

# Thorngrove School

Independent School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------|--------------------|
| DfES Registration Number | 850/6033           |
| Unique Reference Number  | 116590             |
| Inspection number        | 301636             |
| Inspection dates         | 26-27 June 2007    |
| Reporting inspector      | Stephen Dennett AI |

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).

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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

Thorngrove School is a popular preparatory school located on a rural site near Newbury in Berkshire. It was opened in 1988 by the present proprietors. Nearly all of the pupils are of white British heritage, with few from other nationalities. Most come from relatively advantaged backgrounds. The school admits boys and girls aged three to thirteen and there are currently 229 pupils on roll. The school has a few pupils with additional learning needs, mainly specific and moderate learning difficulties. The school was last inspected in May 2002.

The school's prospectus says *'Our school is a unique environment where children learn and develop their social skills. We value our intimate and friendly community and the benefits it brings ...'*. The school also states *'The school has a relaxed yet purposeful atmosphere, where working relationships between pupils and staff flourish. We are forward thinking in our approach ...'*.

## Evaluation of the school

The quality of education provided at Thorngrove School is good. There is an interesting and varied curriculum and good teaching, which engage pupils' interests effectively. As a result, pupils are making good progress in most subjects. Pupils' personal development and behaviour are outstanding. Parents and pupils are positive about the school, which has a good ethos and provides a good quality of care. It meets most of the regulations apart from aspects of the curriculum, the keeping of registers, checks on new staff and provision for pupils who are ill. The school has made a good level of improvement since its last inspection.

### Quality of education

The curriculum is good. A wide range of activities is provided for pupils, although provision for design and technology (DT) is limited. An outstanding feature of the educational provision is the wide range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities provided. These add immensely to pupils' enjoyment of their education. Although there is no written curriculum policy, schemes of work for all subjects cover the syllabus well. Work is well matched to the needs of all pupils, including those

with additional learning needs. The provision for music is outstanding. Provision for children in Nursery and Reception is good and is appropriate to their needs.

Personal, social and health education is good and is rooted in the ethos of the school. A very good range of sporting activities are available to pupils, and they say that they especially enjoy their sporting fixtures with other schools.

Teaching is good overall. In the lessons observed during the inspection, the quality of teaching ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are exceptionally good, warm, caring and respectful. Pupils are confident in speaking to staff and will share their problems and ask for help with their work assured that they will have a positive response. One pupil said, *"You can always get help when you want it. Teachers are always there for you"*. Teaching in the Nursery and Reception is good. There are high expectations and pupils are consistently challenged to work to their full capacity. Most lessons move at a brisk pace but occasionally in science lessons introductions are too long and time is lost.

Planning for lessons is variable, but generally good. Occasionally, plans are too brief to provide teachers with a clear direction to the lesson and some fail to take into account pupils' prior attainment and underlying abilities. The best planning clearly identifies what pupils are to learn and how pupils' achievement is to be assessed. There is good support for pupils with additional learning needs. Teachers are well qualified and have good subject knowledge. An outstanding feature of teaching is the very good use of questioning to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject being taught. The school is generally well equipped and resources are used effectively. Teachers have effective systems for managing pupils' behaviour, which encourage them to behave responsibly.

There are good systems for assessing pupils' progress and attainment. They are generally used effectively to inform teachers' planning and to match work to pupils' needs. Standardised tests are also used to assess pupils' performance in reading and spelling. The school has good systems for measuring its performance against Common Entrance examination criteria; in some subjects in the lower school, teachers also use National Curriculum attainment target criteria to measure pupils' performance.

Pupils of all abilities make good progress in most subjects, although progress in science in forms five to seven is only just satisfactory. Children in Nursery and Reception are making good progress towards the early learning goals for children aged five and progress in their physical development and their personal, social and emotional development is very good. Pupils make good progress in the acquisition of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Pupils' progress in the development of their handwriting is very variable and standards towards the end of the school are not as high as they should be. Pupils make very good progress in music and many achieve very high standards.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are very enthusiastic about their school and all say they really enjoy being there. The daily acts of collective worship reinforce the ethos of the school. Opportunities are taken to celebrate pupils' individual efforts by the handing out of awards. Pupils are consistently encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, and there are incentive schemes such as house points to support this. Pupils also have a range of duties around the school, such as helping in the dining hall, which encourages their sense of responsibility. House captains are responsible for organising team sports for their houses.

