

Sheiling School (Thornbury)

Thornbury Park, Thornbury, Bristol BS35 1HP

Inspection dates

20–22 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads the school with clear vision and determination. He has brought about significant improvements in a short period of time.
- Staff know the pupils well. They take great care and use their skills to support pupils in their learning and personal development. Pupils trust the adults who work with them.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment are rapidly improving. Teachers know their pupils well and plan learning to meet their individual needs.
- In most parts of the curriculum, pupils make good progress. This is particularly the case in mathematics but less so in pupils' reading.
- Children who are looked after make good progress and often achieve more than their classmates. This is as a result of the close relationship between the school and the children's home.
- Behaviour is good. As a result of higher-quality teaching and learning, the number of incidents of poor behaviour have fallen dramatically.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes provide students with academic study, independent living skills and work experience. Consequently, students are successful in the next stage of their education or employment. However, there is still room for pupils to achieve more highly, particularly in reading.
- Leaders have ensured that all necessary arrangements are in place to keep pupils safe. Staff are well trained and in turn teach pupils to be safe, including when online.
- The recently introduced assessment framework is providing leaders with more detailed information about pupils' academic and personal development. However, this now needs to be used by governors and leaders to strategically plan the next steps for the school.
- Most middle leaders are new in their posts. They are yet to receive the training they need to support senior leaders in raising standards.
- The governing body has an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, they lack the specific knowledge required to fully discharge their duties.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by
 - developing leaders' strategic oversight of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in planning for future school improvements
 - providing middle leaders with the training they need so that they are fully equipped to discharge the duties their roles demand
 - ensuring that the newly appointed governing body have the training and external assurances they need to be able to challenge and support leaders effectively.
- Raise the academic attainment of pupils and students in the sixth form, particularly with respect to their ability to read well.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The strong leadership of the recently appointed headteacher, supported by the chief executive officer (CEO), has brought about significant and rapid improvement following a period of turmoil. New appointments to middle-leadership roles have further strengthened the capacity to improve the performance of the school.
- The headteacher has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Robust plans are in place to eradicate the weaknesses. The impact of the improvements made over this academic year are clearly evident. Expectations of staff and pupils are high.
- Leaders have implemented a curriculum which is individually tailored to each pupil's needs. Increasingly, pupils are moving between different classes to increase the level of challenge they encounter. Leaders have ensured that there is flexibility in the transition arrangements to make this as successful as possible.
- Leaders promote British values and equality of opportunity through the taught and broader curriculum. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are clear about the difference between right and wrong. Pupils show respect and understanding of other cultures and traditions. They particularly enjoyed their exploration of Buddhism, as is seen in their work.
- Leaders have forged good relationships with the local community. During the inspection, older pupils undertook some coppicing of a local woodland with a community volunteering organisation, developing both their employability and social skills.
- Leaders have created a detailed assessment framework to record, track and monitor pupils' progress in their personal and social development. Careful moderation supports the accuracy of the assessments teachers make. However, the assessment framework does not include sufficient tracking of progress against accredited qualifications for older pupils.
- Almost all middle leaders are new in post this year. Their responsibilities have yet to be clearly defined and they have not yet had the training they need to be able to carry out these important roles effectively.
- Leaders have not shied away from making difficult decisions. Staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire commented on the recent changes and acknowledged that these were uncomfortable but necessary. As a result of the changes, standards are rising.
- All staff who work at the school undertake a thorough induction programme. During this period, they receive training in safeguarding, health and safety, preventing bullying and intimate care. Each member of staff has a personalised training programme through which they can request specific training, for example in specific art techniques. Throughout the year there is a comprehensive training programme which is supplemented by teacher meetings where staff enhance their knowledge and skills.
- Newly qualified teachers are well supported through their first year of teaching. They benefit from the support of an experienced mentor and develop their skills well.

- Parents and carers receive regular communication from school staff. They are provided with detailed annual reports and are consulted when individual education plans are being revised and when transition plans are being drafted. Parents take an active role in the school's fundraising efforts and many attend festivals and events.
- Leaders have ensured that the school complies with the Independent School Standards and associated regulations, including the promotion of equality and appreciation of diversity.

