

Thornton Grammar School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 107442 |
| Local Authority | Bradford |
| Inspection number | 301371 |
| Inspection dates | 13–14 June 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Patrick Geraghty HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1463 |
| 6th form | 228 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Patrick Wilkings |
| Headteacher | Mr John Weir |
| Date of previous school inspection | 29 September 2003 |
| School address | Leaventhorpe Lane Thornton Bradford West Yorkshire BD13 3BH |
| Telephone number | 01274 881082 |
| Fax number | 01274 814871 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
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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

Thornton Grammar School is a large co-educational foundation school situated in Thornton, Bradford. Learners arrive in Year 7 with attainment at the national average. The proportion of free school meals is broadly in line with the national average as is the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. About 25% of students in the school are from ethnic minorities which rises to 40% in the sixth form. The school has triple specialist status in sport, science and, since April 2007, vocational education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thornton Grammar School is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Achievement and standards are good and the overall progress that students make in Years 7 to 11 is significantly better than similar schools. The school recognises the need to further raise attainment in Key Stage 3 and in mathematics at Key Stage 4.

Personal well-being and development are outstanding. Students enjoy school and their behaviour is exemplary. The school is a very calm and orderly environment imbued with a spirit of mutual respect and care. Opportunities to interact with the community and develop team-work skills make a significant contribution to students' social development, self-confidence and motivation. Relationships at all levels are excellent.

Overall teaching is good although the school needs to increase the focus on learning so that students make the best possible progress in all lessons. Some teachers do not set suitably challenging targets or use assessment data effectively to maximise achievement. The curriculum is outstanding. A broad and rich curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of external partnerships and community links. There is high student participation across all years in extra-curricular activities including sport.

Care, guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Students are valued, trusted and respected. They feel safe and secure in school. The school's tutorial support programme is excellent. Support for vulnerable students with emotional or behavioural difficulties is outstanding. Induction and transition processes are well organised and effective.

Leadership and management are good. The school is very well led by the headteacher. Governors and parents are very supportive. The school has dealt effectively with issues raised in the last inspection report, including significant improvement to achievement and standards in modern languages. The school's capacity to further improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

At GCE A level pass rates are at the national average. At GCE AS level pass rates improved to well above the national average in 2006. This represents significant improvement in standards from 2005. However, in a small minority of subjects at GCE A level student progress is less than satisfactory. The sixth form curriculum is outstanding and offers a very wide range of subject choices. Links with other schools and the local college have developed the range of curriculum options available. Enrolment procedures are good as are guidance and induction procedures. Sixth formers play a very active and valued role in mentoring younger students. The sixth form is well managed and self-assessment is accurate. The school is aware of where further improvements can be made.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards at Key Stage 3 and in mathematics at Key Stage 4.
- Increase the focus on learning so that students make the best possible progress in all lessons.
- All teachers to set suitably challenging targets and use assessment data more effectively to maximise achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are good overall. By the end of Year 9 students attain average standards in English and mathematics and slightly below average standards in science, reflecting overall satisfactory achievement. Girls achieved better than boys in mathematics and science. The school's most recent information indicates that this summer's results are likely to surpass targets for English and mathematics, but fall short of those for science.

Progress in Years 7 to 11 is significantly ahead of the national average. The number of students gaining five passes at A* to C level in GCSE or equivalent qualifications has risen and in 2006 exceeded the national average. Students make good progress in English. The school recognises that progress in mathematics is below average and has put into place a range of strategies to address this. However, improvement is not yet sustained. Students make very good progress in communication studies, art and design and history, and standards in modern languages have improved significantly since the last inspection. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress across all years. Those from minority ethnic backgrounds and with English as an additional language, also achieve well.

In the sixth form pass rates are at the national average for GCE A level and are above for GCE AS level. Progress in a minority of subjects at GCE A level is poor. Students reach good standards in a number of subjects, including biology and physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. The provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. High rates of attendance reflect students' enjoyment and enthusiasm for school. Students told inspectors that, 'We feel safe, everyone is friendly and teachers are helpful and we are able to talk openly about our work and other issues.' At the heart of the school is a high expectation of student behaviour. Behaviour management strategies are excellent and the appointment of a behaviour management team has impacted positively on students' attitudes and behaviour, which are exemplary.

Students are committed to organise events that benefit the school and the community. Opportunities to develop teamwork skills and to take on responsibilities through the school council and house system make a significant contribution to students' social development and self-confidence. Student's participation in extra-curricular activities is high. There is a strong student voice.

The school is committed to the principles of inclusion and every student is treated with respect and as an individual. Relationships at all levels are strong and students learn to develop a strong sense of care and concern for others. Students value cultural diversity and work together on whole school projects such as a multicultural evening to celebrate the various cultures in school. There is a very strong sense of racial harmony.

Students are aware of the importance of healthy eating and many adopt active lifestyles through the wide range of physical activities available to them through sport and dance. The school has

created a safe learning environment. Students and parents say that there are few instances of bullying and that, where they do arise, they are dealt with appropriately.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school regards its quality of teaching and learning as outstanding but inspectors judge it to be good. The school's lesson observation process places too much emphasis on what the teacher does, rather than on how well students learn. The result is that lessons are often graded more highly than they should be and teaching overall seems better than it is.

