

# INSPECTION REPORT

**INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A  
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002**

***REPORT REFERENCE NUMBER: SIS162A/2006-7/07***

Name of school:	Three Shires School
DfES number: FOCUS number:	891/6023 310
Inspection team:	Lead Inspector: Dr Roy Long Supporting Inspector: Mr Derek Coe Lay Inspector: Mr David Kilbey
Dates of inspection:	30 April to 3 May 2007

## CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

**Section A: Introduction and summary**  
**Section B: Compliance with regulations for registration**  
**Section C: The quality of organisation and management**

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Three Shires School	
Address of the school:	The Parrs, Lilac Grove Beeston NOTTINGHAM NG9 1PJ	
Telephone number:	0115 925 6965	
Fax number:	0870 950 2832	
Proprietor:	Trent Valley Education Trust	
Name of Chief Executive Officer:	Mr Michael Fowler	
Name of Senior Teacher:	Mr David Berry	
DfES number:	891/6023	
FOCUS number:	310	
Type of school:	Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust	
Age range of pupils and students:	11 to 18	
Gender of pupils:	Male and female	
Total number on roll:	Boys: 23	Girls: 33
(Full time)		
(Part time)	Boys: 0	Girls: 1
Number of post-16 students:	Boys: 5	Girls: 5
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:	None	
Type of inspection:	Section 162A of the Education Act 2002	
Inspection Team:	Lead Inspector:	Dr Roy Long
	Support Inspector:	Mr Derek Coe
	Lay Inspector:	Mr David Kilbey
Dates of inspection:	30 April to 3 May 2007	
Date of issue of this report:	May 2007	
Report reference number:	SIS/162A/2006-7/07	

## **PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection:**

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service (SIS) in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust (FLT) and agreed with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the regulations. The lay inspector also evaluated both the Trustees' stewardship of resources and the ethos of the school and reported on these in an internal report to the FLT; his findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

During their time in the school, the inspection team talked to Trustees, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Senior Teacher, members of the teaching staff and volunteers, and pupils and students. They also scrutinised paperwork, including pre-inspection questionnaires completed by parents and children, looked at a selection of pupils' and students' work, and spent two days observing the teaching and learning. The inspectors wish to place on record their thanks to everyone in the school for the warm welcome they were given and for the opportunities for professional discussion at all levels.

### **Information about the school:**

The Three Shires School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged 11 to 17 in the Beeston district of Nottingham. It is a school with a distinctively Christian character which is owned and maintained by the local assemblies of Brethren and is affiliated to the FLT. It draws its pupils and students from a wide catchment area which includes Derby, Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham. The school was originally established as a tutorial centre for pupils who were otherwise being educated at home, but has made the transition to being a full-time school and is now registered as such with the DfES. At the time of the inspection there were 56 pupils on roll, of whom 10 were students in Year 12. In addition, there is one part-time student who would normally be in Year 13, but who pursues studies with Year 12. The school is actively planning to increase its age range to 11 to 18 with the addition of provision for Year 13 students from September 2007.

### **Summary of main findings:**

Three Shires is a school which is characterised by good relationships and mutual respect between pupils and students, staff and trustees, and it has benefited from stable and consistent leadership by the CEO and the Senior Teacher. It provides its pupils and students with a broad and balanced curriculum. There is good quality teaching and learning, and, as a result, it has been successful in obtaining good results in external examinations. Although most work is thoroughly marked, there is some inconsistency in regard to assessment and the school needs to review how well its assessment policy is implemented. Pupils and students are hard working, and they are generally well behaved, polite and mutually supportive. Through its strong programme of citizenship

and personal, social and health education, pupils and students are able to gain a good understanding of the wider community and of social and political institutions. The school community treats the buildings with respect.

#### **NOTE ON THE TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS REPORT**

Throughout this report the word 'pupil' is used to describe young people in years 7 to 11. The word 'student' is used exclusively to describe those studying in year 12 and beyond.

#### **What the school does well:**

- it provides good quality teaching, which enables pupils and students to make good progress and to achieve well;
- it fosters good behaviour and mutual support between pupils and students;
- it contributes significantly to pupils' and students' development as responsible and mature young people; and
- it provides effectively for the welfare, health and safety of pupils and students.

#### **What the school must do to comply with the regulations:**

- it must ensure that it keeps full records of the qualifications and employment history of teachers and other members of staff;
- it must ensure that no area of the school compromises pupils' and students' health and safety; and
- it must ensure that parents know that they can request to see details of academic performance during the previous school year, including the results of any public examinations.

