



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THORNTON COLLEGE

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Thornton College

Full Name of School	Thornton College		
DCSF Number	825/6010		
EYFS Number	EY306768		
Registered Charity Number	247358		
Address	Thornton College Convent of Jesus and Mary Thornton Milton Keynes Buckinghamshire MK17 0HJ		
Telephone Number	01280 812610		
Fax Number	01280 824042		
Email Address	office@thorntoncollege.com		
Head	Miss A T Williams		
Chair of Governors	Sister Judith Mary RJM		
Age Range	3 to 16		
Total Number of Pupils	416		
Gender of Pupils	Girls		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	5-11:	151
	3-5 (EYFS):	11-16:	227
Number of Day Pupils	367	Capacity for flexi-boarding:	10
Number of Boarders	Total:	49	
	Full:	25	Weekly: 24
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection date/EYFS	09 Feb 2010 to 10 Feb 2010		
Final (team) visit	08 Mar 2010 to 10 Mar 2010		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. It consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in February 2006.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of boarding was not carried out in conjunction with the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general. The full Ofsted report refers to an inspection in January 2010 and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Inspection reports/Boarding schools.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Thornton College is situated in a rural location within a few miles of Buckingham and Milton Keynes. The Congregation of the Religious Order of Jesus and Mary founded Thornton College in 1917 and the Sisters continue to play an active role in the daily life and management of the school. Members of the congregation are the Trustees of the school and serve on the governing body. A community of Sisters lives within the main house and provide daily support for both staff and pupils. Although the school is a Catholic foundation, children are welcomed from many different denominations and faiths. The pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds.
- 1.2 The school caters for 416 pupils including an attached Nursery for 38 boys and girls from three to four years. There are 151 girls in the junior school and 227 girls in the senior school. The school has 25 full boarders and 24 weekly boarders. The majority of pupils come from the local area with a number of boarders from overseas. The Nursery, junior and senior schools occupy the same campus and are departments within the main school.
- 1.3 The school aims to educate young people to meet the challenges of life courageously, to use their talents to the full, and to live the values of Christ's Gospel. They aim to enable pupils to discover their true potential and to work towards their full development in an environment where pupils will be happy and where they will strive for excellence.
- 1.4 The school no longer enters pupils for national tests for eleven year olds. It enters pupils for GCSE examinations. Overall, the ability profile of the school is above the national average. The school has identified 46 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and 23 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Ninety pupils are receiving specialist learning support from the school. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs funded by a local authority.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL AND ACTION POINTS

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The pupils at Thornton College are well educated and the school fully meets its mission statement 'to educate young people to meet the challenges of life courageously, to use their talents to the full and to live the values of Christ's Gospel'. An outstanding educational experience is provided for the pupils and enables them to achieve excellence in areas of academic study, attitudes to learning and personal development. Teachers are dedicated to the success of their pupils and achieve high standards through an excellent range of teaching methods, careful planning and enthusiasm that makes lessons exciting. Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Pupils of all abilities make good and sometimes excellent progress but more could be done to stretch the most able and the potential for using information and communication technology (ICT) is not always realised. The curriculum allows pupils a good range of subjects with excellent provision for religious education (RE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The extra-curricular provision fosters an interest in creative and sporting activity. The excellent behaviour of the pupils and the respect they show for their teachers, combined with their interest in learning, are major factors in their level of achievement.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is outstanding. An ethos of care, respect, and service, expressed through the faith life of the school, influences the personal development of every pupil. Pupils develop the qualities of consideration, fairness, integrity and respect for both themselves and others. They have an excellent appreciation of, and respect for, the culture and nature of other faiths and nationalities, as well as an awareness of the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. They are responsible young people with excellent social skills and enjoy happy and friendly relationships with each other and their teachers. Boarding education makes a good contribution to the personal development of those living in the school. Arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent. The pupils feel safe, cherished and cared for. The school has appropriate and effective policies in place with regard to safeguarding, health and safety and anti-bullying. Pupils clearly have confidence in these policies and the staff who administer them.
- 2.3 The quality of governance and leadership is outstanding and has created a special community where pupils and staff are happy, proud of their achievements, strive for excellence and care for and look out for each other. In all respects the trustees and governors discharge their responsibilities fully. The strong leadership provides a high quality of education and is effective in fulfilling the aims of the school. The trustees and governors together with the leadership team have a clear insight into the needs of the school and plan successfully for its future. The school has good links with parents and meets the requirements for the communication of policies and documents. They have due regard for all of the regulations required for safeguarding children and have been successful in making sure the recommendations of the previous report have been met.

