

Thornby Hall School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 928/6061
Unique reference number 122148
URN social care SC012939
Inspection number 342533
Inspection dates 6 to 7 October 2009
Reporting inspector David Rzeznik HMI
Social care inspector Mary Timms

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Age group: 12-18

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

Information about the school

Thornby Hall is a therapeutic community comprising of a small independent special school and a children's home. It is registered for 24 boarders aged 12 to 18 years. It currently has 16 students aged 13 to 17 years. The school opened in February 1986. It is located in a village in Northamptonshire. Two thirds of the students have a statement of special educational needs. All have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and all have suffered psychological trauma. Most students are looked after by various local authorities in England. The vast majority are White British and around half of the students have been admitted in the past 12 months. All have had an extremely disrupted education and many have endured family break-up which has adversely affected their attainment and self-esteem. All students are boarders. The previous inspection of educational provision was in February 2007 and of the children's home in March 2009.

The school aims to give each young person a second chance at learning how to grow emotionally, socially and educationally.

Evaluation of the school

Thornby Hall provides a satisfactory standard of education. The school does not meet all the regulations for independent schools, and in particular the overall provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The overall quality of boarding is also inadequate. This is primarily because safeguarding procedures are unsatisfactory. The curriculum, teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Provision enables students to make satisfactory progress in their personal development and basic skills. Behaviour is satisfactory but bad language is too readily accepted and is not improved quickly enough. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Quality of education

The quality of education is satisfactory. The curriculum is satisfactory. All students receive full-time education which for many has not occurred for some time. Sound schemes of work are in place for most but not all subjects. There are no schemes of work for music or physical education (PE). While all of the required areas of learning are covered, including PE, music is not taught to most students. The curriculum is based on an adapted National Curriculum but the subject matter is not always appropriately matched to students' aptitudes or interests. As a result, in some lessons individuals simply opt out of what is provided so do not achieve their curriculum or personal objectives. Subject content, particularly in core subjects, is being delivered without enough thought being given to students' aptitudes, specific learning needs and whether the topic will motivate them to learn. Students are regularly provided with formal activities requiring them to read, write or calculate when they would be better suited to learning such basic skills through practical activities which they enjoy. Links between subjects are not yet robust enough and this means that skills and knowledge learned in one subject are not reinforced in others. Therefore, learning is not as coherent and meaningful as it could be.

The older students follow GCSE courses and individuals in the sixth form attend vocational courses at local colleges. In recent years some Year 11 students have left school with higher GCSE grades in some subjects. The school has just started Award Scheme and Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses, particularly in sports and design technology, to further enrich the curriculum. The therapeutic work that is done in the daily community meetings, where students are called to account for their behaviour and actions, is not effectively reinforced and extended in class. An appropriate programme of personal, social and health education is provided that includes sex and drugs education. Work with Connexions provides all students with appropriate careers guidance. A suitable programme of extra-curricular activities including trips, visits and a residential camp is offered by care staff. Such work helps broaden students' horizons and widens their level of social interaction.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Provision enables students to make satisfactory progress academically and in their personal development. Good teaching exists but there is not enough of it. Where teaching is effective it is because the work engages students' interest and motivation, so students achieve the lesson objectives. Students are encouraged to make choices and to find things out for themselves. This encourages independence and helps develop students' research skills. Where teaching is less effective it is mainly because work lacks challenge or assessment information is not used well enough to ensure work is suitably matched to students' capabilities. Bad language and disruptive behaviour are not dealt with quickly enough. An insufficient range of behaviour management strategies and sanctions are used to promote good behaviour. There are too many occasions where students who do not engage with learning are left to their own devices and staff do not intervene swiftly to get them back on task. Not enough staff produce adequate lesson plans. Planning does not take sufficient account of the objectives in students' statements and it is often unclear how assistants will be deployed. Individual