#### **What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002**

The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002.

#### **Next steps**

Although not a requirement, the school might like to consider the following suggestions as it continues to develop its provision:

- review the implementation of its assessment policy, so that there is more consistency between subjects;
- continue to develop its post-16 provision along the sensible lines that it has already adopted; and
- continue in its search for premises that are more suitable and better located.

## **Distribution of this report**

This report is being sent to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Senior Teacher of the school. The CEO is asked to ensure that copies are made available to parents of all pupils and students. In addition, it is being sent to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills through the Independent Schools Registration Team of the DfES, to the Trustees of the FLT and to its Regional Trustee, to members of the School Inspection Service (SIS) team, and to members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate at OFSTED charged with monitoring how the SIS conducts its inspections. The FLT has established a website upon which this and other similar inspection reports will be placed. Details can be found at the end of the report.

## **PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

### **1 The quality of education provided by the school**

#### **The quality of the curriculum**

Three Shires School provides its pupils and students with a curriculum that is broad and balanced and which meets the requirements of the current regulations. All pupils and students, including those with special educational needs (SEN) are enabled to make progress and achieve good results in public examinations.

As an independent school, Three Shires is not required to follow the National Curriculum (NC), but it seeks to follow it as far as it can. At present, subjects that are being taught to 11 - 16 year olds include English, mathematics, science, geography, history, modern languages (French and German), drama, music, citizenship, personal, social and health education (PSHE), Bible study, physical education (PE) and games. Elements of technology are also taught, but this curriculum area is less well developed, particularly for boys. Pupils in their last two years of compulsory education are also taught business studies, book-keeping and typewriting. Most subjects are examined at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) with some more able pupils taking these examinations earlier than the end of Year 11 before then embarking on more advanced work. In accordance with the principles of the FLT, information and communication technology is not taught in the school.

The PSHE programme is partly delivered through discrete lessons, but also through other subjects. During the present academic year, all pupils in Key Stage 3 have one period of PSHE per week, and it is intended that this provision will be extended into Key Stage 4 at the start of the academic year 2007-2008. The mapping of where and when PSHE topics occur in other subjects has been done very effectively. At the same time, it is intended to introduce into the school the new PSHE syllabus devised by the FLT.

The programmes of study for students in Year 12 are tailored to individual choices as far as possible. Essentially, these programmes comprise business-related education for about half of the week, and studies of a more general nature for the remainder. Externally-set examination opportunities at levels which are appropriate to each student are taken up wherever possible. As a result of the school's unsatisfactory experience in previous years with the British Technological Education Council (BTEC) National courses, the decision has been made to re-orientate the business-related work and the emphasis is now on advanced supplementary and advanced level (AS/AL) studies in company with the unitary Oxford, Cambridge and RSA exam board syllabuses. Outline plans of a sensible nature exist for the new provision for a Year 13 in September 2007. The transitional arrangements that are intended for the present Year 12, who are converting from a one year course of study begun in September 2006, and the curriculum plans for a two year course for those shortly to come into Year 12 have been planned with care and attention to detail.

In the delivery of the curriculum, good use is made of guidance provided by the National Curriculum (NC) and the FLT. Schemes of work exist for most subjects. The best of these are carefully structured and well detailed, with a clear indication as to what is being taught, and when, and with cross-curricular subject links clearly identified. In a minority of cases, schemes of work are merely photocopies of externally produced syllabus material and cannot be considered an adequate aid to teaching.

The quality of the recording of pupils' and students' work and progress is variable, as is the way that completed work is marked and assessed. A number of examples of good, or very good practice exist, but a greater consistency in planning, marking and recording would be beneficial.

The constraints imposed by a restricted accommodation base and the large number of part-time staff mean that timetabling is difficult, but, though not ideal, the pattern of subject allocation across the school week is generally acceptable. The time allocation for core subjects at Key Stage 3 and 4 is good, and this is reflected in the school's success in external examinations in English and mathematics in recent years. The time allocation for AS/AL subjects in Year 12 is only three hours, and the school needs to consider whether or not this is adequate.

