



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Thorpe Hall School

April 2022

Contents

School's Details		3
1. Background Information		4
About the school		4
What the school seeks to do		4
About the pupils		4
2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection		5
Preface		5
Key findings		6
PART 1 – Quality of education provided		6
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils		6
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils		6
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors		6
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools		7
PART 6 – Provision of information		7
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled		7
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools		7
3. Educational Quality Inspection		8
Preface		8
Key findings		8
Recommendations		8
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievement		8
The quality of the pupils' personal development		10
4. Inspection Evidence		13

School's Details

School	Thorpe Hall School			
DfE number	882/6001			
Registered charity number	298155			
Address	Thorpe Hall School Wakering Road Southend-on-Sea Essex SS1 3RD			
Telephone number	01702 582340			
Email address	sec@thorpehall.southend.sch.uk			
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Duckitt			
Chair of governors	Mr Jonathan Gorridge			
Age range	2 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	434			
	Pre-preparatory	73	Preparatory	106
	Seniors			
	255			
Inspection dates	26 to 29 April 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Thorpe Hall School is an independent co-educational day school. Founded in 1925, it is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has created a sports centre. A new headmaster was appointed in September 2021.
- 1.3 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to nurture and support all pupils to develop their confidence, social skills, friendships and love of learning. It seeks to create an environment where pupils are happy, encouraged to take intellectual risks, and each individual is valued and known. Its objective is to enable pupils to become young people who are able to make a positive contribution to society.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds mainly living within a ten mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils in the preparatory school is above average and is average in the senior school compared with pupils taking the same tests elsewhere. The school has identified 68 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia and specific learning difficulties, all of whom receive additional specialist help. There are seven pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Twelve pupils have English as an additional language, but none require additional support in this regard. The curriculum is modified for those pupils with particular talents.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the prep school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2018 to 2019, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- Pupils of all abilities, including those with SEND and EAL make good progress and achieve well.
 - Pupils achieve well in a wide variety of extracurricular activities.
 - Pupils of all ages have a positive attitude to their learning.
 - Pupils' skills in written and creative responses, are not highly developed because opportunities for challenge and high expectations are not consistent across the curriculum.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils have a strong sense of community and an outstanding loyalty to the school.
 - Pupils demonstrate excellent respect and tolerance for all.
 - Pupils develop a strong sense of self-worth.
 - Pupils show excellent maturity in their relationships with each other and the staff.

Recommendations

The school should make the following improvements:

- To ensure senior school pupils are consistently challenged and have high aspirations.
- To ensure all pupils extend their written and creative responses in all areas of the curriculum.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievement

- 3.3 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.4 Pupils are motivated, expressive and have a good work ethic. They gain a good level of knowledge, skills and understanding of the subjects they study. They actively contribute during lessons and collaborate well with their peers. They achieve well in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- 3.5 Pupils' achievement at GCSE in 2018 and 2019 was above the national average for maintained schools. Results for 2020 and 2021, based on centre-assessed and teacher-assessed grades, indicate that these standards have been maintained. Pupils make good progress. Regular marking and an effective progress tracking system ensure they are consistently able to make gains in their learning. Pupils with SEND and EAL make similar progress to other pupils over time with many exceeding target grades. They display a good ability to evaluate their work and improve upon it and are supported well by the

learning and development department. Pupils make good progress when teaching is focused and challenging as seen in a Year 11 biology revision lesson on homeostasis where the use of questioning, combined with a focus on the correct terminology, enabled them to consolidate and extend their knowledge. This approach, however, is not consistent across all subjects in the senior school where at times a lack of challenge lowers the aspirations of the pupils.