Pupils' attendance is good and their behaviour is outstanding. Poor behaviour is not a feature of the school, but any incidents that may arise are dealt with fairly and firmly. Consequently, pupils feel safe and enjoy working in a happy, well-organised and friendly environment. As a result of studies in a number of subjects, pupils are developing an appropriate appreciation of their own and other cultures. Pupils are very positive about future employment, and feel they are well prepared for the next phase of their education. They have all the skills necessary to ensure their future economic well-being.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This school's provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The level of supervision is good and pupils feel very safe and cared for. This makes a good contribution to their outstanding personal development. Routine health and safety and child protection procedures are in place. All pupils are encouraged to lead active and healthy lifestyles. School lunches are of good quality and the high quality of in and outdoor facilities help to ensure that there are always plenty of sporting opportunities available. Risk assessments are suitably managed and procedures for trips and visits meet the regulations. The school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access. Attendance registers do not meet requirements because some entries are in pencil and some absences are not coded. In addition, the admissions register does not include all the information it should, including pupils' gender, their parents' or carers' addresses, emergency contact details and information about the last school attended.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is aware of its responsibilities with regard to ensuring that staff are appropriate people to work with children, but due to an administrative oversight, not all staff have been appropriately checked. Permanent contracts have been offered to new staff before the school has received the results of Criminal Records Bureau

checks. In addition procedures for checking the medical fitness of staff prior to appointment are not in place.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises are modern, purpose-built, light, airy and very well maintained. A recent improvement has been the provision of a new multi-purpose hall and school kitchen, along with new classrooms. Specialist facilities are good and the art room is spacious and very well lit. Other classrooms are adequate in size, suitably furnished and equipped and maintained in a clean and tidy manner. The extensive grounds provide a very attractive setting and the very good outdoor physical education facilities include artificial playing surfaces, tennis courts and a number of sports pitches. Although the school offers good supervision for pupils who feel ill during the school day, there is no sink in the medical room.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has excellent communication procedures with termly reports and half-termly interim reports sent to all parents to keep them informed of their children's progress. Parents are alerted quickly if the school has any concerns and parents are welcomed into school to meet with staff whenever the need arises. Close links with home to support pupils in their learning and development is a feature of the school. The school has an attractive prospectus and website which convey a very good range of relevant and valuable information.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has suitable procedures for receiving and handling complaints.

## 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 those listed below.

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

- produce a written curriculum policy in accordance with the regulations ((paragraph 1(2)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- maintain the admissions and attendance registers in accordance with the regulations (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that Criminal Records Bureau checks have been carried out (paragraph 4(b))
- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that medical checks have been carried out (paragraph 4(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- Provide adequate security arrangements for the grounds and building (paragraph 5(d))
- provide a wash hand basin in the room set aside for pupils who are ill in accordance with the regulations (paragraph 5(l))

## 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:

- improve the range of pupils' experiences in DT in forms eight and nine
- improve the consistency of standards of handwriting across the school
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in science so that pupils in forms five to seven make better progress.

## School details

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|-----------------------------------|--|-----------|------------|
| Name of school                    | Thorngrove School  |           |            |
| DfES number                       | 850/6033   |           |            |
| Unique reference number           | 116590   |           |            |
| Type of school                    | Preparatory  |           |            |
| Status                            | Independent  |           |            |
| Date school opened                | September 1988   |           |            |
| Age range of pupils               | 3 - 13   |           |            |
| Gender of pupils                  | Mixed  |           |            |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 134  | Girls: 95 | Total: 229 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 5  | Girls: 5  | Total: 10  |
| Annual fees (day pupils)          | £ 7,380/£9,060   |           |            |
| Address of school                 | The Mount<br>Highclere<br>Newbury<br>Berkshire<br>RG20 9PS |           |            |
| Telephone number                  | 01635253172  |           |            |
| Fax number                        | 01635254135  |           |            |
| Email address                     | admin@thorngroveschool.co.uk                               |           |            |
| Headteachers                      | Mr and Mrs N J Broughton                                   |           |            |
| Proprietor                        | Mr and Mrs N J Broughton                                   |           |            |
| Reporting inspector               | Stephen Dennett AI   |           |            |
| Dates of inspection               | 26-27 June 2007  |           |            |