2.(b) Action points**(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003, as subsequently amended and the Childcare Act 2006.

(ii) Recommended action

- 2.4 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Ensure all teachers across the junior and senior school integrate a programme of extension tasks into their schemes of work to challenge the more gifted and talented pupils.
 2. Continue to develop and embed into the curriculum the use of information and communication technology.
 3. Ensure that the links between observation, assessment and planning are clearly and consistently documented throughout the EYFS.
 4. Develop stronger co-ordination in the EYFS between Nursery and Reception as a single Foundation Stage unit.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

- 3.1 Over the last three years for which comparative data is available, results in national tests at age seven have been similar when compared with the national average for maintained primary schools and at age eleven, results over the last three years have been high when compared with the national average for all maintained primary schools. Performance at GCSE, over the last three years has been excellent when compared with the national average for pupils in all maintained schools.
- 3.2 In both the junior and senior schools pupils make good and often exceptional progress in relation to their ability profile which is in line with the national average up to Year 4 and above the national average in Years 5 to 11.
- 3.3 The pupils are well educated achieving high standards in relation to their abilities fulfilling the school's aim to provide a community where young people will strive for excellence in all that they do. The pupils are well educated and the school's aim, to provide a community where they will strive for excellence in all that they do, is fulfilled. Ability is monitored effectively using standardised tests. Pupils from overseas and those with LDD achieve well in GCSE. Those pupils for whom English is an additional language are entered for the Cambridge language examinations up to the Certificate of Advanced English and achieve remarkable results. Year 10 pupils achieve exceptionally well in the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualification body and other commendable results are achieved in national tests in music, dance and drama. Some pupils also achieve county and regional standards in a number of sporting activities.
- 3.4 In all year groups pupils have a thorough knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They have excellent skills in reading and literacy and they take pride in the presentation and organisation of their work. The pupils are articulate and confident communicators especially in public speaking. Levels of numeracy are good throughout the school. They have a reasonable level of information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Their excellent social skills allow them to work well together both in and out of the classroom and they are able to work independently when given the opportunity, especially in problem solving and practical tasks. Many have talent in the creative subjects as seen in the imaginative art and design technology work around the school. Junior children enjoy the opportunity to be imaginative, especially in lessons such as music where their skills are impressive. Pupils are enthusiastic in the sporting activities and have an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of movement in dance.
- 3.5 The pupils take responsibility for their work and have a real desire to do their best in the classroom where they work with enthusiasm and commitment. They enjoy learning in an environment which is happy and encourages and respects their efforts. Their good behaviour, respect for their teachers and interest in learning is a major factor in their excellent level of achievement.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