education plans are in place but the objectives within them are not always specific enough in detailing the small steps that are required to bring about improvement. Teachers' assessment of students' attainment on entry is inconsistent, however, established external procedures are in place to verify standards achieved in accredited courses. Marking is generally not detailed enough in identifying what must be improved. Homework is provided and learning is consolidated in the homework club run by care staff after school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning range from good to inadequate but both are satisfactory overall, given students' severe behavioural difficulties. Too many students use bad language and it is too readily accepted by staff who do not administer sanctions consistently to bring about improvement. Staff do a good job getting most students to attend regularly, and attendance is satisfactory and improving. Most students have formed good relationships with their key worker and for some this is the first time they have developed a trusting relationship with an adult. School and care staff are successful in boosting students' self-esteem and self-worth. Most students hold positive views about the provision and feel they are getting on better than in previous placements. Students know right from wrong as demonstrated by their ability to take care of equipment and the premises. The work in religious education, art and food technology gives students a sound understanding of cultural diversity and an appreciation and respect for other cultures. Students make a positive contribution to the school community by preparing food for others. However, students have too few opportunities to contribute to life in the local and wider community. The older students are being suitably prepared for life after school. Work experience and college placements give them a good insight into the world of work.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The overall provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is inadequate. This is because procedures to safeguard them are unsatisfactory. A sound child protection policy exists and all staff, including the designated person for child protection, have been suitably trained to carry out their responsibilities. However, staff and trustee vetting procedures are not robust enough. A first aid policy has been written but it is not comprehensive enough. For example, it does not specify what level of injury would trigger an emergency call or visit to hospital. This said, accidents are appropriately recorded and medicines are securely administered. The health and safety policy for educational visits does not pay sufficient regard to Department for Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance and is not effectively implemented. For example, robust risk assessments are not undertaken for all trips off-site. The health and safety policy is detailed but procedures are not fully implemented. For example, not all portable electrical equipment is subject to testing

by a qualified person and the fire risk assessment is not robust enough. There is an internet policy but it is not fully implemented as students can gain access to inappropriate internet websites. The behaviour and anti-bullying policies lack a sufficient range of methods and sanctions to promote good behaviour and eliminate bullying. Behaviour management plans exist but many lack clarity about what must be improved and by when. The school promotes healthy eating by providing nutritious meals. However, students do not always adopt a healthy lifestyle with too many choosing to eat sweets in lessons. At the time of the last inspection the school did not fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 because it had not produced a three-year accessibility plan. This weakness has been successfully remedied and DDA requirements are met.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for vetting staff and trustees are inadequate. Systems for recording vetting outcomes are unsatisfactory. The school appropriately checks prospective employees' identity, medical fitness, employment history, qualifications and their right to work in the United Kingdom (UK). All staff, including supply staff, have been subject to an enhanced check by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to confirm their suitability to work with children. However, insufficient checks have been made on staff that have lived outside the UK to confirm they do not have an overseas criminal conviction. The chair of the board of trustees has not carried out all of the necessary checks on board members to confirm their suitability to work with children. Details of all the statutory checks are not recorded in a single central register. Therefore, the required information cannot be reproduced in a legible form.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is located in a converted stable and coach house. The premises are close to a sixteenth century manor house that contains good living accommodation. The accommodation has been suitably adapted for educational and care purposes. Classrooms and specialist areas vary in size but are suitable for the small number of students using them. Provision enables satisfactory teaching and learning. The buildings are set in extensive grounds that contain a playing field, woods, a fishing lake and floodlit hard-court area. There is plenty of outdoor space for play and recreation. In 2007 the kitchen received a four star food hygiene rating because of its high standard of food safety. The premises are well maintained and in good decorative order.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school supplies parents and others with a useful booklet and leaflets about the school's aims and the type of education provided. However, some essential information is not provided or made available. Therefore, regulatory requirements are not met in the areas identified below. The school supplies appropriate information on students with a statement of special education need, to the local authority, for the purpose of the annual review of the statement. Looked after children's reviews are carried out within the recommended timescale. The school

does not submit to the local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State, an annual account of the income and expenditure incurred by the school for those students funded by the local authority. Parents and others receive satisfactory reports about children's attainment and progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a written complaints procedure but it does not contain all of the required information. The areas of non-compliance are noted below.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care provision was judged to be inadequate, and national minimum standards were not met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.¹

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

- produce and implement schemes of work for music and physical education (paragraph 1(2))
- ensure that the subject matter is always appropriate for the aptitudes, needs and interests of the students, including those with a statement of special educational need (paragraph 1(2)(b))
- ensure that all lessons are well planned, effective teaching methods are used and activities are properly matched to students' capabilities and the objectives in their statements (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- ensure that all staff take students' aptitudes and prior attainment into account when planning lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- ensure teaching encourages students to behave responsibly at all times and that effective behaviour management strategies and sanctions are applied when students' behaviour is unsatisfactory (paragraph 1(3)(h)).

