

# School inspection report

11 to 13 June 2024

## **Thorngrove School**

The Mount

Pantings Lane

Highclere

Newbury

Berkshire

RG209PS

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing by providing a caring and stimulating environment where pupils enjoy learning. Leaders seek the views of everyone involved in the school to evaluate the impact of their actions and inform their decision-making. The school's aims and ethos are evident in the school's wide-ranging curriculum which prepares pupils well for life beyond the school.
2. The Board of Directors have oversight of the school. They meet regularly to check that leaders are well supported and carry out their responsibilities effectively. Directors and leaders scrutinise and review policies and procedures to make sure they are in line with current and relevant regulations. They seek advice from appropriate external agencies when necessary.
3. Leaders and teachers assess pupils' starting points. Teachers teach the curriculum to take account of pupils' different needs. Pupils make good progress. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders review how the curriculum is taught across the school to check that pupils are challenged and engaged in their learning. However, the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education does not meet the needs and interests of pupils sufficiently across the school.
4. Leaders plan a wide range of extra-curricular activities that provide pupils with enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. This is a significant strength of the school. Pupils across the school thrive during weekly lessons in the woods, which support their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing through effective teaching. The school's enrichment programme prepares pupils for life in modern British society through activities to 'Be challenged, be part of the community, be creative and be curious'. Pupils engage enthusiastically in canoeing, caring for the environment, beekeeping and take an active role in school productions.
5. Leaders ensure that the school premises are maintained well and provide a stimulating environment in which pupils can experience a well-balanced range of activities. Policies are robust and procedures for health and safety, first aid, admissions and attendance are in line with statutory requirements.
6. A culture of mutual respect for everyone, regardless of age, sex, belief or religion, is established throughout the school. Positive relationships between staff and pupils enable pupils to be confident and self-motivated. Pupils participate enthusiastically in physical activity during lessons, clubs and at breaktimes. Pupils across the school know what is expected of them. They follow the school rules to keep themselves, and each other, safe.
7. Pupils are given opportunities to learn important values such as respect, tolerance and democracy. Pupils understand right from wrong, behave well and take on roles of responsibility within the school. For older pupils, leaders have thought carefully about the content for the post common entrance (CE) programme so that it equips pupils with the skills they will need in their new schools.
8. In early years, staff follow the statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding, learning and assessment. Staff know individual children well. Their interactions with children are positive and purposeful. Well-resourced classrooms and outdoor areas enable children to make choices about how they learn, through play and exploration.
9. The importance of safeguarding pupils is understood by all staff through effective policies and regular training. Timely communication between staff, pupils and parents ensures that pupils are

protected from harm. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online. They feel confident to speak to a trusted adult if they have any concerns.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

## Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- review and adapt the PSHE curriculum and how it is taught so that it matches the needs and interests of all pupils.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The proprietor ensures that leaders are well equipped with appropriate knowledge, skills and training to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The Board of Directors meet regularly to maintain a strategic overview of the school, particularly regarding the wellbeing of pupils. Through ongoing support as well as holding leaders to account, they ensure that all aspects of the school's work are effective.
11. Leaders engage with appropriate outside agencies, including the local authority, to ensure that they follow statutory guidance and that pupils are protected from harm. A range of external specialists are invited in, for example, to teach older pupils about the risks of drugs and alcohol misuse and gambling.
12. Through effective and rigorous evaluation, leaders are aware of the strengths of the school and areas to develop further. They identify risks and unintended consequences of their decision-making. For instance, leaders recognise that the PSHE curriculum needs to be taught more effectively and they are taking action to address this. Leaders have gathered pupils' opinions and are aware that adjustments need to be made to both the PSHE curriculum content and how this is taught so that it is better matched to pupils' interests and needs.
13. The school's aims and caring, family ethos are well known to pupils and parents and are actively promoted throughout the school day. Leaders and staff provide engaging learning experiences for pupils who enjoy their learning while exploring and developing new talents and interests. Pupils acquire new knowledge and understanding because of effective teaching.
14. The wide-ranging extra-curricular programme inspires pupils to be curious and creative. The programme develops pupils' personal and social skills and actively promotes their wellbeing. Pupils from Nursery to Year 8 have regular, well-planned lessons in the woods. Pupils develop an increased knowledge, understanding and appreciation for the natural environment and develop a range of skills, including team building. Weekly enrichment afternoons allow pupils to choose and develop new skills and interests. Staff are actively encouraged to extend their own expertise, for example in bee husbandry, to increase the range of activities they offer to pupils.
15. All early years staff complete the necessary levels of training according to requirements so that children are safe. Careful thought is given to ensure that both the indoor and outdoor environments are creative and inspiring. As a result, children benefit from an adventurous curriculum which covers all seven areas of learning. Staff match learning experiences to children's individual needs so that children make good progress from their starting points.
16. Leaders make relevant information available to parents through the school website and other correspondence. They invite parents to workshops and talks, for instance, to explain how regular assessment informs teaching and improves outcomes for pupils. Leaders make sure they share required information with the local authority. This includes informing the local authority when pupils leave and join the school at non-standard times.
17. An effective complaints policy is shared with parents and put in place effectively. Complaints are resolved quickly and appropriately. Records are detailed and kept securely. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 by adapting the curriculum so that it is accessible to