Teaching has many strengths. Teachers have very good relationships with students and manage them well so that there is a very good atmosphere for learning in most lessons. Lessons are well prepared. Information and communication technology is used well to engage learners. Occasionally, teaching is inspiring and highly motivating for students. For example, in a science class, students' excitement in measuring, in the laboratory, the diameter of the branches of large portions of a tree was matched only by the speed at which they grasped the underlying ideas. However, there is a shortage of challenge in some lessons. In these lessons there is an absence of sparkle because the teacher dominates and provides too few opportunities for students to explain or take part in thinking things out for themselves. In some lessons challenging targets are not set or assessment data used effectively to maximise achievement.

Teachers mark students' work regularly and many give good advice to students on how the work can be improved. However, this good practice is not yet fully established across all subjects. Students' progress is monitored at regular intervals and any under-achievement is identified so that appropriate action can be taken.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The overall curriculum is outstanding and meets, very effectively, students' needs. Specialist status has played a significant part in the development of the curriculum. There are effective links with partner primary schools to provide experiences for Year 6 students in sport, science, and design and technology. All Year 10 and Year 11 students study GCSE physical education within the normal timetable, with additional vocational sports, and leisure and tourism courses available. A similarly good range of choices is offered in science.

The school is developing a more personalised curriculum across Years 7 to 9, with opportunities for most students to obtain a GCSE qualification in modern foreign languages and to start GCSE religious education, by the end of Year 9. Special arrangements in Year 7 ensure that additional literacy and numeracy support is provided for students who need an extra boost. Students in Years 10 and 11 can opt for a wide range of general, vocational and occupational subjects. Links with other schools, further education colleges and businesses ensure that provision is very much tailored to the individual's needs, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Close links with local employers augment good work experience programmes and highly successful enterprise initiatives.

The sixth form curriculum is outstanding in that it offers a wide range of traditional and applied subjects. For example, courses such as design and technology, government and politics, religious education, photography and Islamic Studies are offered at partner secondary schools. An extensive range of enrichment activities, are well supported by students in all years.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Excellent provision in personal, social, health and citizenship education makes a very effective contribution to the personal development and well-being of students.

There is very inclusive provision for the broad range of students on roll and the welfare and support systems for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for vulnerable students are excellent. Transition arrangements from primary schools are very extensive and students speak highly of these arrangements.

The school works well with parents and other agencies. The vast majority of parents are extremely supportive of the school. Students and their parents attend review, assessment and setting of target days twice a year at which academic progress and personal development are discussed. Appropriate action is taken when students are not on course to reach their targets and students, in particular the younger ones, are very pleased with the way the reward system is used to acknowledge good personal and academic progress.

Students are advised well about the relevant courses on offer and effective guidance helps students move on to further study and employment. The school has appropriate procedures for the safeguarding of students and child protection and all staff have received the required training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is highly experienced and committed. His leadership is founded in a clear vision for the continuous development of the school and a genuine desire to provide for the talents and aspirations of staff and students. This is evident in a continuous rise in standards and achievement in recent years as well as important innovations in curriculum, care and guidance. In view of its inclusive ethos, the richness of its curriculum and good levels of achievement, the school provides good value for money.

Senior managers give good support to the headteacher, some taking on multiple management roles. Their success is particularly evident in the high level of care and support that students receive. Their line management of departments, while good overall, is less consistent. The senior team has steered the school firmly toward the prestigious award of three specialisms in sport, science and vocational, the latter being awarded in April 2007.

Middle managers make a good contribution to the school's provision. Self-evaluation helps teachers at all levels to identify appropriate priorities and opportunities. Some evaluations are too generous, for example those regarding achievement and the quality of teaching and learning.

Equality of opportunity has high priority. The numerous links teachers have forged with local agencies, colleges and employers add to the variety of courses available.

The school enjoys the confidence of its students, parents and governors. Students are increasingly consulted about developments in the school. The school operates influentially at the hub of a community partnership and provides outreach, cooperation and support to other local schools. The governing body is shrewd and supportive. The school maintains a good capacity to improve.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 | 16-19 |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 | 2 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | Yes |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 | |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | |
| 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 | 2 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 | 2 |

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? | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No | |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No | |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed our two days at your school. We particularly enjoyed talking to so many of you about your work, interests and how much you enjoy and give to the school. We were very impressed by your behaviour, which we thought was outstanding.

Your school is making good progress and has a number of outstanding features. The school is very well led. The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard because they want you to do the very best you can.

Most importantly your achievement and examination results are good. You enjoy many of your lessons, particularly when you know that you are improving and learning. However, some of you are not reaching the standards that you are capable of, especially in Years 7 to 9. You can play an important part in this by working with your teachers and helping them to improve your work.

There is much good teaching in the school and in these lessons you respond well to the teachers' high expectations and you make good progress. However, this is not the case across all of the school. In some lessons you are not being given work which really stretches you or encourages you to enjoy learning, achieve well and progress.

Your curriculum options are excellent. You enjoy a wide range of extra activities. We were particularly impressed with how many of you take part in sport. The teachers and support staff care for you and give you excellent guidance.

We have asked your school to:

- continue to improve examination results and ensure that you make the progress that you are capable of, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9 and in mathematics in Years 10 and 11
- ensure that there is a greater focus on learning so that you all make the best possible progress in all lessons
- ensure that all teachers set you challenging targets to further increase your achievements.

We are sure that you will keep up your excellent behaviour and enthusiasm for learning and will make even better progress.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you well for your future education.