

The Sheiling School Thornbury

Thornbury Park, Thornbury, Bristol BS35 1HP

Inspection dates 3–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Pupils' achievement is good from low starting points, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The curriculum and the very strong ethos promote pupils' personal development well.
- After settling in, pupils quickly become confident and enjoy learning. Pupils behave well most of the time and feel safe.
- Teaching is mostly good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils are given individual learning tasks that are mostly matched closely to their needs.
- The principal and senior leaders lead the school well and have made sure that the pupils have a good, and improving, experience in both the classroom and in the residential accommodation. They have ensured that teaching and achievement are good.
- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is good as a result of highly individualised, child-focused, care and support.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Staff do not always make their meaning clear to pupils with communication difficulties, for example by using additional signs or pictures.
- Residential pupils do not receive sufficient feedback from staff on their suggestions for improvement.
- A few classroom staff sometimes lose precious learning time by poor organisation or poor behaviour management and do not always provide sufficient challenge to the most able pupils.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for boarding schools residential special schools

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Information about this inspection

- The principal was notified of this inspection on the day before the inspection started.
- Six lessons, taught by six teachers, were observed jointly with the head of education. Meetings were held with the principal, head of care, head of education, head of resources and health and safety, head of training, development, head of therapy and safeguarding, staff and pupils. Two evening visits were made to the residential accommodation.
- The inspectors checked a range of documentation including records of pupils' progress, pupils' work, leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching and care, the school improvement plan and a range of care and education policies.
- There were no Parent View responses, but the inspector met four parents and carers to discuss their views of the school.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Clare Davis

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Sheiling School is a mixed day and residential special school, part of the Camphill Communities Thornbury, a registered charity, offering full-time education and care for up to 30 pupils between the ages of six and 19 years.
- The school's educational and care philosophy follows the principles of Rudolf Steiner.
- There are currently 22 pupils attending the school, who are funded by their home local authorities. Seven pupils are looked after by their local authority and two of them live in the accommodation on site. The remainder of the pupils are day pupils. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, or moderate or severe learning difficulties. Many of them have a history of disrupted prior education or non-attendance at school.
- Some learning takes place off site at the S&B Automotive Academy in Bristol. Older pupils have work experience at various local workplaces.
- The school is situated on the edge of Thornbury near Bristol, and pupils attend from a number of different authorities across southern England and Wales.
- The school opened in October 1952. Its last education inspection was in December 2010, and its most recent welfare-only inspection was in December 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more pupils make outstanding progress by making sure that:
 - all staff make their meaning clear when they speak to pupils by using signing, gestures, symbols, pictures and other additional cues where this is necessary
 - all pupils, and especially the more able, are given work set at the right level
 - all classroom staff organise their lessons carefully and manage difficult behaviour skilfully so that no learning time is lost.
- Improve the information given to residential pupils by making sure that they always receive prompt feedback about the suggestions they put forward in house meetings.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

For all groups of pupils, achievement is good because of the good curriculum and because the teaching is good. Pupils join the school with low levels of attainment, largely because of the significant amounts of schooling they have missed in the past and this has slowed down their learning and progress. Despite their low starting points, it is evident from the school's records, lesson observations and pupils' work that pupils are making good progress in all subjects. As the pupils settle in and regain their confidence, they make good progress in reading and writing. Some read fluently, expressively and with good understanding. Their reading ages improve rapidly. Pupils' writing is improving well because the school gives pupils frequent opportunities to practise this skill throughout the day. Some pupils find it more difficult to write longer sentences but the teachers provide good support using tracing and copying or by encouraging creative writing. Although progress in communication is generally good, this is sometimes slowed down because a few staff are not as skilled in assisting the listener, especially pupils who have communication difficulties, by providing signs, symbols or pictures to make their meaning clear. Last year, the school's information shows that progress in English was slightly behind that in mathematics. The school has responded well to this issue by introducing new strategies, such as 'cued articulation', that have improve pupils' knowledge of the sounds that letters make. Pupils make good progress in numeracy, and teachers of practical subjects such as cookery and woodcraft take every opportunity to promote numeracy skills in their lessons. Pupils are making good progress in other areas of the curriculum, particularly in creative subjects such as art and music, and in the outdoor activities where they learn practical skills that will stand them in good stead in the future. They learn to use tools safely and carefully, light fires and make shelters and fences. Older pupils gain appropriate qualifications, achieving for example Entry Level Certificates in literacy and numeracy and various Unit Awards. Most pupils have high, mostly realistic, aspirations for the future. Some talk about continuing their education at college, doing car mechanics or undertaking training so they can support youngsters like themselves. All go on to purposeful further education courses or residential care settings.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Pupils' behaviour and their personal development are good, despite their previous unhappy experiences of education. Once admitted, pupils quickly regain some self-belief and show an enthusiasm to learn. All the pupils spoken to say how much they like coming to school. In the first few weeks at the school, pupils undergo a thorough assessment, involving their families, of their behavioural, emotional and social needs. This allows the school to see what staffing, resources and strategies will help the pupils to settle quickly and re-engage in their learning.