Very good provision is made for the needs of individual pupils and students across the school. At present, there are no pupils with a statement of special educational need, but those with clearly identified needs are well-supported. The organisation of the support provided to individuals and the monitoring of progress is managed in an exemplary fashion. A well-equipped base room is provided for pupils with special needs. The school is diligent in identifying those pupils and students who are significantly able and provides opportunities for them to "fast-track" in their preparation for examinations. Individual talents are also recognised and many of these pupils and students play leading roles in the various productions put on by the school.

The setting and marking of homework is supported by a brief and concise policy, which is clearly stated in the school's *Handbook*. This recognises the significant part that out-of-school church activities play in the lives of pupils and students and seeks to provide a balanced approach to the amount of homework that should be set. The *Handbook* also provides a daily timetable for when different subjects should set homework for the respective year groups.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

During their time in the school, inspectors saw all or part of 24 lessons, covering most of the subjects taught in the school, including the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They saw lessons with every year group, although they were not able to see every teacher. Over 90% of the lessons seen were judged to be good, and within that percentage a small number were deemed to be very good. Despite some unevenness, there is an overall consistency in the quality of teaching and this has enabled pupils and students to be successful in their results in public examinations.

Teachers generally have a good knowledge of the subjects they teach, and they are successful in communicating this to their pupils and students. Lessons are usually carefully planned, take into account what has gone before, and are clear in what they want the pupils or students to achieve. In this way individual lessons are seen as part of a continuum of learning. The majority of pupils and students in the school are very well motivated and they usually respond thoughtfully to what is provided in the lessons. No poor behaviour was seen during the inspection, but it was clear from discussion with teachers that they have a range of strategies to deal with this, should it occur.

In the best lessons, there was clear evidence of very good practice. In an English lesson with Year 9, which aimed to identify features of good writing in a range of texts,

the aims of the lesson were shared with pupils from the beginning. The lesson had been thoroughly prepared, and considerable attention had been given to an effective use of the time available. The lesson started briskly, proceeded at a challenging pace, and concluded with a suitable review of what had taken place during the preceding 45 minutes. The lesson was characterised by strong and sympathetic relationships. The pupils were very skilfully drawn into the lesson, interacted very well with each other and with the teacher, stayed engaged throughout, and made thoroughly good progress in their knowledge and learning. They produced work of high quality, which was marked and assessed thoroughly and contained very good feedback from the teacher. Similarly, in a Year 12 citizenship lesson, dealing with campaigns and lobby groups, good attention had been given to the use of time and resources, and the structure of the lesson meant that students had extensive opportunities for whole group debate and discussion in pairs. There was a good debate on the rights and wrongs involved in the case studies with which they were presented, and clear evidence of the good foundations of learning that had been laid down in earlier years.

In some areas of the curriculum, the school makes use of volunteers who are drawn from the supporting community. These volunteers are not qualified teachers, and, although their contribution is generally satisfactory, there is some inconsistency. A good Year 12 current affairs lesson, which had been very adequately prepared, made positive use of time and resources. The teacher built on what had gone before by revising and consolidating what had been done in the previous lesson. Using the day's newspaper and a current affairs resource prepared by the FLT, there was stimulating discussion which included lively contributions from both the boys and the girls. Similarly, a Bible study lesson with year 10 effectively reinforced pupils' knowledge of the story of Joseph, placing it in the context of previous lessons on Abraham and Jacob and relating it to the subsequent ministry of Christ. The school does, however, need to give attention to securing professional help for the teaching of games. At present, all pupils and students have a games lesson together on Tuesday afternoons at a sports centre in Derby, to which they travel by coach. Boys and girls are taught separately by volunteers, and although the organisation is generally satisfactory better use could be made of time. Due attention is paid to health and safety issues during activities on the field and track. During the session observed by inspectors, some time was lost for the boys because the nature of the activities (400 metres races and throwing the discus) meant that, inevitably, many boys had to wait around for their turn. A more judicious use of personnel could have meant that participants were kept more active than they were. The school might profitably seek for the use of a professional coach to help with these activities.

Assessment of pupils' and students' work is satisfactory overall. All teachers mark work regularly, but there is some unevenness and this needs to be addressed. At its most basic, marking is limited to ticks or marks, with very little extended comment. At its best there is evidence of detailed constructive comments which help pupils to improve and make progress. Classroom practice is, however, generally very good. Teachers know their pupils and students very well, give them oral feedback during lessons, and frequently discuss their work with them. The school makes good use of tests, including some devised by the school and some standardised tests, including those related to the NC. Close attention to the results of these means that progress can be monitored and help channelled to pupils and students who need it.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **2 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Three Shires School is particularly successful in providing for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils and students, and it enables them to develop into well rounded and poised young people who appreciate the value of hard work, understand the importance of accepting responsibility, and who enjoy good relationships with their peers and with others.