- 3.6 The curriculum of the school is good and it is effective in its coverage of all the main subjects. It is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs and it supports the school aim to develop the whole person. The junior school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that is well suited to pupils of all abilities and in the senior school the curriculum expands to offer suitable courses for the many interests and talents of the older pupils. In keeping with the school's foundation, the provision of religious education has a high profile. Extra-curricular activities strengthen the curriculum across the whole school.
- 3.7 A curriculum review is carried out annually by the senior leadership team and a recent focus has been the junior curriculum and how it is delivered. Changes from classroom teaching to specialist teaching in Years 4, 5 and 6 have allowed a greater depth of subject knowledge to be provided. A review of the senior school has resulted in offering GCSE dance and physical education as options in Year 10 and the language curriculum has been broadened to include Spanish in Year 8. There is little provision for drama across the school as a whole which limits access to performing art skills and the school is aware of the desire of pupils to study food technology. Both of these subjects now form part of the curriculum review process. In response to a recommendation in the previous report, attention has been given to the further use of ICT and, by introducing broadband and interactive whiteboard technology, the school is making steady progress. In the parent questionnaire a small number of parents raised concern about learning support provision but inspection found that the support for those pupils who are on the LDD register is good. There is a process which monitors the progress of these pupils across the academic year and modifies the special support they receive where necessary. Individual educational plans are simple in format and focused on individual need. The profile of the gifted and talented pupils has risen considerably and, although these pupils have been identified, the introduction of extension work and activities has not yet been fully developed. The specialist support for EAL pupils is extensive and has resulted in them making excellent progress in English language skills. An excellent personal, social and health education (PSHE) is delivered through dedicated lessons, the religious studies programme and the ASDAN scheme for life skills. Careers education supports GCSE choices and raises awareness of future employment opportunities.
- 3.8 The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities which encompass opportunities for the pupils to develop interests in sporting, cultural, creative and academic spheres. The school fields successful sports teams and undertakes comprehensive and demanding drama productions such as the forthcoming production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Music is well represented and participation in school choirs is strong. The school makes a conscious effort to raise the pupils' awareness of the wider community and their responsibility within it. Involvement in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the ASDAN Scheme forge strong community links and the school is committed to extensive charity work.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.9 The quality of teaching is good, with some that is outstanding, and fulfils the school's aim to enable pupils to discover their true potential and to work towards their full development. Teachers have thorough subject knowledge and they have excellent relationships with their pupils.
- 3.10 The most effective lessons are characterised by an understanding of individual abilities, and planning of different tasks to meet individual needs promotes good and sometimes excellent progress. Enthusiastic teaching engenders excitement, and is marked by an excellent range of teaching methods, with opportunities for independent work. In the junior school interest was fostered through effective questioning. In an outstanding lesson in the senior school, pupils were prepared to take risks and guess both the pronunciation and meanings of new words based on their previous knowledge, confident in the positive response of their teacher. In less successful lessons, pupils did not have opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge to tasks which were not sufficiently matched to the age and ability of the pupils. A very slow pace sometimes led to a loss of concentration. There are opportunities for pupils to undertake interesting independent work and some excellent research projects have been completed.
- 3.11 The majority of teaching is well planned with clear and appropriate objectives. Provision for pupils with LDD is good but those who are more gifted academically or talented are not so well served. The provision of different tasks to suit pupils' varying needs and abilities was seen in one lesson where both LDD and very able pupils received appropriate work, resulting in excellent learning for the whole ability range. In the majority of lessons, however, the needs of the more able pupil were left to chance in the expectation that they would extend themselves in the outcome of their written work.
- 3.12 Teaching is suitably resourced and the library is well stocked to aid reading and study skills. Interactive whiteboards are a useful addition and a start has been made to improve teacher expertise by arranging some in-house training sessions which offer a growth point for the sharing of good practice. The use of ICT has been mapped across the curriculum as recommended in the last report but, except for word processing, few examples of pupils applying their ICT skills were seen in lessons or in pupils work.
- 3.13 National standardised tests are being used to monitor academic progress across the whole school and to set targets in individual subjects. This good initiative is in the early stages of development and has started to improve the planning of lessons. Most of the marking of pupils' work is regular and thorough. The best marking included encouraging comments and suggestions for ways in which the work could be improved. An impressive amount of helpful oral feedback was given by teachers during lessons and was accompanied by a liberal use of praise. Reports and interim report cards issued every half term are informative and useful in tracking progress.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The pupils' engagement in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the school is outstanding. The school aims to enable pupils to grow in the knowledge and love of God and to spread the knowledge of the Gospel in the wider community. The pupils' response in this area meets this aim in every manner.
- 4.2 Pupils' outstanding spiritual development is evident in their respect for the core values of Christianity and they show how they consider them to be important in the way they conduct their lives. Their behaviour clearly demonstrates that the pupils have respect both for themselves and for others. Pupils speak passionately of their involvement in chapel services and assemblies which they feel are an important time for them in their school day. The chapel itself is a strong spiritual resource and a place used by them frequently for reflection. An excellent Year 11 assembly given by the pupils addressed in an appropriate, reflective and humorous manner the issues of contentment, relative wealth and responsibility for the weak and the dispossessed. Pupils in junior chapel were keen to consider and value their individuality and the uniqueness of each of their friends.
- 4.3 The moral awareness of pupils is very strong. The pupils show a good appreciation of right and wrong along with the importance of fairness and justice. Pupils are strengthened in their beliefs and attitudes through their lively participation in discussion in their PSHE and RE lessons. Across all year groups, pupils take the opportunities provided to accept responsibilities within the school community, as an expression of their service to the school. Some pupils, however, felt that these were routine, and many were eager to make a more significant contribution to the life of the school through an active role, for example, within the school council. Almost all parents think the school inculcates good attitudes and values.
- 4.4 The social relationships enjoyed by pupils are likewise of outstanding quality. Good social development is demonstrated by the strong sense of community in the school and the integration of all age groups. Pupils are confident with their peers and with the school staff. They are welcoming to visitors and wonderful ambassadors for their school. They enjoy working co-operatively, both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities and they enjoy the excitement of healthy competition in house events. They are proud of one another's successes and commendations and awards in assembly receive genuine and enthusiastic applause. The pupils enthusiastically support many good causes going out into the community to help in many charitable organisations. They understand the workings of their local community and country through the challenges they successfully undertake in their ASDAN programme.
- 4.5 Pupils have a well developed understanding of other cultures. The international pupils who board at the college provide a good multicultural mix and pupils show a sensitive understanding of their traditions and tolerance of their beliefs. They undertake visits to cultural and religious centres across the region and write detailed and informed projects about their findings. Visitors to the school from overseas, or of different faiths, aim to broaden cultural understanding and make an important contribution to the school.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety. Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through developing healthy eating habits and taking regular exercise.

