

Sheiling School (Thornbury)

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	803/6000
Unique Reference Number	109353
Inspection number	318452
Inspection dates	6-7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Thomas Smith 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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Sheiling School is a mixed gender day and residential special school for pupils aged six to 19 years, with severe learning difficulties. The school is part of the Camphill movement founded in 1940 and provides education and care, based on Steiner Waldorf principles, for up to 30 pupils. Currently, there are 15 pupils on roll and each has a statement of special educational need; all are funded by their home authority. The school opened in 1952 and was registered by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 1963. The school is situated near the small town of Thornbury in South Gloucestershire and located on a campus of some 50 acres, which it shares with other activities run by the Camphill Communities charity. The school aims *'to provide a centre for curative education within a holistic therapeutic environment that is designed to meet the common and diverse needs of its pupils.'* The last education inspection took place in 2002 and Ofsted Children's Directorate reported in October 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Sheiling School provides a good standard of education and outstanding care for its pupils. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development as well as their welfare, health and safety is also outstanding. It successfully meets its aims to provide a holistic, therapeutic education within a safe and nurturing environment. Since the last inspection the school has made good progress against the action points identified at that time. The school meets most of the required regulations and the management group also has a very good understanding of the issues that it needs to further improve.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The school provides pupils with experiences in all the required areas of learning and which are influenced by the requirements of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The curriculum is good for pupils of all ages. The personal development of pupils is a strong feature and this is made more effective because the provision is securely linked with the care curriculum. The planning that underpins the curriculum is rigorous. Schemes of work are derived from the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and these are translated into effective lesson plans that provide pupils with good challenges in their learning. Pupils make good progress. However,

the post-16 students make outstanding progress, particularly in their ability to communicate as well as in their personal and social development.

Each day, all learning begins with a 'main lesson'. The planning for this is themed, according to topics, such as the seasons or figures in history. These 75 minute sessions incorporate activities that develop well the pupils' literacy and numeracy, which is further enhanced through use of music and art. The outcome is that learning is made very accessible to all pupils. The lessons include the requirements of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, such as speaking and listening, written work, practice in basic skills, mental arithmetic, drawing and recall of previous work. Subsequent lessons provide experiences in weaving, basket making and woodwork; in addition all pupils experience eurythmy (an art of movement that engages the whole being, creating a harmonious relationship between mind and body). When viewed as a whole there is good cohesion to pupils' learning.

Literacy and communication are appropriately emphasised within all learning and it is a strong feature that pupils are encouraged to articulate their responses. Teachers and support staff provide rich and varied opportunities that encourage all pupils to communicate. To support this, systems such as Makaton signing, the Picture Exchange Communication System and Signalong are extensively used. Older students are very effective in use of their communication skills.

Students in the post-16 years follow a curriculum that is appropriately different and targeted towards their needs. This prepares them very well for the time when they leave the school. The provision for their personal development is outstanding and this means they are developing as mature young adults. They are courteous and responsive to their peers and teachers. These students have individually tailored programmes that include opportunities for development of practical skills, such as pottery and woodwork. They also experience the world of work through opportunities to work alongside others in management of the estate and the market garden. Despite the good quality of this provision and its effective outcomes these students have no opportunity to have their effort recognised through the award of any nationally recognised accreditation. The school acknowledges this as an omission and has active and advanced plans to put these opportunities in place within the coming year.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and some is outstanding. This ensures that the progress made by pupils is good. Teachers provide a rhythm in learning, based on Steiner Waldorf techniques; this includes a balance of practical and mental activities, movement and rest as well as concentration and relaxation. The approach requires teachers '*Not to be mere facilitators of information gathering, but to enliven the child's experience directly through his or her own enthusiasm and creativity*'. Teachers are true to this ideal.

Planning of lessons is meticulous. This includes elements, such as the development of concepts and how these will be achieved, selection of simple but effective

resources and identification of individual opportunities that enhance learning. Lessons include frequent opportunities to review what has been learned; this fully engages pupils in their learning. All teachers evaluate lesson outcomes and where necessary the information derived from this is used to influence the content of subsequent lessons. This constant critical evaluation of pupils' achievements leads to further learning that incorporates more demanding challenges. A further outstanding element of teaching is the high demands teachers make of their pupils. Where pupils respond to questions their answers are used as a starting point to challenge and extend their understanding. Teachers rarely accept the first answer as being the sum total of pupils' knowledge and this results in pupils being able to deepen their understanding.

Individual education plans (IEP) are in place for all pupils and these are based accurately on the requirements identified within each pupil's statement. Teaching reflects the objectives identified within these IEPs and the tasks provided for learning are commensurate with the age and ability of each pupil. In the best practice pupils are able to remember and act on the objectives within their IEP.

Assessment of pupils' work is good and recorded by reference to the P-scales. (P-scales are used to record and report the achievements of those pupils who are working towards level 1 of the National Curriculum in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.) These are used consistently to identify attainment and the information these provide is used to plan further learning. However, this information is not used widely to provide parents and others with objective evidence of their child's progress. Informal assessment also occurs in every lesson and the information from this is examined at the weekly meeting attended by all teachers.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school provides extensive, high quality opportunities for pupils that successfully enable them to develop their characters. The holistic nature of the provision and the ways in which it is consistently offered means that, by the time they are ready to leave, pupils have matured into thoughtful and responsive young adults with a good sense of personal identity. The behaviour of pupils is outstanding as are their attitudes to work. Pupils are prepared as well as they can be for the next challenges in their lives.

