

Thornden School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116439
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	290535
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Christine Jones HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1382
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr S O'Connell
Headteacher	Dr R Sykes
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002
School address	Winchester Road Chandler's Ford Eastleigh SO53 2DW
Telephone number	02380 269722
Fax number	02380 268393

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thornden school is larger than most other secondary schools. Few students come from minority ethnic groups or have English as an additional language. Lower than average numbers of students have learning difficulties or disabilities or statements of special educational needs. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school is designated as a specialist arts college with science as a second specialism.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'My daughter absolutely loves Thornden and has thrived there. She genuinely loves school and looks forward to each day with enthusiasm.' The view of this parent illustrates the overwhelmingly positive view held by those involved with this outstanding school. The calm and supportive environment is sharply focused on developing a sense of self-worth in the students. As a result, the personal development and academic achievement of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are outstanding.

Students come to Thornden with standards that are already above to well above average. Outstanding teaching, guidance and support result in them making excellent progress and reaching very high standards by the time they leave. Students appreciate the opportunities available to them. They behave extremely well and are maturing as responsible citizens with a commitment to the school community. This is reflected in very good relationships and positive attitudes to learning. Well above average attendance is testament to students' enjoyment of their education.

Teachers are expert in their subject areas and this makes for lessons which challenge and stimulate students of all abilities. Assessment information is used well to track progress and set appropriate targets for students although more could be done by some teachers to involve students in assessing their own performance. The excellent curriculum offers students appropriate courses well matched to their needs. The range available has been extended to provide greater flexibility and choice that motivates students and provides pathways to further education, training and employment.

A major key to the success of the school is the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher and senior team supported by high quality middle management. They have created a clear vision of a learning community where the achievement of every individual matters and this is much appreciated by parents, many of whom say their children have 'blossomed' during their time at this school. Managers have an accurate view of the school's performance based on secure evidence that is focused on maintaining the excellent overall quality of students' learning experiences. Strong teamwork, including that of the governors, has created excellent capacity and drive for continuous improvement. As a result, staff and governors have a realistic understanding of what the school does well and what could be improved further. The school's specialist status in arts and science leads the way here and provides exciting opportunities for students within the school and beyond.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop consistent opportunities for students to evaluate their own work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Overall, achievement and standards are outstanding. In 2006 standards at GCSE improved from 2005 and continued to be very high. They were well above the national average for students gaining five or more higher-grade GCSEs, as well as when English and mathematics are included. All students gained at least five or more graded GCSEs. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, performed equally well with no difference between the results reached by boys and girls.

The school is successful in making sure that students perform equally well in all their subjects. Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are already above national averages and they make exceptional progress so that by the time they reach Year 11 they attain very high standards. This performance exceeded the challenging targets set for the school and current information indicates that this will be repeated with the present Year 11 students.

In 2006 results for the end of Key Stage 3 tests were also outstanding and are expected to reach similar levels in 2007. Year 9 students reached very high standards. Students in Year 8, who were all entered early for the tests in English, reached standards that were in line with the national average for Year 9. Inspection evidence indicates that current standards in Key Stage 3 are very high and students are making excellent progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Pupils behave exceptionally well both in lessons and around the school and show respect to adults and each other. Students consciously value the teaching, resources and above all the relationships that help them develop so well. Students come to school regularly and on time and the school has robust strategies in place to ensure that this is maintained.

Younger students quickly settle in to school because of the close relationship with primary schools, excellent transition arrangements and the support they receive from the school. Students throughout the school feel that they are safe and well cared for, that bullying is not a significant problem and that good systems are in place to deal with any problem should it arise. Students are confident individuals and appreciative of the extra benefits coming from the school's specialist status. They feel very well supported by staff, and those experiencing either personal or academic problems know who to approach for assistance. As one Year 10 student put it, 'At this school everyone can talk to someone who can help'.

Students are well aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle as the school encourages healthy eating and has recently been awarded Healthy Schools status. Students' readiness for economic well-being is fostered through the excellent advice given to help them make the right decisions about their future. Students are enthusiastic members of the effective school council as well as the year councils and feel these provide an effective voice for their opinions. Extra curricular and community linked activities and events are well attended with students participating in community bands and drama productions as well as helping in local primary schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Excellent relationships in classrooms result in a strong focus on learning and high levels of concentration. Students listen to each other carefully and respect others' ideas and contributions. As a result, in almost all cases, pupils are really interested in their lessons and make outstanding progress especially where teachers identify very precisely what pupils are intended to learn. They then support pupils' learning with a varied range of carefully selected and well-sequenced activities which engage and motivate pupils very well.