visually and hearing-impaired pupils. Leaders continue to find ways to improve the school site so that areas are accessible to those with physical disabilities.

18. Leaders at all levels ensure that health and safety procedures are robust, and policies are up to date. Risk assessments for activities and trips are thorough and all regulations for fire safety and first aid are closely adhered to.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance**

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Pupils across the school explain what they have learned and remembered confidently to adults and their peers. Staff in early years use cleverly crafted questions and modelling to encourage the development of children's language. Children in early years and pupils in the lower school are taught an effective phonics programme. They quickly learn to recognise and blend sounds. The use of high-quality texts in English enables pupils across the school to improve their reading and creative writing skills. Pupils develop self-confidence in expressing themselves through engaging activities in drama lessons.
21. Leaders have adapted the mathematics curriculum so that pupils apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems regularly. Children in early years demonstrate their understanding of early numbers by playing games, independently on an interactive whiteboard. Children in Reception show good acquisition of high-level, subject-specific vocabulary when investigating topics such as the water cycle and fossils. Pupils develop scientific skills through practical investigations. For instance, in Year 4, pupils measure and record temperatures of solar ovens left in the sun. The enrichment programme provides exciting opportunities for pupils to investigate themes such as space through virtual reality.
22. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and skills which they use to encourage pupils' creative and aesthetic skills. In art lessons, pupils are inspired by the work of famous artists and sculptors. In information and communication technology (ICT) lessons, pupils use a software program to design useful objects such as bubble wands. They work creatively but within parameters set by the teacher. Lessons in the well-resourced design and technology room enable pupils to plan and create objects such as acrylic key rings or wooden props. Pupils apply the techniques they have learned to produce their own imaginative work. Pupils are keen to participate in weekly games which help to boost their self-esteem. They enjoy music lessons, and many pupils challenge themselves to take examinations or enter competitions.
23. In early years, children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is threaded through the curriculum. Teachers carefully track children's confidence, self-awareness, social awareness and self-regulation. In Year 2, pupils discuss which emotions might be triggered in different scenarios and are taught how to self-regulate. Enrichment topics such as Wellbeing Warriors and team-building challenges in the woods provide pupils with opportunities to develop their personal and social skills. However, from Year 3 onwards, the PSHE curriculum and how it is taught does not give pupils sufficient opportunities to broaden nor deepen their learning and engage in topics that interest them.
24. The curriculum is enriched with lessons taught in the woods for all pupils from Nursery to Year 8. Pupils relish learning outdoors; they identify a range of plants, insects and birdsong through good use of resources. Older pupils learn skills such as fire lighting and raft building. They deepen their understanding of photosynthesis and the importance of water in settlements. Weekly enrichment programmes for pupils from Year 3 to Year 8 are well planned and provide pupils with choices to learn new skills. As a result, pupils learn successfully across a wide range of experiences. They quickly build up new skills and develop their talents and interests.
25. Teachers support pupils in their learning so that they make good progress. Early intervention and effective tracking and monitoring, enable pupils who have SEND to make good progress from their



different starting points. Effective communication between the leader of provision for pupils who have SEND, staff, parents and external professionals, ensures that pupils' needs are well catered for. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are provided with support and resources such as vocabulary lists in their first language, as well as English. This helps pupils to access unfamiliar topics in the curriculum. Pupils with higher prior attainment are encouraged to deepen their learning by completing additional research and project work. Pupils who find learning more challenging are supported through teaching in smaller groups and additional sessions at lunchtimes.