All of the pupils and students in the school come from the Brethren communities in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, and, when they come to the school, most of them already know each other through church and family connections. They participate in a wide range of spiritual and social activities together outside school, and the school uses these things as a basis to develop further their understanding of their distinctive religious beliefs. This is done particularly through Bible study lessons, which are taught by volunteers from the local Brethren communities, but also through the overall ethos of the school, which is positive and supporting.

Over the past two years, the school has developed a strong PSHE syllabus, and along with this has been particularly successful in developing a high quality programme of citizenship education. Together, these give its pupils and students a good understanding of the diversity of the wider community and of the nature and function of the social and political institutions at a local, national, and international level. Recently, there have been a number of outside visits which have reinforced this understanding, including visits to the Nottingham City Council House, the local Magistrates' Court, the Houses of Parliament, and the local Fire Brigade headquarters. Other visits, such as those to the Imperial War Museum and to Lincoln Castle, help to bring alive the history which pupils and students study in class.

The school is aware that it exists within a wider community that is very diverse and has people from many different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. It has drawn up a brief, but very clear, policy covering the areas of race relations and racial harmony. It recently hosted a student of Ghanaian background who gave pupils and students an insight into his own cultural heritage, and this produced some interesting work which is on display in the school.

All pupils and students are expected to behave responsibly, and, for the most part, they do so. Year 12 students have specific responsibilities to help the school run smoothly, such as acting as prefects, organising House teams, and running the school tuck shop. The tuck shop is a particular success, and the students who run it do so in a commendably professional way, which reflects what they have learned in their vocationally orientated courses in Year 12. With the assistance of other year groups, Year 10 pupils organise an annual Open Day.

The Trustees and professional staff of the school have worked hard to ensure that pupils and students take a full part in the life of the school. They recently organised a "Consultation Morning" which involved a visit by a lecturer from the University of Nottingham. The morning, which included personal interviews and group discussion led by students from Year 12, looked particularly at the school rules, the discipline procedure, and the House system. They subsequently reported back to the Trustees and teachers, and, as a result, Year 12 are now re-writing the school rules, with the agreement of the rest of the school, and it is intended to establish a school council.

Music and drama are successfully used in the school to develop young people's self-confidence and social awareness. During the time of the inspection, pupils from Key Stage 3 were in the final throes of rehearsing for a production of *Toad of Toad Hall*, and the two members of the inspection team were privileged to watch the final dress rehearsal before the whole school. The casting had been very skilfully and carefully done so as to ensure that pupils from each year group had a chance to play leading roles. It was significant that older pupils and students, as well as former members of the school, took a leading part in providing the infrastructure of sound and lighting technology.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3 The welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The Trustees have been assiduous in ensuring that the school safeguards the welfare, health and safety of its pupils and students. They have been constructive in their use of guidance provided by both the DfES and the FLT and have developed policies which cover all aspects required by the current regulations. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that these policies are adhered to.

The school maintains an admission register and its daily attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations of 1995. The catchment area of the school is large and the many pupils and students have to travel long distances each day. At present, extensive road works in the area can mean that the coach and minibuses which are used for transport can be significantly delayed and pupils and students can arrive late. The school has taken appropriate steps to ensure that this does not have an adverse affect on their education.

The school premises are accessible to all of its present pupils and students, and the Trustees have drawn up a three year plan which meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **4 Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school is a registered charitable trust. It has a board consisting of seven Trustees drawn from the religious community which maintains and supports it. The school is staffed by 14 professional teachers, of whom two are full-time. In addition, a variable number of volunteers from the local community support the school by teaching, performing supervisory duties, or giving one-to-one support to individual pupils. People in each of these categories are checked for suitability by the procedures of the Criminal Records Bureau, although the most recently appointed are still in the process of being checked. A full disclosure list is kept centrally.

The day-to-day responsibility for overseeing the school as a whole lies with the CEO, who is a local businessman whose business premises are next to the school. Together with the Senior Teacher, he has succeeded in creating a school which is characterised by good professional relationships and mutual respect. The Trustees have not found it easy to arrange for there to be a daily supervisor on the premises, but the proximity and

availability of the CEO means that he is able to keep a watchful eye on the school and ensure that it is maintaining its distinctive ethos.