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

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

- improve the quality of the anti-bullying policy by ensuring that a wider range of strategies and sanctions are adopted to reduce bullying and ensure that all incidents of bullying are formally recorded and that procedures are monitored effectively (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- ensure that the child protection procedures are effectively implemented by adopting robust staff and trustee vetting procedures (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- improve the quality of the policy relating to the health and safety of students on activities outside school and ensure robust risk assessments are undertaken for all educational visits (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- improve the quality of the behaviour policy by ensuring that a wider range of behaviour management strategies and sanctions are adopted to promote good behaviour, and produce individual behaviour management plans clearly specifying the behaviours to be modified and ensure that the plans are implemented and monitored effectively (paragraph 3(2)(d))
- ensure an electrical equipment register is kept and all portable electrical appliances are subject to regular inspection by a qualified person and the internet policy is implemented effectively to prevent students accessing inappropriate websites (paragraph 3(4))
- improve the quality of the fire risk assessment and ensure procedures are effectively implemented (paragraph 3(5))
- produce and implement a satisfactory policy on first aid (paragraph 3(6)).

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

- ensure that any person who has lived outside the UK has been effectively vetted, and that the proprietor has paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State to ensure their suitability to work in school (paragraph 4(2)(c))
- ensure that the chairperson of the proprietorial body carries out an enhanced CRB or List 99 check on all board members, and ensure that where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK further overseas checks are undertaken to confirm their suitability to work with children, and ensure appropriate checks are made to confirm their identity and their right to work in the UK and ensure that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (paragraph 4B(4 and 5))
- ensure that the proprietor keeps a single central register which records for each member of staff in post on or after 1 August 2007, the checks made

(and certificates obtained where relevant) of their identity, qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB or List 99 was obtained, and ensure that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002, and where appropriate establish an individual's right to work in the UK, and where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK undertake further overseas checks to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4C(2 and 3))

- ensure that the single central register records for all agency supply staff that written notification has been received from the employment business that checks have been made to confirm their identity, qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB or List 99 check has been obtained, and where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK, conduct further overseas checks to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4C(4))
- ensure that the single central register records for each member of the proprietorial body in post on or after 1 August 2007, the checks made of their identity and whether an enhanced CRB or List 99 check was carried out, and certificates obtained, and where appropriate establish an individual's right to work in the UK and where someone has lived outside the UK conduct further checks to confirm their suitability to work with children, and ensure the dates of all checks are recorded (paragraph 4C(6 and 7))
- ensure that the single central register can be reproduced in a legible form (paragraph 4C(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- ensure that the school makes available and informs parents and prospective parents that they can request:
 - particulars of policies relating to bullying, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour and the sanctions adopted in the event of students misbehaving (paragraph 6(3)(d))
 - particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(3)(e))
 - details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(3)(f))
 - details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(3)(g))

- ensure that the school publishes on its website, or sends to parents of students, and prospective parents on request, a copy of their safeguarding children policy (paragraph 6(4))
- ensure that the school submits to the local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State, an annual account of the income received and the expenditure incurred by the school for those students wholly or partly funded by the local authority (paragraph 6(8)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that where parents or others are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint there is provision for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f))
- 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))
- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and that the procedure stipulates that a copy of the findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and that findings and recommendations are available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher (paragraph 7(i))
- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j))
- ensure that the complaints procedure provides that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision in the children's home which should be read in conjunction with this report.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

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

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students				✓
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision				✓
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School details

Name of school	Thornby Hall		
DCSF 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: 9	Girls: 7	Total: 16
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of boarders	Boys: 9	Girls: 7	Total: 16
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 8	Girls: 3	Total: 11
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 5	Total: 13
Annual fees (boarders)	£184,600		
Headteacher	Mrs Rhona Jelly		
Proprietor	Childhood First		
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI		
Dates of inspection	6 to 7 October 2009		