In both residential and education settings the personal development of pupils is a priority. Staff treat all pupils with utmost respect and where behaviour may become challenging staff respond with calm authority. The supportive nature of the school means that all pupils enjoy their work, whether this is in formal lessons or working practically around the school, as in estate management. The work on the estate is only one way in which all pupils can contribute to the community but many other opportunities also exist, such as taking part in the many festivals and plays, making artefacts for sale at the annual fete or, more simply, in clearing away at the end of

each lesson. Other opportunities include the display of pupils' art and craft within the school and occasionally in the local library and museum. This impacts positively on pupils' self esteem. Pupils' enthusiasm is clear as is their willingness to attend school. Pupils spoke warmly about their experiences in the school.

Cultural development and awareness of public institutions is successfully achieved through a citizenship programme as well as using the varied cultural backgrounds of the many overseas staff who work at the school as teachers or volunteer co-workers. For example, in an assembly a Hindu member of staff sang a song celebrating the forthcoming Diwali festival and was accompanied in this by two other Asian pupils.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. This judgement corroborates that made in the most recent report on the care standards, which were described as 'excellent'. A hallmark of the provision is to be found in the strong and effective links between the care and education provision, with no artificial distinction between the two.

Safeguarding provision is robust and pupils are taught early in their school career about the risks they find around them. All policies are in place and the effective ways in which these are implemented minimise the risks to pupils. The school is proactive in introducing pupils to the local community where they learn to become aware of risks from traffic as well as relating positively with members of the public. Robust risk assessments are prepared for all pupils.

Nutritious meals are provided, with the main meal at midday each day. Following this pupils have a rest hour, before returning to school for the afternoon session. This enables them to retain their energy and enthusiasm for learning. The practice is in keeping with the Steiner Waldorf philosophy.

Although there is no school council pupils' views are listened to through the positive relationships they have with their carers and teachers. Staff are very aware of, and responsive to the needs of pupils. At all times pupils are encouraged to voice their thoughts and the warm relationships they have with staff indicate a high measure of trust between them.

The school has given consideration to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) and has produced a statement of its present position but this is inadequate. The nature of many of the buildings limits the adaptations that can be made but it has not yet drawn up a 3-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school carries out robust checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children. Many staff are volunteers from continental Europe and the checks for these

staff are rigorous. The school has put in place the required single central register that summarises the required checks.

School's premises and accommodation

The school has outstanding facilities that are used well to support and extend pupils' learning. Although located on a rural campus it has the benefit of being close to the small town of Thornbury. There are high quality specialist facilities such as therapy rooms, swimming pool, craft workshops, gymnasium and a well-equipped assembly hall and stage; all of these are used effectively to provide a range of rich experiences for pupils that complement their sense of achievement. All buildings are maintained well. The Ofsted Children's Directorate report noted, in reference to the residences, that 'All houses are furnished and decorated to a very high standard.' Teaching areas are particularly generous and enable teachers to vary the methods by which pupils learn.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents are provided with a wealth of information concerning their child that gives a satisfactory picture of each pupil's personal and academic development. Sources of information include an informative web site and a comprehensive information pack provided prior to a pupil's admission. Day pupils use journals that give a rich source of communication between parents and the school. The school is sensitive to the needs of parents when their children are a long way from home. Frequent communication and informative reports are provided that enable parents to feel included in the education of their children. Of those parents who contributed, through the pre-inspection questionnaire, all indicated they are satisfied with the information they receive. The annual reports to parents and those for the annual reviews, although wide-ranging, do not all provide objective evidence of pupils' achievements, even though this information is available. These do, however, identify targets for intended learning during the subsequent year.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy in place but this does not fully meet the requirements. There is no indication that one member of the hearing panel must be independent of the management and running of the school or that parents may be accompanied at the hearing of their complaint. Additionally, the policy does not ensure that the outcomes to complaints are recorded as being resolved at the preliminary stage or if they went to the formal hearing, or that all correspondence concerning any complaint should be kept confidential. In the last academic year the school did not receive any formal 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 procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that where there is a panel hearing of a complaint there is provision that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g))
- allow for parents to be accompanied at any panel hearing (paragraph 7(h))
- keep written records of all complaints, which indicate whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j))
- make provision for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

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 that current plans will enable students to gain nationally recognised forms of accreditation are brought to fruition
- further develop the provision for assessment so that it uses objective evidence to better inform parents about the progress made by their child.

School details

Name of school	Sheiling School (Thornbury)		
DCSF number	803/6000		
Unique reference number	109353		
Type of school	Special; for pupils with severe learning difficulty		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1952		
Age range of pupils	6-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 5	Total: 15
Number of boarders	Boys: 8	Girls: 4	Total: 12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 10	Girls: 5	Total: 15
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,181- £39,198		
Annual fees (boarders)	£45,738 - £65,427		
Address of school	Thornbury Park Park Road Thornbury Bristol BS35 1HP		
Telephone number	01454 412194		
Fax number	01454 411860		
Email address	mail@sheilingschool.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Peter Bateson		
Proprietor	Camphill Communities Thornbury		
Reporting inspector	Thomas Smith AI		
Dates of inspection	6-7 November 2007		