Teachers plan for practical, active work and many use the interactive whiteboards to make learning interesting and fun.

Teachers make good use of assessment information to ensure that work is at the right level. In many lessons students are often involved, alongside the teacher, in evaluating how well they are achieving and in identifying what they need to do to improve their work although this is practice is not always consistent in all subjects. The school has correctly identified the need to build on existing good practice and ensure greater consistency in the use of assessment and feedback to further improve the quality of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum offered to students is outstanding. Within the main curriculum many subjects extend coverage to include stimulating topics which are made accessible and relevant, for instance in history, where a topic about abuse of human rights forms a background to the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Specialist arts and science college status has considerably improved curriculum opportunities both within and beyond the school. The Science Department is developing new teaching approaches that are spreading to other curriculum areas and is providing good outreach support to the science curriculum in the local family of primary schools.

The school manages the curriculum flexibly to meet the needs of students in different subjects. For example, English is exemplary in the way it adjusts the organisation and groupings of students to their best advantage. This is combined with other strategies such as early entry to end of key stage tests, which allows the creative use of the subsequent Year 9 to introduce GCSE styles of working.

The range of GCSE courses offers personal fulfilment and good preparation for future economic well being. GCSE arts courses, trips, wonderful performance opportunities, clubs and activities extend opportunities for achievement beyond the school day. The curriculum supports community involvement very well. The school recognises the importance of educating for diversity in society and does this well, putting principles into practice by ensuring equal opportunities for all students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Careful management of students' personal and academic welfare begins before they enter the school in Year 7 and follows them through their life at school and beyond. The strong emphasis on building positive relationships with teachers and tutors, through constructive advice and positive encouragement, inspires confidence and equips students with negotiation skills that are an excellent preparation for adult life. All appropriate measures to keep students safe are in place. There is very good monitoring of the progress made by individuals and helpful intervention happens quickly if there is any sign of slow progress or lack of effort. Alongside very good links with external support agencies, a school nurse and a personal counsellor are on hand to support students' physical and mental well being. Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is superbly organised, so that they fully participate in school life and make progress at the same rate as others. A special strength is that parents of students with learning difficulties are continually reassured about how their child will thrive in this school and are given opportunities to help them with their studies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has an impressive determination to sustain and wherever possible improve on already high standards. He sees the importance of 'maintaining the culture of the school even when the people change.' The school has succeeded in this and there is no complacency. There is a strong emphasis on teamwork. An equally dedicated senior leadership team provides excellent support. All teachers are fully involved in robust self-evaluation procedures that encourage them to reflect on the effectiveness of their work. Middle managers use available data very well to identify areas for development and there are excellent links between departmental and whole school development plans. Teaching and learning are closely monitored. This leads to very good support aimed at improving the teaching of individual teachers. This information could be used more rigorously to ensure that all teaching is as stimulating as the best.

Since the last inspection, the school has successfully developed its work as a specialist arts college. Pupils benefit from a wide range of additional opportunities, especially in the new performing arts centre. Extensive community links are very well managed. Similarly, successful initiatives are now taking place as part of the school's second specialism as a science college. This excellent track record in bringing planned developments to fruition means that the school has excellent capacity for further improvement. The governing body is very well informed. Governors provide excellent support and challenge for the headteacher and individual subject departments. Although funding for the school is slightly below the national average, the excellent achievement of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, means that the school provides outstanding value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Thornden School, Eastleigh, SO53 2DW

We visited your school on June 6 and 7 and I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made. We enjoyed our visit very much and it was a pleasure to talk to you about your life in school and to watch you enjoying your lessons. If you read our report it will tell you in more detail about what your school does well and how it could be made even better.

You are rightly proud of your school and we found it to be an excellent place in which to develop and learn and the school makes sure that there are excellent opportunities for every one of you to achieve as well as you can. You enjoy school, work hard and achieve excellent results. Those of you with extra learning needs do especially well. The school takes excellent care of you and you feel safe and secure. Your behaviour is excellent and you take very good care of each other. There are very good relationships in the school between staff and students and you work well together and respect each other. You appreciate the excellent teaching that helps you to learn.

We have made just one recommendation to try to make your outstanding school even better. We would like you to work more closely with your teachers in assessing your own work.

Thank you for your contribution to this inspection. You are a credit to yourselves as well as the school and your parents.

With very best wishes for the future,

Christine Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector