective system of 'contracting out' parts of the ICT curriculum has been strengthened, which is starting to ensure that the school meets the national requirement to teach ICT across a variety of subjects. Subject provision and pupils' progress have been closely monitored. Pupils are now achieving well and ICT is beginning to emerge as a strength in the school.
27. The school started to implement a full programme of performance management before it was required nationally, and has put a very effective system of monitoring and professional development into place. Lesson observations are systematically structured and teachers' objectives tie into both personal needs and school development needs. The headteacher has taken personal oversight of the effectiveness of the programme, and has provided a system of feedback through which comments on ways to improve the system reach him directly. The headteacher has a very clear understanding of his school's strengths and weaknesses, identifying, for example, areas which are his priority for development, in terms of standards, teaching and management. The inspection team did not find unsatisfactory practice, but agree with the headteacher's analysis of the areas that are less strong than others.
28. The recent long term absence of the special needs co-ordinator could not be covered by appropriately qualified external temporary staff, so a member of the department took over co-ordination with the support of a deputy headteacher. They appropriately focused on maintaining the quality of individual support, and on ensuring that special needs expertise was fully used in the literacy developments. It is therefore understandable that the minor weaknesses in individual education plans were not identified. It is also understandable that with so very few learners at the very early stages of acquisition of English, there is no depth of expertise in the school. It is a mark of the readiness of the school to improve that during the inspection senior managers took great pains to explore in detail with inspectors even minor areas that they might need to develop further. Another example of this was the school's response to discussions on pupils' personal development, bringing forward a senior management audit of provision so that they would be well prepared to implement any recommendations made. The approach of the senior managers is echoed by the response of departmental and pastoral heads to the inspection – with a real climate of review and reflection evident to inspectors.
29. The school is also responsive to parents and works hard to review systems it perceives as in need of improvement. It has sent out questionnaires about parents' evenings to try to make changes and better meet parents' demands. It has also given very clear information about homework practices. Heads of year meticulously log contact with parents, and they are given

very clear information about changes affecting their children, such as arrangements for Year 11 examinations.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

30. There are no areas for improvement significant enough to be included here. During the inspection a small number of minor weaknesses were discussed with the headteacher, senior managers and middle managers, in order that they might further raise the already high quality of what the school does.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	40
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	18

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	6	18	9	7	0	0	0
Percentage	15	45	22.5	17.5	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents nearly four percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1311
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	7

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	183

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	46

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2

National comparative data	8.1
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National comparative data	1.1
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	129	129	258

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	123	124	126
	Girls	127	120	122
	Total	250	244	248
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	97 (92)	95 (90)	96 (88)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	81 (66)	75 (69)	72 (56)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	118	122	122
	Girls	128	121	119
	Total	246	243	241
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	95 (86)	94 (87)	93 (89)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	64 (53)	72 (62)	63 (56)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	130	128	258

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	93	129	130
	Girls	113	128	128
	Total	206	257	258
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	80 (78)	100 (98)	100 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE/GNVQ results		Average point score
Average point score per pupil	School	52.1
	National	39.0

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	33
Pakistani	7
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	11
White	1238
Any other minority ethnic group	22

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	1	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	1	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	23	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	75.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	423

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	19.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	3,598,032
Total expenditure	3,549,078
Expenditure per pupil	2,694
Balance brought forward from previous year	83,019
Balance carried forward to next year	131,972

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	22
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Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	25
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1311
Number of questionnaires returned	212

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	54	8	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	44	3	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	63	6	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	51	17	2	1
The teaching is good.	36	57	3	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	51	15	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	37	5	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	26	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	28	52	17	0.5	2
The school is well led and managed.	57	36	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	41	7	2	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	41	8	0.5	1