- 3.6 In their response to the questionnaire, the vast majority of pupils agreed that lessons are interesting, that their teachers have good subject knowledge and are very supportive giving individual feedback for improvement. This was supported in observations during the inspection. The achievement of the pupils reflects the commitment of the teaching staff, the clear direction set by the school's leaders and the proactive and committed approach of governors. This is something the vast majority of parents supported in their response to the questionnaires.
- 3.7 Pupils demonstrate good knowledge, skills and understanding and apply themselves readily to tasks, working diligently. They show good levels of prior learning, and their skills develop well over time. In a Year 8 physics lesson, pupils explained the differences when light is reflected from surfaces of varying colours demonstrating a good understanding of independent, dependent and control variables. Pupils in a geography lesson in Year 11 showed good understanding of the concept of meander, flood risk and levees. Pupils are confident in the support offered by teaching staff and frequently show their readiness to ask questions to seek clarification.
- 3.8 In practical activities, art, drama and design technology (DT) pupils displayed good and at times excellent technical ability. For example, in a Year 7 lesson in DT, pupils demonstrated accuracy in their measuring and cutting and were able to use a set square effectively, displaying prior learning and knowledge of how to work safely.
- 3.9 Pupils are good and often excellent, verbal communicators and are always keen to engage in discussion and debate. In a Year 7 English lesson, two pupils lead the class effectively, collating responses to a thinking challenge, asking thoughtful and perceptive questions of their peers. Year 6 pupils worked together well, building a shared understanding of playscripts, articulating their ideas clearly and interacting confidently. Pupils develop good reading skills, as shown when Year 5 pupils helped younger pupils with their understanding and pronunciation. Pupils listen to the views of their classmates in a respectful manner. Pupils competently complete extended written work in some subjects, particularly in English, but this is not consistently the case in all curriculum areas.
- 3.10 Pupils have good numeracy skills and apply them confidently across the curriculum. They develop their skills well from an early age and make good progress as they go through the school. In Reception, pupils used specialised vocabulary, such as "doubling", when describing what they were trying to do mathematically. Pupils in a Year 8 art lesson showed a good understanding of proportion, size and dimension in an observational drawing exercise. From Year 11, pupils who are chosen to become mathematics ambassadors further strengthen their own skills by supporting younger pupils
- 3.11 Pupils have good skills in information and communication technology (ICT), competently using electronic devices in lessons. They research independently and confidently, employing their devices as a study aid. Pupils in the senior school are proficient in using a range of software to support their learning. When working on a project to design and cost a smoothie, pupils in Year 6 successfully recorded promotional films for their virtual companies to use when the product was launched. Pupils are very appreciative of, and benefitted from, the remote learning that they received during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns where live lessons were taught.
- 3.12 Pupils of all ages develop strong study skills. Pupils enjoy their work and keenly extend their learning both in lessons and in independent study. In the younger years they apply themselves to problem solving with enthusiasm, as seen in a mathematics lesson in Year 5 where each pupil was given an individual challenge. Study skills are reinforced by a study skills course in Year 7 and older pupils learn effective revision strategies as a result of the supportive guidance and one-to-one mentoring provided by the school.

- 3.13 Pupils develop a wide range of interests outside the classroom through the extensive provision of clubs and activities provided by the school. They enter a variety of competitions in which they achieve notable success: the National Lego Robotics competition, Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Green Growers, Independent Schools Association (ISA) Art Competitions and the English Speaking Union. Sports teams consistently achieve success in regional and local competitions in netball, rounders, cross country, athletics, tennis, cricket and table tennis. Many pupils gain bronze and silver awards in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme. Talented pupils in sport extend their performance well because the school offers an adapted timetable to allow them to participate in enhanced training. Pupils participate successfully in many musical activities through choirs, orchestras, bands and ensembles including such competitions as the Southend Music Festival and in ABRSM examinations. They achieve well in dance and drama, including in LAMDA lessons and examinations.
- 3.14 Pupils have a very positive approach to learning; they come to lessons ready to work and are attentive and responsive throughout the lessons. Many pupils overcome specific difficulties as they learn and apply a range of study and organisational skills that they have developed through specialist teaching and mentoring. Pupils enjoy and work well collaboratively as observed when building sponge brick towers in Nursery, solving a mathematical riddle in Year 4, or in role plays in French in Year 11. Pupils are familiar with sharing their reflections, researching together and coming to agreed conclusions as they develop their work. Many parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire, also noted that pupils gain the teamworking, collaborative and research skills they will need in later life.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.15 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.16 Pupils have a very strong moral code and a deep understanding of their responsibilities as members of the community in school and in the wider world. They are courteous and respectful of others as shown by the maturity of their interactions with their peers and staff.
- 3.17 The supportive community within the school and the strong pastoral system enable the pupils to flourish and grow. They develop self-confidence, resilience, and independence in line with the aims of the school. This is recognised by parents, most of whom agree that the school helps their children to be confident and independent. Pupils enjoy receiving certificates for achievement, progress and contributions to the school in the regular celebration assemblies. They value discussions that they have with their teachers and in particular their form tutors. Pupils feel that their opinions are valued, and they are treated with respect. The excellent level of pastoral care, pupil and teacher relationships and relationships amongst the pupils themselves, create an environment which allows pupils of all ages to grow in self-confidence in preparation for the next stage in their life. Pupils with SEND develop their self-confidence equally well and are aided in this by learning support staff who work closely with the pastoral leaders to ensure holistic support is in place.
- 3.18 Pupils are confident in their decision making and are prepared to attempt challenging tasks within the supportive environment. In all aspects of the curriculum, they make excellent decisions and are tolerant of others if mistakes are made, knowing that this can be a learning experience. Starting in pre-nursery through to the end of the prep years, pupils are able to make informed decisions based on their own assessments and work through problems either individually, as a group or with support. Through the many responsibilities in Nursery, which the children take on each day, to the Year 6 Librarians and Science Ambassadors and the Year 11 leadership team pupils make appropriate decisions and apply for new opportunities which help them develop academically and socially.
- 3.19 In the senior school pupils use their decision-making skills to excellent effect in the many effective forums, often pupil-led where they conscientiously discuss ideas and lead initiatives. In the school council, pupils are making decisions on new playground equipment. In the Pretty Tough Group, pupils worked with teachers to decide on the format and speakers for the school's well-being week. Pupils

in year 7, 8 and 9 show confidence in choosing activities to enhance their skills of communication, perseverance and creativity in the weekly choice afternoon.