- 4.6 The contribution of arrangements for pupil welfare, health and safety is outstanding. An important aim of the school is to provide a happy and caring atmosphere with a strong sense of unity and purpose which the school achieves fully. The pastoral care is excellent due to the high quality of support and guidance provided by the staff. The form teachers play a pivotal role in the day to day delivery of care. They know their pupils well and maintain an excellent overview for their well being. The system is overseen with sensitivity by the deputy heads in both the junior and senior schools. The presence of the sisters of the Order living in the school provides another source of comfort and counselling and the homely atmosphere is greatly valued by the pupils. The pupils feel safe and supported. In the pupil questionnaires a few pupils did not agree that the school listened to their views and concerns, and they felt there was no adult or senior pupil who they could turn to with a problem. Throughout their visit inspectors could find no support for these views amongst pupils.
- 4.7 The school has excellent standards of behaviour which is clearly promoted by example in all lessons and by a consistent calm atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils in Year 6 described 'the look' from a teacher as being a sufficient reprimand and sometimes a quiet word is also given. The pupils feel the rewards and sanctions system is fair with a greater emphasis on reward rather than punishment. The pupils were not aware of any instances of bullying which had not been dealt with speedily and effectively. They had clear confidence in the school's structures and attitude towards this issue.
- 4.8 There are good policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the pupils. Clear and effective child protection policies and procedures are in place. All staff and governors have participated in the school's recent safeguarding training which included safer recruitment and internet safety. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective. The health and safety committee includes representative members from all appropriate areas of school and has a nominated governor. Detailed risk assessments are adhered to and are regularly reviewed. All necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken and the required fire prevention procedures are in place. The school received a report from the fire authority in June 2009 and all recommendations have been addressed. Day pupils and boarders benefit from a comfortable medical centre run by a health care professional. The school has a three year disability plan in operation and current access to buildings and toilets for the disabled is good.
- 4.9 In the senior pupils' and parents' questionnaires concerns were raised about the quality of food served at lunch. During the inspection, the choice of food on offer was nutritiously balanced with healthy options available and any racial or cultural tastes were taken into consideration. The inspection team found no evidence to support the concerns expressed by the parents and senior pupils. An excellent healthy living programme promoted through PSHE lessons and the pupils have good access to extensive grounds and facilities for exercise and sporting activities. The admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and correctly stored for the previous three years.

