

School report

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Inspection of Sheiling School (Thornbury)

Thornbury Park, Thornbury, Bristol, BS35 1HP

Inspection dates: 10–12 March 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Sheiling School (Thornbury) was founded on the Steiner philosophy of education. It has adapted what it teaches well to suit the needs of pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

Staff treat pupils with respect and dignity. They choose learning activities to fit pupils' interests and aptitudes. Over time, pupils feel comfortable with their teachers and enjoy the lessons they prepare for them.

Many pupils find it difficult to build relationships with other people. Staff use creative activities to develop pupils' personal skills well. They agree ambitious milestones for pupils to achieve. These challenging targets stretch pupils' emotional reserves and help them to grow.

Most pupils' previous experience of education has been frustrating. When pupils join the school their attitude to education is often negative. Their behaviour can be aggressive. Staff provide therapies that gradually help pupils to build their self-esteem. This helps pupils to regulate their own behaviour.

Staff take any incidents of bullying seriously and deal them swiftly. They aim to restore relationships between pupils as fast as possible. The school keeps pupils safe. It provides pupils with a high level of support and supervises them closely.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The headteacher sets a positive example for everyone in the school community. He is ambitious for every pupil. He has set in place a new leadership structure over the last year. As a result, senior leaders' responsibilities are well defined. Staff understand who is accountable for what.

Governors have a vision of blending the school's traditions with new ideas to produce a curriculum that is tailored to pupils' individual needs. Along with senior leaders, the headteacher has revised the curriculum so that key ideas are identified. These ideas are taught in a sequence that builds pupils' knowledge. For example, in lessons covering ideas in science, pupils are taught how to think scientifically and plan investigations.

Leaders place a high priority on reading. Storytelling and reading are every-day experiences for pupils. Staff are well trained in teaching phonics. Consequently, they are able to help pupils of all ages, especially those who have been unsuccessful in learning to read at an earlier age.

The curriculum is well-planned. For example, teachers' medium-term planning in mathematics is well ordered. Teachers present mathematical ideas using a wide

variety of methods, often using rhyme or role play to help pupils understand. Staff are adept at helping pupils who fear making mistakes to overcome their anxieties.

Teachers meet regularly to share ideas with each other. These meetings help teachers to improve their skills but, they do not bring in new ideas from other settings efficiently.

Senior leaders have devised a framework for assessing pupils' social and emotional development. This helps teachers to plan pupils' next steps. Even so, leaders recognise that their system for assessing pupils' academic understanding needs further development.

The school has had difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified staff over the last six months. Consequently, there is some variation in the implementation of the curriculum across the school.

Over time, the great majority of pupils improve their ability to think and act independently. Their behaviour improves. They require less and less help from adults. As a result, they become better able to concentrate and learn.

Teachers take time to listen to pupils. For example, at the start of each day they encourage pupils to share their thoughts and feelings. Pupils feel valued. All staff contribute to pupils' social development. Pupils and staff eat lunch together. This helps to build pupils' social skills.

Pupils enjoy the chance to take part in plays and festivals. These events enhance pupils' cultural and spiritual awareness. They help pupils understand the rhythm of the year.

Parents back the school. They say the school provides strong support to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One parent's comment was typical of many, 'The school is a very caring and nurturing environment. Staff care deeply for the pupils, many of whom have very challenging needs.'

Therapists and other staff help pupils to understand their own feelings. For example, speech and language therapy helps pupils to express their feelings and so better manage their emotions. This helps pupils to know what to do when they feel anxious. However, some less experienced learning support assistants do not have a broad enough repertoire of techniques for helping pupils to stay calm and learn well.

Senior leaders carefully craft the sixth-form curriculum to fit students' abilities. Sixth-form staff work well as a team. This has helped to overcome staff shortages. Teachers successfully develop skills that will help students when they leave. These are directly linked to pupils' EHC plans.

The sixth form has strong links with the local community. As a result, sixth-form students have many opportunities to develop employability skills. For example, they

work as volunteers for local organisations and complete placements in charity shops. Students receive appropriate careers advice and guidance.

Governors are suitably experienced, skilful and committed to their roles. However, they have not listened to staff views closely enough. Along with senior leaders, they have misjudged the strength of feeling that recent staffing shortages have caused. As a result, morale among some staff is low.

The proprietor and governors reacted swiftly to the findings of the material change inspection in November 2019. They have followed the action plan they submitted to the department for education. Better systems are now in place for checking that the requirements of the independent school standards are met. All of the standards are now fully met. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders are fully aware of pupils' vulnerabilities. They are knowledgeable and experienced in leading safeguarding. Staff receive safeguarding training during their induction. This is followed up by regular training and reminders. Consequently, there is a vigilant safeguarding culture at the school.