26. Assessment systems throughout the school check pupils' progress thoroughly. Data is recorded, tracked and analysed so that appropriate measures can be put in place to support any pupils who need to catch up. Pupils receive helpful feedback from their teachers, so they understand how to improve their work. In early years children are assessed against the early learning goals (ELGs) and parents are provided with relevant information regarding their children's progress.
27. Staff plan learning experiences using resources in the local community. For example, pupils attend glass fusion workshops in a nearby senior school. Year 2 pupils use the bridge over the stream in the school as a model for their Monet paintings. Playgrounds provide a stimulating environment during break times. Staff use resources creatively from the local area, which pupils of all ages enjoy and benefit from.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation**

- 28. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

29. Pupils across the school are articulate. They express their ideas and discuss their learning confidently. The calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school is strengthened by pupils' respectful relationships between staff and each other.
30. Pupils develop their moral understanding through these positive relationships that are evident during form time, within lessons and during extra-curricular activities. Children in early years are taught how to take turns and share resources. Older pupils discuss right and wrong in religion, philosophy and ethics (RPE) lessons. In the woods, pupils are taught to appreciate the environment through their senses and mindfulness, which is offered as part of the school's enrichment programme.
31. The behaviour policy is followed throughout the school. Children in early years demonstrate high levels of responsibility as they transition between activities and from room to room. They tidy up, help each other, listen to adults and settle quickly to new activities. Through the school council, pupils contribute ideas for rewards and sanctions in the behaviour policy, which helps pupils accept responsibility for their actions.
32. The school's anti-bullying policy is shared with pupils and parents. In the pupil diary, clear steps are outlined for pupils to follow if they are bullied. Although bullying is rare, staff are trained to recognise, record and deal with such incidents. Pupils are confident as to who they can go to and know that any issues will be resolved.
33. Pupils develop empathy, for instance in English, by writing letters from the perspective of a refugee. They learn how to write sensitive messages for the charity 'Cards for Bravery'. They visit a local residence for the elderly and spend time interacting and singing songs to entertain the residents. Children in early years show empathy and care for each other when they are upset.
34. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught throughout the school. Older pupils understand the importance of consent and are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including when using social media. Parents and pupils in Year 8 receive helpful advice from external speakers. This supports pupils to feel more confident about the transition to their next school.
35. Children in early years choose a leader of the day to carry out roles of responsibility. Older pupils take on roles such as house captains and ambassadors, including wellbeing ambassadors, who are on hand to help their peers.
36. First Aid provision is robust, and pupils are aware of who to go to if they need medical help. All staff are suitably trained, particularly in early years. Pupils are taught how to recognise and respond to emergency situations in PSHE lessons. However, pupils would learn and understand more if they were given opportunities to discuss these situations in greater depth.
37. The admission and attendance registers are well kept in line with regulatory requirements. Leaders have rigorous procedures in place to identify and follow up on any pupil whose attendance needs to improve.

38. Led by the headteacher, staff take responsibility to ensure that health and safety procedures are always followed. Risk assessments ensure that pupils can safely take part in the wide range of activities and trips. Regular monitoring reports indicate that fire safety procedures and training are up to date. Internal checks and audits from external specialists are carried out. Any recommendations are promptly addressed.
39. The school site is well maintained and provides an environment where pupils of all ages can take part in a range of interesting activities, including at break times. Pupils understand the importance of a balanced diet in their lunch choices. The health and safety team regularly reflect and review policies and systems to keep pupils safe. Ample supervision throughout the school, including during lessons in the woods, ensures that pupils can take part in activities where they can challenge themselves safely.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing**