Pupils, parents, carers and staff say that for all pupils there is improvement, often dramatic, especially in their behaviour. As one parent, typical of others, said, 'I was dreading my son's teenage years. But they have turned him around and I'm so relieved and happy.' The school's records and the new behaviour tracking system confirm that for each pupil there is a reducing number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour. This is because most staff apply the agreed common set of procedures skilfully if pupils become upset and begin to lose control. These procedures are new and one or two staff are not yet quite as skilful in using them, so that some pupils are not as quickly restored to the classroom as they could be. Pupils attend well at the school and in almost all cases there is a significant improvement in the number of days lost. However, some non-residential pupils occasionally arrive late, because of ongoing difficulties with transport provided by the various local authorities. This means that learning time is shortened and progress is held back.

Residential pupils make good progress as a result of highly individualised, child-focused care and support. The collaboration of therapists, health care professionals, teachers, care staff and parents and carers ensures that each pupil receives appropriate support to meet their needs. This holistic approach promotes consistency and enables residential pupils to make progress in many aspects of their development. For example, where some pupils found it difficult to eat in a group and participate in school events they have now achieved these targets and continue to make good progress in their personal development. Throughout the day and in the residential accommodation, adults and pupils enjoy each other's company and pupils say that they would turn to any member of staff if they were in trouble in any way.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong within the common ethos and beliefs of the Steiner philosophy that are shared by all staff. The school successfully creates a calm, therapeutic environment where pupils support and listen to one another. They are developing their social skills well and understand the difference between right and wrong. Pupils are expected to take on responsibility for their own behaviour, their own environment and contribute well to the life of the school community. In both the school and the residential provision, pupils are given the opportunity to make their views known, both individually and in a group, for example through the pupil council and in house meetings. When they make suggestions in the house meetings, pupils do not always receive prompt feedback on whether their ideas have been accepted or not. Tolerance, understanding and spiritual awareness are fostered through the various festivals that are celebrated throughout the year. School days start with a morning verse in candlelit classrooms and grace is said before all meals. These moments of stillness have a positive calming effect.

Many staff come from different backgrounds and cultures and share with the pupils their varied cultural experiences and upbringing. This prepares the pupils well for life in a multicultural British society. Pupils are developing a good understanding of public institutions and services in England, particularly through the personal, social and health education curriculum. When political views are debated, staff ensure that there is a good balance of opposing views.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good, some of it is outstanding and enables pupils to make good progress. In most lessons, teachers let pupils know what they are going to learn and set out clearly what the pupils need to do to be successful. Classroom staff work well together as a team to provide good individual support in lessons, although they sometimes forget to make their meaning clear by giving pupils additional cues such as signs or gestures. Pupils have individual learning targets for English, mathematics and behaviour, and most pupils know what they have to do to achieve them. Residential and teaching staff share information about the pupils every day, including any steps they have made towards achieving their targets. This enables care staff to support pupils' learning well outside the school day.

When pupils join the school, they are assessed carefully to check what gaps they have in their knowledge, skills and understanding. This allows the staff to plan, carefully, activities that are set at the right level for each pupil. In a few cases, work is set that is too easy for more-able pupils. Staff track pupils' progress carefully throughout the day, and this information is updated regularly to set the next individual targets. Parents and carers are informed of how well their children have done each week.

Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach, and the activities they provide are generally exciting and are changed quickly to ensure that the pupils maintain their interest and concentration. While most teachers are well organised, occasionally resources are not sufficiently well prepared in advance. On a few occasions, teachers leave the pupils waiting with nothing to do if other pupils are slow in arriving.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good and supports pupils' achievement well. The curriculum is balanced well in Steiner Waldorf terms, between 'head, heart and hands', so that pupils have good opportunities to learn academic, personal and practical skills. The curriculum, largely based around school-wide topics, encompasses all the required areas of learning, and is supported by appropriate schemes of work. The curriculum is well adapted and individualised to meet most pupils' needs, although sometimes the work is a little too easy for some. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects. However, staff occasionally miss opportunities to promote pupils' individual communication targets, so holding the pupils back.

There are excellent resources to underpin the practical and creative curriculum. Pupils learn craft skills, such as weaving, pottery and knitting, in fully equipped specialist rooms. Pupils learn important life skills such as cooking and baking. A highlight of the curriculum is the outdoor curriculum. This curriculum is especially beneficial to those pupils who are very hard to reach, and who have complex emotional and social difficulties. The activities involve pupils fully in the world outside using a practical approach to literacy and numeracy. Pupils practise counting skills when making wattle fences and improve their reading when they match letters and pictures to objects in their environment. They develop new social and independent skills when brewing tea over open fires and drinking it in the shelters they have made for themselves.