Staff help pupils to recognise the risks they face. The curriculum builds pupils' understanding of how to deal with these risks. Staff communicate with a wide range of agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the help they need at times of crisis.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Senior leaders have not provided sufficient training for learning support assistants and assistant teachers. A minority of these staff feel ill-equipped to help pupils with particular needs. Senior leaders need to make sure that all staff have sufficient training to feel confident in helping pupils with complex needs.
- Governors and senior leaders have underestimated the impact that staff absences have on those staff who remain. Consequently, some staff feel overwhelmed by their workload. Governors must follow through with their very recent proposals to change working practices and improve communication within the staff body.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	109353
DfE registration number	803/6000
Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10121019
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	38
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Thornleigh Camphill Communities Ltd
Chair	Anthony Nowlan
Headteacher	Dean Frances Hawksley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£80,266
Telephone number	01454 412194
Website	www.sheilingschool.org.uk
Email address	mail@sheilingschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–22 June 2017

Information about this school

- The school follows the Steiner Waldorf educational philosophy. It provides education and therapeutic care for pupils with SEND.
- All pupils are placed at the school by their local authority. Pupils have social, emotional and mental health difficulties, moderate learning difficulties or profound learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The proprietor runs a children's home on the same site. Both the school and the children's home are overseen by the chief executive officer.
- The headteacher of the school was appointed in February 2019. He was previously the deputy headteacher.
- In autumn 2019, the school asked the department for education to remove boarding provision from its registration. This request was accepted. The school is no longer registered for residential provision.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school has 38 pupils on roll. This exceeds the maximum number of pupils it is registered to admit.
- The previous standard inspection took place in June 2017. At that time the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- Last year, the school asked the department for education to change the maximum number of pupils it is registered to admit. An inspection took place in November 2019 to ascertain if this material change to the school's registration was appropriate. This inspection found that the school did not meet the independent school standards.
- The department for education subsequently required the school to submit an action plan to describe how it would rectify the deficiencies. In January 2020 the action plan was judged to be acceptable by Ofsted.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

During the inspection we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at the previous inspection.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: The school meets all the requirements of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection.
- Further information about this part of the inspection is available in the annex of this report.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer, headteacher and senior leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietorial body, the chair of the board of governors and one other governor.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in reading, mathematics, English and science. In each of these subjects, inspectors met with teachers, considered curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and considered pupils' work.
- The lead inspector spoke with the designated safeguarding leader, scrutinised safeguarding documents including records of pre-employment checks, records of safeguarding referrals and considered information about staff safeguarding training.
- The lead inspector scrutinised communications from representatives of the local authorities that commission places for pupils at the school.
- The inspection of the school was aligned with an unannounced inspection of the children's home at the same time.

Inspection team

Paul Williams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b), 11, 12

- At the material change inspection in November 2019, the inspector found that senior leaders' self-evaluation lacked rigour. Senior leaders had not shown sufficient urgency to act on the school's fire risk assessments. In one area of the school buildings fire doors had not been fitted even though this had been identified as a requirement many months earlier. This lack of action had the potential to put pupils at risk.
- Inspection evidence shows that the fire doors have now been fitted as required.
- Senior leaders have arranged for regular external scrutiny of the school's health and safety provision. A rigorous system for ensuring fire risk control measures are maintained is in place.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1)–23(1)(c), 24(1)–24(1)(b), 24(2), 28(1)–28(1)(d), 28(2)–28(2)(b)

- In November 2019 the inspector found several deficiencies in the premises. The toilet facilities in some areas of the school did not meet the requirements. The medical room, although generally suitable for its purpose, did not contain washing facilities. The water supply from some taps was too hot and so posed a scalding risk to pupils. As a result, the school's premises did not meet the independent school standards.
- Senior leaders' action to remedy each of these deficiencies was confirmed at this inspection. A sink with hot and cold water has been installed in the medical room. Temperature regulator valves have been fitted to the hot water supply so that the water temperature from the taps is controlled effectively. Suitable signs have been fitted to toilet doors to ensure that separate facilities are set aside for staff and for pupils.
- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34–34(c)

- At the previous inspection senior leaders' self-evaluation processes lacked rigour. As a result, the school failed to meet all of the independent school standards.
- Inspection evidence shows that in late November 2019, in response to the previous inspection, the school's governing body agreed a new system for self-evaluation against the requirements of the independent school standards. Extra

checks and monitoring processes were introduced. This action has ensured that senior leaders' self-evaluation is now accurate.

- The standards in these paragraphs are met.

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