- 40. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

41. Leaders create opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures through lessons, theme days and celebrations. The curriculum content is updated so that it remains relevant. During Black History Month and Windrush Day, pupils plan activities which enhance their understanding of events in modern British society. In early years, staff plan learning around children's experiences and interests. For example, activities are linked to a safari theme and Diwali, King's Day and Chinese New Year celebrations. Children listen to stories to develop their understanding of different cultures and different types of families.
42. In humanities, teachers plan experiences and projects for pupils to deepen their learning. On a geography trip to Box Hill, pupils engage with the public to survey methods of transport and suggest ways in which the impact on the environment can be reduced. Pupils in Year 5 present considered and balanced arguments as they discuss the decisions which led to the loss of life on the Titanic. Older pupils present justified opinions in an essay entitled, 'Is boredom beneficial?'
43. Leaders plan purposeful learning experiences where pupils can apply skills learned in DT, ICT, drama, art and music to prepare for their musical productions. Older pupils appreciate the residential trips planned each year, which help them develop independence and self-confidence. In PSHE pupils understand the importance of goals and aspirations.
44. During enrichment activities, pupils learn how to keep bees and the benefits for the environment. Pupils value the opportunity to work with different peer groups. Skills such as lifesaving, sailing, alternative sports, and British Sign Language develop pupils' talents and interests. In their post CE programme, Year 8 pupils learn cookery, how to open a bank account, change a plug and the importance of voting. These activities support pupils to be equipped for life in modern British society.
45. Pupils learn to respect different beliefs by visiting a local church to celebrate Advent, attending a workshop on Buddhism and listening to a talk from a Rabbi. In religious education (RE) lessons, older pupils choose a faith such as Hinduism or Islam to research and present their findings to their peers.
46. Pupils in Year 7 study the differences between democracy and dictatorship and the role of women in Nazi Germany. They understand the impact of these concepts on society. Pupils in Year 2 become familiar with British institutions as they learn about monarchs and the influence they had on society. Pupils are taught about the democratic process through a talk by the local member of parliament and their own school council elections.
47. The school provides opportunities for pupils to learn about money. For example, in early years, children role play buying and selling in a flower shop. Older pupils learn the importance of making wise choices and saving money in PSHE lessons. Pupils use their budgeting skills to plan and organise a community cafe to raise money for charity.
48. In the Nursery, staff create a nurturing environment where children of different ages play and learn together. Staff monitor children's social development through regular observations and share these with parents to evidence children's development and learning.

49. Children in early years learn about people who help them through role play and visits from firefighters and the police. Pupils in Year 6 to Year 8 receive advice from a careers adviser about how to prepare for the challenges of the workplace. School trips to local companies and organisations expose pupils to a range of careers.

**The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society**

**50. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

51. The school has an effective safeguarding policy to protect pupils from harm. The governor responsible for safeguarding, reviews the policy regularly and supports the staff safeguarding team. Leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy and procedures are rigorous and in line with statutory requirements.
52. The school seeks advice from, and makes referrals to local authorities to safeguard pupils. Relevant safeguarding training takes place for current staff and new joiners so that all staff feel confident in safeguarding procedures. Staff are proficient with logging concerns on the online tracking and monitoring system. Safeguarding leads ensure that any concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Leaders check records for repeated concerns and incidents so that they can mitigate risks.
53. The positive relationships between pupils and staff enable pupils to voice concerns or problems. Pupils feel confident to speak with a trusted adult or use a worry box to seek help anonymously. Form tutors and class teachers work closely with heads of section, those with designated safeguarding responsibilities and the school counsellor so that pupils are supported and cared for.
54. Leaders are aware of and take steps to mitigate the risks of pupils using devices for learning. They ensure that filtering and monitoring systems are robust and up to date. Staff work closely with pupils and parents so that pupils can use devices safely and appropriately in school and at home. Pupils are taught how to keep safe online in ICT and PSHE lessons. Staff are vigilant and take swift action when necessary to keep pupils safe.
55. Leaders provide effective training for staff about how to identify low-level concerns. Staff understand the importance of reporting such concerns. Leaders record these and follow them up appropriately. Leaders follow the necessary guidance with regards to their recruitment processes. Checks on all adults recruited to work at the school are rigorous and compliant with legislation.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 56. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Thorngrove School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	850/6033
<b>Address</b>	Thorngrove School The Mount Highclere Newbury Berkshire RG20 9PS
<b>Phone number</b>	01635 253172
<b>Email address</b>	office@thorngroveschool.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://thorngroveschool.co.uk/">https://thorngroveschool.co.uk/</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	Thorngrove School Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Nicholas Broughton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nick Graham
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	230
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	10 to 12 March 2020

## Information about the school

57. Thorngrove school is an independent co-educational day school located in Berkshire. The school has a Nursery for pupils from two to four years, a lower school for pupils from five to seven years and a prep school for pupils up to the age of 13.
58. Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new headteacher. Thorngrove School Limited is governed by a Board of Directors which includes the school's founders.
59. There are 50 children in early years, of whom 34 are in the Nursery.
60. The school has identified 39 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
61. There are a small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
62. The school states its aims are to promote wellbeing, mindfulness and a sense of worth in pupils; encourage pupils to develop sensitivity and empathy to those around them and in the wider world; build resilience and promote a positive mindset amongst all pupils; provide consistently excellent and exciting teaching and learning which will enable every pupil to develop intellectual enquiry and a lifelong love of learning; enable pupils, whatever their ability, to find and develop their individual talents in sport, performing and creative arts and other activities; and maximise academic results so that every child achieves their full potential in internal, standardised and external examinations.



## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

11 to 13 June 2024

63. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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