

Thornhill Park School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	394/6015
Unique Reference Number	108877
URN for Social Care	SCO47819
Inspection number	331307
Inspection date	4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts
Social care inspector	Stephen Smith

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). The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



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.

An inspection of the boarding provision was also carried out. The full report on this provision is not published but may be obtained from Ofsted by telephoning 08456 404040.

This was a light touch educational inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding learners and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Thornhill Park School is an independent school for learners with autism and Asperger's syndrome. Some have other learning difficulties, including behavioural ones. All learners have a statement of special educational needs. They are currently aged from eight to 19 years. Almost all are White British, and three quarters are boys. They come from many different local authorities across the north-east of England and beyond.

The school is part of the Tyne and Wear Autistic Society, comprising three educational units for learners of different ages. Separately, there are also seven 'home' units which provide residential or boarding care for the young people.

Through individualised and specialist teaching and therapy, the school aims 'To prepare learners for adult life in a multi-cultural society and provide equal opportunities for all'. An acting headteacher, formerly the deputy headteacher, has been in post since Easter 2008.

Evaluation of the school

This is a good school which has improved well since the previous inspection in March 2006. All of the regulations are met, including the creation of a good three-year development plan to improve the accessibility of the premises and curriculum. The monitoring and overall coordination of the curriculum are now good, and the resources used to enhance learning in the post-16 unit are now appropriate to learners' ages. Good and lively teaching ensures that learners' progress is good in all aspects of their learning, and is assessed well. Very high staffing levels ensure that learners' health and safety are well safeguarded within the school, as well as promoting their good educational and personal progress. However, there are some

inadequacies in the welfare, health and safety arrangements in the boarding provision. The very good standard of the accommodation contributes well to learners' education and well-being.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It is broad and well matched to the varied needs of the learners, with particular adaptations made to meet the requirements of their statements of special educational need. There are many good links between subjects, often taking the form of cross-curricular topics. Communications, personal and mathematical skills are paramount in the curriculum for all ages. In Key Stage 4 and at post-16, the curriculum develops a good bias towards independence and vocational skills, with increasing assistance from outside providers such as leisure centres, an agricultural college, Connexions, therapy services and a variety of community links. There are good opportunities for learners to gain awards through nationally recognised organisations such as the Assessment and Qualifications Authority (AQA) Unit Awards, the Award Scheme for Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and GCSE. Information and communication technology, horticulture and physical education courses also offer externally accredited certification. The post-16 curriculum develops the independent living skills further, and provides good outside links for many work-related skills as well as developing learners' communication and numeracy skills in practical ways.

Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Classroom staff work together well in teams, know the learners well and are dedicated to supporting and teaching them in lively and challenging ways. Staff are good at avoiding behavioural incidents, and at managing the incidents that do occur. Lessons are planned well to meet the needs of all learners, whether it is in the form of sensory or outdoors experiences for some learners with severe autism; speech and language sessions for learners who do not speak; or for instance, with relatively advanced mathematics activities looking at correlations between different factors on graphs.

Learners' work is assessed well, often with the help of the learners themselves, or with their classmates' help. The courses themselves may include good tracking systems, such as Equals, or teachers may look at each learner's individual targets, and use a tracking and assessment scheme such as **Performance Indicators for Value Added Target Setting (PIVATS)**. Teachers use the information well to consider their next steps in teaching, but the school does not use the information to check if some groups of learners achieve better than others, or if learning is more successful in some subjects than others, in order to see what is most or least effective.

Learners achieve well and make good progress regardless of the level they started at when entering the school. Through structured experiences, less able learners begin to understand their environment; others begin to understand signs and symbols, and use them to express their needs and choices. More able learners learn to pay

attention and control their behaviour. They cooperate together in projects such as 'Young Enterprise', go climbing and kayaking, write accounts of what they have been doing, or help to plan their own shopping and cooking activities.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the learners

This is good. The development of confidence and self-esteem is paramount in what the school does. Learners discover how to understand and follow rules within school, and in the outside world. Their behaviour is good, particularly in view of their difficulties, and they contribute well to community life as members of the school council, doing jobs in school and many forms of helping charities and fundraising. Learners learn effectively about institutions such as the Post Office, bus stations, other schools and colleges, and the police, ambulance and fire services. Many learners understand aspects of their own culture, and some aspects of other cultures, countries and religions. They enjoy their lessons and their involvement in out-of-school events and visits. They attend well and make good progress towards becoming valuable and contributing future citizens with increased independence.

Safeguarding learners' welfare, health and safety

All of the regulations are met with the exception of some aspects of the boarding provision. As a result the welfare, health and safety of the learners are satisfactory. All staff are thoroughly checked for their suitability and qualifications for working in this environment, and the records are kept in a single central register, in accordance with the regulations. Safeguarding procedures are robust, thorough and well understood by well-trained staff. Learners' health and safety are also well enabled through thorough staff training, good and relevant curricular topics and staff dedication to their students. Learners are confident that they could speak to staff about their problems, and often do. There are very high levels of staffing to meet every situation or need, and many extra rooms which can be used for flexible short-term activities for individuals or small groups who need separate activities for a period, or calming down from time to time. Learners are well guided towards their future learning in personal and academic skills because the staff know them so well, and assess their current progress thoroughly. The curriculum for personal and social education is good and wide-ranging; it guides learners well towards increasing independence and confidence in the community. Learners have a good understanding of many things that they should do in order to be healthy, including being careful about what they eat and drink, what kind of drugs are beneficial or dangerous, and the value of exercise. The school fully meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 as amended (DDA), and has increased learners' access to the premises and the curriculum well.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision was judged to be inadequate, and National Minimum Standards were not met. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all but two of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

- The school must have regard to the National Minimum Standards applicable to the residential provision as set out in the inspection report on the boarding provision (paragraphs 3(3) and 5(u)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Use existing information about the progress made by groups of learners, and in different subject areas, to see where teaching and learning are most or least effective.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of learners' needs		✓		
How well learners make progress in their learning		✓		

Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of learners		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of learners

The overall welfare, health and safety of learners			✓	
--	--	--	---	--

The quality of boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision				✓
----------------------------------	--	--	--	---

School details

Name of school	Thornhill Park School		
DCSF number	394/6015		
Unique reference number	108877		
Type of school	Residential Special School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1980		
Age range of learners	4–19		
Gender of learners	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time learners)	Boys: 64	Girls: 17	Total: 81
Number of boarders	Boys: 30	Girls: 10	Total: 40
Number of learners with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 64	Girls: 17	Total: 81
Number of learners who are looked after	Boys: 28	Girls: 11	Total: 39
Annual fees (day learners)	£33,000 to £45,000		
Annual fees (boarders)	£100,000 to £200,000		
Address of school	24 Thornhill Park Sunderland SR2 7LA		
Telephone number	0191 514 0659		
Fax number	0191 510 8242		
Email address	margaret.burton@tawas.org.uk		
Headteacher (Acting)	Mrs Margaret Burton		
Proprietor	Mr Gavin Bestford		
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts		
Date of inspection	4 March 2009		