- 3.20 Pupils display an excellent understanding of spiritual matters, both religious and non-religious. They show a deep appreciation of the non-material aspects of life and enjoy discussions in this area in PSHE and across the curriculum. In a Year 9 English lesson in discussion on barriers to success relating to the American Dream, pupils enthusiastically discussed mental health, relationships, spirituality, moral code, tolerance and respect, showing clear insight and understanding. The thought for the week offers further opportunities for spiritual reflection; pupils in Year 7 in form time were observed discussing the meaning of empathy and comparing it with sympathy in a suitably reflective manner. In the preparatory school, pupils' sensitive discussions about the atmosphere within a painting showed an excellent awareness of the wider context of the image and the links to spiritual understanding. In the broader curriculum pupils develop a positive sense of self through mindfulness, yoga and lessons in reflection and relaxation techniques. Younger pupils develop their strong appreciation of the natural world through their participation in the forest and beach schools.
- 3.21 Pupils' development of moral understanding and taking responsibility for their own behaviour is excellent. They have a clear and deep understanding of what is right and wrong. Pupils are respectful and courteous to each other as evidenced in the calm, family feel of the school, when all the pupils are outdoors sharing the school's grounds. Pupils show a mature understanding of the need for sanctions. The new behaviour policy introduced in September 2021 is based on discussion and reflection. In pupil interviews, Year 11 felt that the new policy provides clear expectations and positive guidance which enables them to make good choices regarding their behaviour and attitudes. Instances of serious misbehaviour are rare and when they do occur effective, corrective support is put in place through the school's excellent pastoral system.
- 3.22 The school encourages the development of community spirit through the very strong house system where members of Year 11 play a prominent part and pupils work together in vertical groups towards a common aim. Pupils take pride in their school as shown through their observation of the school uniform, care of their belongings and respect for the school's premises. Pupils appreciate the wider issues in society and volunteer in the community through the DofE scheme, contribute to the local food bank and Year 7 visit the local senior citizens' home. When unable to do so due to Covid-19 restrictions they wrote letters to the residents, showing their ongoing commitment. The children in nursery complete daily jobs to take on responsibility. The excellent range of jobs include, snack helpers, the weather checker, and the class counter. These regular and popular duties develop personal responsibility and understanding of morals and rules within nursery.
- 3.23 Pupils show high levels of respect and inclusivity for different faiths and cultures. Their interactions in school with staff and other pupils are courteous and based on mutual respect on all sides. Pupils were unanimous in their belief that diversity is a normal part of life and that they operate within a tolerant and inclusive community which does not exclude those from different backgrounds, faiths, or beliefs.
- 3.24 Pupils demonstrate their desire to discuss and celebrate diversity in all its forms; for example, in the senior school the pupils work with staff in the Pretty Tough Society where they have organised assemblies in Pride Month and Black History Month to raise awareness. They have raised funds for a local charity which provides support for people who have been made homeless because of their beliefs and through this have gained an insight into inclusion issues in society. The group has also set up an email contact in school to support pupils with concerns relating to diversity and inclusion. These initiatives enable pupils to widen their understanding of the issues of equality, diversity and inclusion and an appreciation of the importance of respect and tolerance for all. The excellent wall displays around the school on such issues as diversity enhance the provision in this area. In response to the questionnaire the overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the school promotes values of respect, democracy and tolerance.

3.25 Pupils feel safe in the school environment, both physically and emotionally. This is because keeping children safe is given the highest priority by senior leaders and governors. They are confident that any concerns that they might raise related to issues in school or outside school will be listened to and dealt with appropriately and discreetly. They are aware of the challenges that the internet presents and how to use it safely. Pupils acquire skills to manage stress effectively and maintain positive mental health. They appreciate the importance of physical fitness and make good use of the outside play facilities and the more formal sports programme. In response to the questionnaire an overwhelming majority of parents felt that the school safeguards their children effectively and the vast majority of pupils felt that the school was a safe place to be. Inspectors agreed with these views.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Dr Ruth Weeks	Reporting inspector
Mr Roland Martin	Compliance team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Dr Pamela Edmonds	Team inspector (Head, ISA school)
Mr Richard Whymark	Team inspector (Head, ISA school)