Although the school has been very careful to ensure that all statutory checks have been carried out, it is aware that it is failing to meet the current regulations regarding the provision of information about teachers' qualifications, and their teaching record in terms either of how long they have been teaching or how long they have worked at Three Shires.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all but one of the requirements.*

***What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?***

*Prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, appropriate checks must be carried out in accordance with paragraph 4(c) of the current regulations, particularly in respect of confirming their qualifications and previous employment history.*

## **5 Suitability of the premises and accommodation**

At present, the school occupies premises on a small industrial estate in the Beeston area of Nottingham. Bearing in mind the catchment area served by the school, its location is not ideal and the Trustees are currently searching for a more conveniently located site.

The present accommodation consists of a number of modular buildings which have been grouped together on the site. These provide for both general and specialist teaching rooms. Both these and the public spaces have been made very attractive by the use of attractive displays, much of which are of pupils' and students' work. Although the provision is adequate for the number of pupils and students at present on roll, there is little room for flexibility and the school is beginning to outgrow its present facilities. There is no central school library or study centre where pupils and students can pursue private study. Formerly, the school's collection of books was housed on shelves near the school entrance, but a previous inspection recommended that this was not ideal and the stock has now been distributed in classrooms around the school.

While inspectors were satisfied that the provision is adequate overall, they expressed concern to the Trustees about the dual use of one room as a science laboratory and as a boys' technology room. This presents storage and operational difficulties which may compromise the health and safety of the pupils.

In the school grounds there is a hard surfaced area and a grassed area, and these are well used by pupils for recreational purposes. However, there are no facilities for indoor PE. In order to provide for games and PE, the school makes use of municipal facilities, either in Nottingham or Derby.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all but one of the regulations.*

***What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?***

*Having regard to the number, age and needs (including any special needs) of pupils, all classrooms must be appropriate in size to allow effective teaching, so that no area of the school compromises health and safety (paragraph 5(j)).*

## **6 The quality of information for parents**

The school has produced a commendably full and detailed handbook for parents and teachers, and this includes most of the information required by the current regulations. However, it does not indicate to parents that they may ask the school to provide them with details of examination results for the previous year.

Communication between school and home is good, and this is helped by the number of parents who work voluntarily in the school. There are regular twice-yearly reports to parents, which enable them to receive accurate information on their children's progress, and these are supplemented by parents' open evenings. More regular opportunities for providing information about pupils' progress is provided through the student planners which everyone is required to keep up-to-date, and which provide a valuable two way information system. The Senior Teacher sends out newsletters at least once a term, and there are similar newsletters from the Trustees, as and when required. The school is intending to produce a regular yearbook and work on the first of these is already underway.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all but one of the requirements*

### ***What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?***

*The school must make it clear that parents of pupils and prospective pupils may request particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i)).*

## **7 The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure**

The school's procedures for handling complaints are effective and fully compliant with the regulations. The school makes use of the FLT approved policy document

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*Yes.*

## PART C: THE QUALITY OF ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

*This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The Lay Inspector evaluated both the school ethos and the Trustees' stewardship of resources and produced an internal report for the Focus Learning Trust, which is summarised below.*

The school Trustees have worked faithfully towards providing a good education for the pupils and students in their trust and has achieved highly commendable success. The regular, detailed, and well-documented Trust meetings have enabled the Trustees to identify objectives and evolve effective strategies, in spite of the present constraints of accommodation.

There is an effective management team in which each of the seven Trustees has several defined roles with teams to assist each responsibility. Scope exists for streamlining some departments to promote efficiency, and this is being actively reviewed.

The school has reaped the benefit of several years of stable leadership under the present CEO and Senior Teacher, who have enjoyed a very good working relationship. It is hoped that this can be carried forward and utilised in the forthcoming changes in the administration.

The school's caring ethos is assiduously upheld and the *Every Child Matters* principle is well promoted. The allocation of year heads to provide pastoral care could perhaps be made more effective by making specific opportunities for contact on a regular basis between the carers and their charges.

There is a steady supply of assistance from the community in both learning support and other duties, so that there is generally a community presence in the school. However, this is not always the case, and this has been commented on by pupils and students.

Communication within the organisation is generally good. The Senior Teacher has regular contact with his teaching staff and ensures that he liaises with the CEO daily. There are good lines of communication between the school and the parents. The *Year Book* that is being prepared will keep others well informed as to the welfare of the young people and of the activities taking place.