Governance

- The board of trustees recognised that their previous model of governance was not providing trustees with the level of detail needed to discharge their duties fully. In April 2017, the trustees established a sub-group of trustees to act as a dedicated governing body for the school. Those trustees who have been appointed as governors bring significant experience in their own professional fields, such as in property management, finance and human resource management.
- The governing body has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know where additional funding is used effectively and check its impact on pupils' learning and achievement. Identified weaknesses result in actions being taken by the CEO and headteacher.
- The governors ensure that finances are used suitably to maintain appropriate numbers of staff and that they are adequately resourced for their work. They maintain the buildings and extensive grounds to a good standard.
- Governors oversee the performance management of staff, including the headteacher. They set challenging targets and ensure that staff receive the training and support they need. When staff perform particularly well, governors ensure that they are suitably rewarded.
- As they are new in their role, governors do not yet have the specific knowledge they need to effectively challenge and support leaders. Governors recognise this and have initiated enquiries to source high-quality training so they are fully equipped to carry out their responsibilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have made the arrangements necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. These meet statutory requirements in line with guidance from the Secretary of State. The safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and is available to parents in hard copy on request.
- The designated safeguarding lead is suitably trained and makes referrals to the local authority when necessary. He ensures that all staff are trained appropriately and are briefed on particular aspects of child protection. As a result, the school has a strong safeguarding culture.

- Leaders have ensured that pupils are trained about how to keep safe, including when online. However, they are aware there is more work needed to raise pupils' awareness of the risks they may face from extremism or radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching staff know their pupils well and use this knowledge to carefully plan learning based on what pupils know, understand and can do. Teaching staff use their strong subject knowledge particularly well in topic work. Specialist teachers prepare pupils well for public examinations. As a result, pupils make good progress and gain suitable qualifications.
- Teachers' expectations are high, especially with respect to pupils' personal and social development. Their expectations of what pupils can achieve academically are rising.
- Teachers help pupils to develop their functional skills in literacy and numeracy at a rate appropriate to each pupil's stage of development. Mathematics is taught especially well, with pupils able to undertake GCSE examinations. Consequently, most pupils are able to use and apply their mathematical knowledge correctly, for example when measuring distances and volumes. The teaching of reading is not as well developed.
- Academic teaching helps pupils to develop routines and understand boundaries. This is augmented by informal teaching where this meets the pupils' needs. For example, through 'bush craft' lessons pupils are able to apply their scientific knowledge to identify plants and animals.
- Teaching staff develop pupils' personal and social skills in a variety of settings, including at break and lunch times. This is a strength of the school which underpins pupils' holistic development.
- Teaching staff accurately assess pupils' attainment both in their academic learning and in their physical health, living skills, forming relationships, staying safe, making choices and expressing themselves. The school's assessment framework is especially effective in evaluating pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding when they join the school. This is then used effectively to track and monitor pupils' progress and informs teachers' planning.
- Pupils show an enjoyment in their learning. They especially enjoy work on science projects, such as understanding about animal adaptation in Antarctica.
- The presentation of pupils' work is improving. Teaching staff pay specific attention to pupils' fine motor skills in art, woodwork and handcraft (textiles). This is resulting in much more precise handwriting by the pupils.
- Homework is used effectively to develop pupils' skills. Teachers use the individual education plans (IEPs) to help parents better understand what their child is learning. Additionally, parents are provided with clear information annually about their children's progress and the areas that need to be worked on.
- Pupils benefit from a wide-ranging curriculum, including extra-curricular activities and a rich mix of visits in which pupils can build on the skills they have learned in school; for example the use of money when shopping. The recent whole-school trip on a narrowboat had significant positive impact on pupils' development.

- Teaching assistants play an important part in pupils' personal development and are now integrating many therapies into lessons. However, on occasion, they do not support academic learning effectively and so time is lost.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are keen to take on leadership roles and carry out their duties diligently, such as being 'register monitors'. Older pupils make the arrangements for meetings and undertake some administrative duties. This contributes to their preparation when they leave the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is interwoven through the curriculum. The Christian ethos and values, along with the principles of the Steiner Waldorf education, are an intrinsic part of the school culture. Staff ensure that pupils have a good awareness of other faiths, including Islam and Buddhism. Pupils enjoy the celebrations of festivals, such as Eid al-Fitr.
- Pupils enjoy their sport. They play rounders, basketball and a range of other sports enthusiastically. The school grounds are well furnished with play equipment, including climbing equipment and a trampoline, which pupils use as part of their daily exercise.
- Teaching staff have prepared pupils well for some of the risks they may encounter online and those they may face when they are in the community. During visits, pupils are taught road safety and an awareness of 'stranger danger'. However, relatively little work has been done to raise pupils' awareness of the risks from extremism and radicalisation.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils show good manners to each other, adults and visitors. They welcome visitors warmly.
- Pupils play well together at break and lunchtime. They engage in team games with other pupils, enjoy walks in the grounds with staff members and enjoy eating lunch together in the various dining rooms across the site.
- The environment is stimulating and supports pupils' learning well. The extensive outdoor space is particularly well used and, across the site, there is a calm and orderly atmosphere.
- Leaders maintain a record of incidents of poor behaviour and the sanctions used. The number of incidents of misbehaviour has been high in the past but has fallen dramatically this academic year. The need for physical intervention has similarly reduced. This is a result of teachers giving greater thought to pupils' needs when planning learning. A small number of staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire still have concerns about the behaviour of some pupils. Leaders are aware of this and have plans in place to continue to improve behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance is below the level typically seen nationally. This is disproportionately affected by the long-term absence of a small number of pupils. Staff continue to work

