



Thornby Hall School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	928/6061
Unique Reference Number	122148
Inspection number	298226
Inspection dates	6-7 February 2007
Reporting inspector	Mrs Pauline Allison HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group 13-17	Published 2 March 2007	Reference no. 298226
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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, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Thornby Hall is a residential, therapeutic community and special school offering placements for 52 weeks per year. The young people who are placed here have suffered psychological trauma and the school aims to meet their behavioural, emotional and social needs. Students can attend the school between the ages of 12 and 18 years. There are currently 16 students aged between 13 and 17. All the young people placed in the community are looked after by their local authorities and many have a statement of special educational need. The residential wing of the community is in a listed sixteenth century manor house in 17 acres of grounds in rural Northamptonshire. The school is based in converted stable and garage buildings close to the residence. The community operates on psychodynamic principles. It aims to focus on the individual needs of each young person and enable them to grow emotionally, socially and educationally, maximise their potential, and prepare them for adult life and independent living. The school was last inspected in 2001.

Evaluation of the school

Thornby Hall is a good school which, as part of the therapeutic community, is successful in meeting its aims. It gives its students good quality education and care within a safe and welcoming environment. As one placing authority noted, it provides young people with: 'a positive influence at a time when not much else seems very positive.' The school has made good progress against the action points of its last inspection and now has a strong and clear focus on the importance of academic achievement in ensuring the future well-being of the students. It meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The school provides a broad curriculum which is good and includes access to the full National Curriculum and which meets the requirements of those students who have a statement of special educational need. For students in the school's sixth form there are well-planned opportunities for them to attend courses at local colleges, in addition to the good quality courses offered at the school. Many students arrive at the school with significant gaps in their education and the school plans a curriculum which ensures that their basic skills are developed, and which enables them to re-

engage with learning. The curriculum is enriched by opportunities such as Enterprise Week, where students use a range of cross-curricular activities to design, make and sell products. A wide programme of extra-curricular activities including music, drama and photography is offered by the school and this is supported effectively by residential staff. Good use is made of local resources for activities such as rock climbing, swimming and ballet. The school has good links to the local Connexions service and provides carefully planned and monitored work experience for students in Year 11. Students in the sixth form also have opportunities for further work experience or to take part-time jobs.

Almost all teaching is good and some is outstanding. The teachers plan very well for their engaging lessons, which are specifically tailored to meet students' individual learning needs and which develop their knowledge, skills and understanding effectively. Where teachers have very good expertise and knowledge in specialist areas, their natural enthusiasm for the subject is very quickly picked up by the students and it engages their interest very well indeed. As an example, in science where students were very focused on their ecological surveys, the level of detail in the observations was excellent. In a thoroughly prepared mathematics session, a considerable emphasis was placed on commitment and achievement in a lively and engaging atmosphere.

General classroom resources are adequate except for the use of information and communication technology to further support and enhance work in other subjects. Additional support is managed according to the subject and to students' needs and the educational assistant is appropriately and effectively engaged in the teaching and learning process. The school is planning to make more use of residential staff to provide support in classrooms.

A very good framework for assessment is in place and forms a key feature of the school's work. Each student is formally assessed on entry to the school in order to establish an education history and a base line of current levels of achievement. A successful and informative learning skills assessment programme has been introduced into the school to identify individuals' strengths and weaknesses, and to target their needs in key areas on an on-going basis. This is a good, straightforward system that works well. Assessment methods vary between curriculum areas and to suit specific subjects.