Pupils develop their physical skills in regular physical education lessons, participating well in regular sports activities, and also in weekly folk dancing and movement lessons. Many lessons incorporate a rhythmic session, which involves movement with verses or songs. Pupils enjoy regular swimming sessions in the school's pool and go horse-riding off site. Older pupils have the opportunity to attend various types of work experience, for example in local stables, a garden centre, a garage and a bakery. There are good links with local colleges for taster courses to help pupils on to their next stage of learning.

Residential staff provide many interesting evening and weekend clubs and activities. Pupils benefit from their access to the school's physical resources throughout the week for swimming, cycling, walking, trampolining, games on the lawn and activities in the gym hall. The pupils enjoy being part of the local community visiting local cafés, shops and leisure centres. The school's membership of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust gives the pupils many further opportunities for outings and events.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and meets all the independent school and national minimum standards. The school provides good staff training and has developed comprehensive policies and procedures, including those for anti-bullying. Pupils are extremely well cared for and feel safe because the procedures and records are monitored carefully by senior staff and because of the close collaboration between the care, school and therapeutic teams. Parents and carers have full confidence in the school's ability to keep their children safe and happy. Pupils, parents and carers say that there is little bullying of any type and that they feel safe in school and in the residential accommodation.

There are robust systems to make sure that pupils are kept safe across both the school and the residential provision. The trustees and senior leaders are scrupulous in checking that recruitment procedures are 'followed to the letter' and that all adults are correctly investigated to make sure of their suitability to work with children. The school keeps the details of these checks, as required, in a single central register. The designated persons for child protection are appropriately trained and liaise effectively with the local safeguarding team. All staff have received training in child protection and the management of behaviour. A high number of staff are trained as specialists in first aid, fire

safety and lifesaving. The school has recently upgraded its procedures relating to the physical management of pupils if they become a risk to themselves or others. Although all pupils are managed safely, these new procedures are not yet thoroughly embedded into the practice of all staff.

The trustees and leaders have put sound policies and procedures in place to protect the health and safety of pupils, staff and visitors. These are consistently implemented so that all unnecessary risks are minimised. There are detailed risk assessments for the school and residential buildings and all aspects of school life, including those for off-site and educational visits. There are good staffing ratios that ensure appropriate levels of supervision and provide support to pupils so they can take measured risks as part of their learning and personal development.

Leadership and management

Good

The school's leadership and management are good, in both the educational and residential provisions. The trustees and leaders have made sure that the quality of teaching and care is at least good, and sometimes outstanding, and pupils are making good progress in their learning and in improving their behaviour. As a result of good management, the school meets all the independent school regulations and national minimum standards and has continued to improve since its last inspection. The leadership and management are not outstanding because the school has not achieved outstanding provision and outcomes for all its students.

The trustees and leaders have established a firm sense of direction for the future of the school. They have insisted upon, and achieved, good standards from both staff and pupils. Ofsted's questionnaires show that staff are unanimously committed to the cause. Each year, the school undertakes a thorough self-examination based on frequent checks on the quality of teaching and care and pupils' academic and personal progress. These checks give staff helpful guidance on how they can improve their performance and provide the best possible support to the pupils. By these means, the trustees and leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and are able to identify accurately in their development plan the most important priorities for further improvement. The school has addressed all the issues identified in the last school and care inspections.

The adequacy, qualifications and training of both school and boarding staff are good. The leaders' insistence upon close professional teamwork means that all staff, whether in care, education or therapy, collaborate closely to the single end of improving pupils' life chances. All staff say that they receive high-quality training to update and further enhance their skills and qualifications.

The school makes contact with parents and carers every week to report on their children's achievements and progress. Parents and carers receive an annual report and record of achievement that contains a photographic record of their children's successes and experiences. The school is currently revamping its website, which contains all the required information for parents and carers and others. There is a very handy booklet for new pupils and their families that answers all the basic questions and prepares them well for joining the school. There are suitable procedures for responding to any complaint.

The accommodation is of good quality. The beautiful grounds promote the pupils' connection to nature, the seasons and home grown food. The school buildings, residential areas and grounds are secure and meet all requirements. They provide plenty of room for outdoor education, recreation, play and games. The classrooms are well maintained and light and cheery.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

Residential pupils' safety

Good

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Good

What inspection judgements mean

School and boarding/residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education and care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education and care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education and care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	109353
Social care unique reference number	SC003404
Inspection number	422700
DfE registration number	803/6000

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	7
Proprietor	Camphill Communities Thornbury
Chair of Trustees	Phyllida Parsloe
Principal	Nico Sialelli
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 December 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,475
Annual fees (boarders)	£87,278
Telephone number	01454 412194
Fax number	01454411860
Email address	mail@sheilingschool.org.uk

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