with these pupils and their families to improve attendance. Leaders have ensured that specialists in educational psychology and in child and adolescent mental health are involved. School staff maintain regular contact with these families to ensure that the pupils are safe.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils make the progress that is expected of them, with some making accelerated progress. Appropriate targets which cross both academic and personal development are set, and it is against these that progress is measured. For a few pupils, there is some regression in a small number of aspects of the curriculum. Due to their complex needs, most pupils are working well below age-related expectations.
- While rates of progress are good for all pupils, they are strongest for the younger pupils. This is particularly the case in English. Progress in mathematics is strong for all pupils.
- Where pupils have the potential to achieve recognised qualifications, the school adequately prepares pupils for formal assessment and public examinations, including entry-level qualifications, unit awards, pre-vocational qualifications and GCSE.
- The most able pupils are suitably challenged. They gain qualifications at appropriate levels.
- Older pupils benefit from individual careers guidance and advice from an independent, impartial adviser. This helps pupils choose vocational training routes that interest them and where they can succeed. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Children who are looked after make at least the same, and often better, progress than their classmates.

Sixth-form provision

Good

- The school operates a fully integrated sixth form in the school as students are grouped by their stage of development rather than by age. Nonetheless, leaders have ensured that the provision for students' academic progress, development of life skills and personal development are incorporated in students' 16 to 19 study programmes.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes meet requirements. They are especially effective in developing students' mathematical skills and preparing students for further training or employment. However, students do not have sufficient experience of working in environments outside of the school environment.
- Teachers use a wide range of techniques, including therapeutic approaches, to settle students so they are ready to learn. Teachers make good use of the resources on the school site, for example in creating plays, to help develop students' self-confidence. However, some students would benefit from further support to ensure that they learn to read effectively.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of each student's needs, plan activities and target support precisely. However, they do not have a clear oversight of the programmes of

study or track students' progress rigorously enough to be fully effective in planning provision for these students.

- Students receive timely, independent careers advice and guidance. This starts early in the transition period before the student leaves the school. Leaders recognise that there is a need to ensure that there are back-up plans in place should an intended arrangement fail.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. Increasingly, students have better control of their own actions. The number of incidents of misbehaviour has fallen rapidly.
- Sixth-form students are well prepared for their next steps. The vast majority continue on to further education or training where they continue to experience considerable success and complete their courses.

School details

Unique reference number	109353
DfE registration number	803/6000
Inspection number	10026035

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Thornleigh Camphill Communities Limited
Chair	Rosie Phillpot
Headteacher	Paul Gawdan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£74,391
Telephone number	01454 412 194
Website	www.sheilingschool.org.uk
Email address	mail@sheilingschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–5 December 2013

Information about this school

- The Sheiling School is an independent, co-educational special school. It is registered for pupils who have moderate and severe learning difficulties. Many pupils have one or more additional need, including autistic spectrum disorder, sensory impairment and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan and have been placed at the school by their local authority.
- The proprietor, Thornleigh Camphill Communities Limited, is a registered charity. Until March 2017, it was known as Camphill Communities Thornbury Limited. This change of name has not been notified to the registration authority.
- In April 2017, the trust board established a governing body for The Sheiling School. Previously, the board of trustees of the charity assumed this responsibility.
- The school's educational philosophy follows the principles of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. This incorporates the use of therapeutic techniques to support pupils' development and encourages pupils to develop independence skills. The school has a Christian ethos.
- The school shares the site with a children's home operated by the same provider. Both the school and the children's home are overseen by the CEO with a headteacher taking responsibility for the leadership of the school.
- The previous standard inspection was in December 2013 and there have been no significant changes since that inspection.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed lessons in all classes and looked at pupils' work from subjects across the curriculum. The headteacher and assistant headteacher joined the inspectors for all of these activities.
- Meetings were held with the CEO, headteacher (who is also the designated safeguarding lead), assistant headteacher, middle leaders, three governors and the head of training, therapies and development. Inspectors spoke with staff throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on pupils' attainment and progress, pupils' education, health and care plans, and individual education plans. The school's plans for improvement, notes of visits made by governors, behaviour logs, the admissions register and attendance reports were scrutinised. Inspectors also took into account staff performance management information, examples of reports to parents and records relating to safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils during visits to classes and at social times.
- The views of the 11 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the comments made by parents were taken into account. Additionally, the comments made by one parent by telephone were considered.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the children's home by Ofsted. A separate report has been published for the inspection of the children's home.

Inspection team

Iain Freeland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jonathan Dyer

Her Majesty's Inspector

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