4.(c) The quality of boarding education

- 4.10 The boarding experience makes a good contribution to the school's aim of providing a happy environment where pupils can work towards their full development. A welcoming and truly inclusive environment is provided. The relationship between boarding staff and boarders is excellent. High standards of care are evident and sensitive support and counselling for personal problems is available if necessary. The quality of accommodation for boarders is comfortable and provides a secure atmosphere where pupils feel safe and well cared for. Study facilities are good and boarders have reasonable access to leisure and recreational facilities in the evenings and at weekends.
- 4.11 In the classrooms and the boarding houses, overseas pupils receive excellent support to develop their English language skills and to integrate with their fellow English pupils. Trips at weekends are varied for differing interests and a suitable range of activities is offered in school during their free time. The school grounds are a safe and beautiful facility for relaxation and play. There are good policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and ample opportunities are available to express their own opinions and report any issues or concerns. The majority of comments made by pupils and parents in their questionnaires were very positive about the provision made for the boarding community.
- 4.12 In the last boarding inspection, conducted by OFSTED two weeks before the ISI inspection, it was recommended that the school provide each boarder with a secure and accessible place for personal items and must ensure risk assessments are carried out on all weekend outings. The school is addressing these recommendations.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is outstanding. The management of Thornton College is overseen by effective trustees and governors who work hard together to deliver the aims of the school and to fully discharge their responsibilities. Six of the seven trustees are also members of the governing body. The remaining members of the governing body offer a wide range of local knowledge and professional expertise. A number of small committees successfully oversee key areas of the school such as boarding, safeguarding, curriculum, finance and health and safety.
- 5.2 Communication between the school and the governors and trustees is excellent and they are kept fully aware of important developments and issues. Meetings are frequent and the governing body carefully monitors and reviews policies and procedures. They are invited to all school events and are known well by the staff and pupils. At least one governor sits on all appointments of staff. Financial support is strong and is aided by an efficient bursary which enables wise investment to be made in new resources and accommodation. The recently opened and impressive new building of science laboratories and classrooms is of major benefit to the pupils. To fulfil their responsibilities in relation to recruitment, child protection, and all matters relating to health and safety many have undertaken specialised training. They have fulfilled all the health and safety matters recommended in the last inspection. They have improved the monitoring of traffic in the car park, improved the storage of chemicals, ensured safer movement of pupils in the science department and appropriate safety measures have been put in place for the fountain in the school grounds.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.3 Through outstanding leadership the school is delivering a high quality of education and is fulfilling its aims to provide an environment where pupils will be happy and where they will strive for excellence. Focused and decisive leadership promotes a clear vision to uphold the very highest standards whilst maintaining a warm and friendly community in a beautifully maintained environment
- 5.4 Effective direction and leadership of the whole school is supported fully by an experienced leadership team which includes representatives from both the junior and senior departments and the support staff. Although the school does not have a formal middle management level, the head and governors are aware of the need to consider increasing middle management roles to continue the efficiency of the school as it grows. Communication at all levels is excellent, contributing to the strong sense of community felt by staff, pupils and parents.
- 5.5 Thorough self evaluation is taking place with the headteacher working closely with the leadership team, bursar and governors. School documentation is current and excellent in its detail. School development planning is carefully linked to the school's aims and to staff appraisal. The school development plan has grown from questionnaires and discussions with parents, pupils and staff and gives excellent consideration in its detail to the needs of all departments. Educational monitoring and tracking is a current priority as is the introduction of more ICT provision to raise standards of achievement.