The students' confidence is built up through the continual positive reinforcement by the teachers, who regularly assess students' progress in relation to their targets. The quality of verbal feedback is very good and has a positive impact on the good progress that students make. The quality of written feedback in marking is not yet as consistent across the school. Comprehensive progress reports are completed for each pupil three times per year and discussed with them. Good quality individual education plans for students with learning difficulties are very robustly reviewed on a regular basis. Good progress in both academic and social development is evident as students move

through the school to become 'seniors.' Here they show a good degree of maturity in their approaches to studying for a range of examinations including GCSE and A levels. Well led and managed sixth form tutorials contribute positively to students' development.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good. Students have good opportunities to reflect on their own situations and emotions in a range of ways, including through the regular meetings held as part of the therapeutic approach. The community is sensitive to the spiritual needs of individuals and enables them to practise their faiths. In religious education lessons students learn about other faith groups. The school sets a strong moral tone and students are clear about what constitutes good behaviour. There are many opportunities within the Thornby Hall community for young people to join in social events, for example sport, bingo and quiz nights as well as provision for them to spend time on individual pursuits. The well designed communal dining area is an outstanding facility which contributes to the excellent promotion of social skills through shared meal times. Cultural development is promoted through the curriculum, for example when students make masks of other cultures or consider African art, as well as by visits to the theatre, and to museums and art galleries.

As part of a therapeutic community the school rightly places a strong focus on raising young people's self esteem, and provides a clear framework which enables them to enjoy and achieve and form positive relationships. This aspect is outstanding. There is a strong culture in lessons of promoting positive behaviour and attitudes to work. Students proudly display the certificates they receive to celebrate their effort and achievement. The school successfully promotes the students' improved attendance in lessons from a previously low base in their former placements. The school is particularly successful in fostering the individual talents and interests of the students, for example playing the piano. Relationships between students and between students and staff are good, and older students provide positive role models for more recent entrants to the school. As a result of the clarity and consistency of expectations by staff, students' behaviour is good.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the students is good. Safeguarding has a high priority for the whole community and there are very good policies and procedures in place to safeguard the young people and help them to understand and manage potential risks. All students are confident that there is an adult they can turn to if they have any concerns. The structure of

regular community meetings also enables them to voice their views and anxieties and to receive care and support. There are excellent opportunities for students to make healthy choices in their eating and to take regular exercise. The school offers support and encouragement to help students understand a wide range of health issues, including the dangers of substance abuse. In addition to thorough health and safety checks, the school carries out comprehensive and wide-ranging risk assessments, both to reflect the needs of individual young people, and for when students attend college or make other visits. The school has given some consideration to the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) but the nature of the buildings limits the adaptations that can be made. It has not yet drawn up a three year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school carries out thorough checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children.

School's premises and accommodation

School and residential accommodation is in listed buildings. These are well maintained, enable students to learn effectively and promote their personal development. Within the school there is dedicated provision for food studies, design technology, information and communication technology, science and art. There is a well-stocked library within the residence. The extensive grounds provide for a wealth of curriculum enrichment and sporting activities and include a football pitch, hard courts, and an adventure playground.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school is sensitive to the need for parents and carers to receive information when their children are living a long way from home. In addition to providing a wide range of information in its prospectus, the community makes very good provision to enable young people to have regular contact with their families and friends where this is appropriate. Parents and carers are able to contribute to annual reviews. Most parents and placing authorities are pleased with the provision made for their young people.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy which fully meets the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of that listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide classroom resources of an adequate quality, quantity and range and ensure they used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure staff consistently mark students' work with written comments that help them know what the next steps are for making progress;
- develop the potential for residential staff to take a more active role in supporting learning in the classrooms.

School details

Name of school	Thornby Hall School		
DfES number	928/6061		
Unique reference number	122148		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	February 1986		
Age range of pupils	12-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 10	Total: 16
Number of boarders	Boys: 6	Girls: 10	Total: 16
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 5	Girls: 5	Total: 10
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 10	Total: 16
Annual fees (boarders)	£160,680		
Address of school	Thornby Hall School Naseby Road Thornby Northamptonshire NN6 8SW		
Telephone number	01604 740001		
Fax number	01604 740311		
Email address	education@thornbyhall.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Rhona Jelly		
Proprietor	Childhood First		
Reporting inspector	Mrs Pauline Allison HMI		
Dates of inspection	6-7 February 2007		