- 5.6 The school has recruited and retained motivated and hardworking staff who work as a close team and place the pupils at the centre of all that they do. To them, this school is a special place to work and they feel they are part of a supportive and caring family. Staff are very proud of their school and the achievements of the pupils. A member of staff is responsible for continuing professional development which demonstrates the school's level of commitment to training, which is thorough and plentiful. All staff are fully up-to-date with changes in the areas of safeguarding and child protection legislation. The administration and support staff of the school are efficient and friendly and are appreciated for their helpfulness to pupils and parents.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.7 The school maintains good relationships with parents in accordance with its aim to create a strong sense of unity with all those involved in the school. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, the majority of parents who responded agreed that communication is good and information about the school and its policies is readily available. All required policies are available on the website and updated regularly. Most parents were satisfied that the school handles well any concerns they have, although a small number of parents did identify this as an issue. The inspectors found that the system for handling concerns is efficient and found no evidence to suggest that concerns had not been addressed satisfactorily. All complaints handled in the last year have been resolved informally. No formal complaints from parents were recorded in the previous academic year.
- 5.8 The school has an informative internet website and good quality publications such as 'The Thornton News' and 'The Thornton Times' which include interesting articles and reviews as well as news. The head's letter home at the end of term keeps parents well informed of special events, trips, charity work and extra-curricular activities. Every opportunity is taken to share the success of the pupil's work with the parents. Informative booklets on separate sections of the school are provided and the parents' handbook is comprehensive in its coverage of important information. Clear and concise reports are issued twice a year and supplemented by half term interim report cards. Reports contain helpful comments about the pupils' attainment, skills and progress, and any areas for improvement. Useful parent evenings are held twice a year in the junior school and at least once a year in the senior school to give parents the opportunity to talk about their child's development with their teachers.
- 5.9 The vast majority of parents who answered the pre-inspection questionnaire were very positive about all aspects of the school and many complimentary remarks were added to express their pleasure with the education provided for their children. The majority of parents agreed that they are given many worthwhile opportunities and encouragement to become involved with the life and work of the school. Plentiful opportunities to be involved include sporting fixtures, concerts, drama productions and many other special events. Parents are invited to join the 'Friends of Thornton' who give valuable support to the school, most recently by raising funds to fully refurbish the school hall. Parental surveys are carried out to better understand their views about the education provided and any of their concerns or suggestions are noted by the leadership team as potential areas for improvement.

6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.1 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS in meeting the needs of the children is good with some outstanding features. Every child is valued and respected as an individual and, as a result, all children make very good progress regardless of their individual starting point. The local authority's Quality Assurance Award recognises the very good practice throughout the EYFS. Safeguarding procedures are rigorously implemented to ensure children's safety. Partnership with parents is very good with many parents giving up their time to share their experiences and expertise with the children. Parents are very happy with the feedback they receive regarding their child's progress and comment very favourably on the quality of the provision.

6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.2 Leadership and management is good with staff working well as a team, although Nursery and Reception are not consistently seen as a single unit within the foundation stage. Comprehensive policies are regularly reviewed to comply with current requirements and appropriate checks are made on new staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. Staff are well-qualified and there is a strong commitment to professional development. Effective risk assessments support daily checks to ensure that all facilities are safe. Additional risk assessments are carried out before outings. Self evaluation is good and involves all Foundation Stage staff. Priorities for future development are clearly set out in a statement of intent. Resources and staff deployment are well managed. Although a small number of parents think that too much homework is given in Reception, inspectors did not find any evidence of this.

6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.3 The quality of provision in the EYFS is good with some outstanding features. Stimulating and welcoming environments encourage children to explore through a wide range of free and structured play activities that are planned to meet the needs of all the children. There are many opportunities for children to be active, creative learners, especially in the Nursery and staff seize every opportunity to support and extend children's learning. Lessons in Reception are more directed by adults but still provide opportunities for children's active involvement, for example when replying to an invitation to a dinosaur's party. Excellent use of music, role play and puppets reinforces learning. Staff make good use of spontaneous and planned observations to gather evidence of children's learning and development. Links between observations, assessment and planning, however, are not clearly or consistently documented. The good quality of provision is mirrored in the before- and after-school care.

6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 6.4 Outcomes for children in the EYFS are outstanding. Children's social and emotional development is excellent. Progress is outstanding in all other areas of learning and development, with children achieving above national standards in relation to the Early Learning Goals. Children have a very positive attitude to learning. Independence is strongly developed with children helping to prepare snacks and wipe tables. Children are very confident in the use of ICT and thoughtful, kind and positive staff ensure that children respond well and feel valued in all that they do. Children have a very good understanding of classroom routines and the need to behave in a safe and responsible manner and are involved in creating rules for the playground. They develop very good hygiene practices, such as washing their hands before eating, and are able to explain the benefits of choosing healthy foods at snack and meal times.

Complaints since the last inspection

- 6.5 Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required any action to meet national requirements.

What the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietors and governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Maureen Bradley	Reporting inspector
Mr Larry Fairclough	Head, HMC school
Mrs Penny Austin	Head, IAPS school
Mr Robert Carlisle	Head, GSA school
Mrs Janet Huntly	Head of department, GSA school
Mrs Wendy Martin	Director of Studies, SHMIS school
Mr Chris Manville	Early Years Lead Inspector
Mrs Gill Pinchbeck	Head , IAPS Pre-prep school