

# Thornbeck College (NEAS)

Independent specialist college



14–16 June 2016

## Inspection dates

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for learners	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Learners make outstanding progress in developing their personal and social skills, which prepares them exceptionally well for living and working more independently.
- Staff are highly skilled in working with learners with autistic spectrum disorders and through their effective teaching they successfully enable learners to understand and regulate their own behaviours.
- The standard of many learners' work is high.
- Where learners progress into supported employment at the end of their studies, their destinations are sustained over time.
- Through a wide range of enrichment, social-enterprise projects, internships and work experience, learners develop effective teamworking skills and notably improve their ability to communicate with others.
- Partnership working is extensive and has brought about significant benefits for learners, such as the broad range of high-quality external work experience.
- Through close collaboration with employers and the community, governors and leaders are effectively promoting the capabilities of learners with autism and tackling wider preconceptions about autism on a local and national level.

### It is not yet an outstanding provider

- A minority of teaching, mainly classroom-based, does not enable learners to make the maximum progress of which they are capable.
- Learners' long-term programme goals are not precise and/or individualised enough to enable staff to review accurately all learners' outcomes over time.
- Managers do not monitor and evaluate a few areas of the college's work rigorously enough. As a result, they do not sharply identify, action and prioritise all areas that require further improvement.
- Although governors oversee the work of the college frequently, they do not ask probing enough questions to hold managers fully to account.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Thornbeck College is part of the registered charity North East Autism Society (NEAS). In addition to Thornbeck College, NEAS offers other services such as day and residential adult provision, domiciliary care and supported living. In January 2015, the college relocated to a purpose-built enterprise centre in the town of Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. An NEAS board of trustees and a director of NEAS education services oversee the governance of the college.
- All learners have autism, associated learning difficulties and/or disabilities and varying levels of challenging behaviour. Of the 17 current learners in 2015/16, three are female. Most learners are of White British heritage. All learners are funded as day placements.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teachers' setting and reviewing of learners' long-term programme targets so they are sufficiently personalised, clearly aligned to learners' future aspirations and enable staff to capture a much more accurate and cohesive view of each learner's progress.
- Ensure managers are more self-critical in evaluating all aspects of the college's work so they can precisely identify which areas require further improvement and implement actions to remedy this more effectively.
- Make sure all college observers identify more constructively how staff can improve their teaching and assessment so that the college's very good practice can be disseminated effectively and learners extend their understanding and make the maximum progress of which they are capable in all lessons.
- Strengthen further the reporting to governors by providing them with more precise, meaningful and easy-to-interpret summaries on all areas of the college's work. Ensure governors use this information more effectively to ask more probing questions of managers, particularly regarding the impact of improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and learners' outcomes.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Through their ambitious vision for the college and an unyielding passion for improving the quality of life for learners with autism, leaders and governors have retained several of the college's outstanding features from the previous inspection. However, their lack of rigour in reviewing a few key areas of the college's work has led to the impact of their actions being less effective in maintaining the previously outstanding quality of teaching and outcomes for learners.
- Specialist training for all staff is extensive, frequent and of high quality. Leaders and managers have successfully nurtured a very skilled workforce who provide high-quality support to learners with a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Managers' and observers' evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently self-critical. This lack of precision too often means teachers and support staff are not sufficiently well informed to know exactly how they can improve their teaching and/or assessment practice.
- The self-assessment report is comprehensive and includes the views of parents and carers, learners, staff and employers. Managers accurately identify many of the college's notable strengths but overstated others and did not identify explicitly enough all key weaknesses. As a result, managers are unable to take effective action against these weaknesses.
- Managers have given the development of learners' English and mathematics a high profile and staff promote these subjects effectively through lessons.
- Partnership working remains outstanding. Governors and leaders liaise with an extensive range of employers, community organisations and education providers, which leads to significant benefits for learners in the form of a broad range of tailored work experience opportunities.
- College staff provide specialist training and support on autism to a vast array of organisations including national health services, youth offending services, universities, colleges and schools. The exchange of training and expertise between these organisations and the college is well established and expanding, contributing to a much wider understanding of autism within the community.
- Managers have continued to develop a well-balanced, diverse curriculum that prepares learners very well for living and/or working in society. Since the previous inspection, managers have extended the range of high-quality external work placements for learners substantially and introduced supported internships to increase progression routes further.
- Staff promote learners' appreciation of different cultures and their understanding of diversity in all its forms very well. For example, work experience in a local food bank helps learners comprehend and empathise with what it can mean to be less privileged in life. The celebration of wider equality themes, including sexual orientation, is also good. Learners were recently involved in the 'red card against racism' campaign which uses football as a theme to promote racial harmony.
- Most accommodation at the college's new site is well maintained and fit for purpose. Managers acknowledge that the current sensory rooms, used as calm, quiet spaces for learners, are in need of refurbishment and plans are already place to remedy this for the start of the next academic year.
- **The governance of the provider is effective**
  - In most cases, governors apply their expertise effectively and play a pivotal role in forging a significant number of local and national partnerships to help support the college's work and strengthen how they shape the curriculum at a strategic level. In addition, their widespread collaboration with other individuals and organisations is helping to dispel myths about autism and highlight the notable capabilities of learners with autistic spectrum disorders within the local community.
  - While the governing body has recently strengthened its reporting and review of the college's provision, governors do not consistently receive easy-to-understand, pertinent information. As a result, they are less able to ask sufficiently probing questions of senior managers to hold them fully to account regarding all areas of the college's work.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Staff training in safeguarding awareness is thorough and includes high-quality specialist training on working with learners with autistic spectrum disorders and other disabilities.
  - Staff give health and safety a high profile in lessons. Managers assess external work experience settings appropriately and learners apply safe working practices across a range of settings, including in their work placements and supported internships.

- Managers have responded appropriately to instigating the 'Prevent' duty, providing comprehensive training to all staff and governors. Through tutorials, staff effectively raise learners' awareness regarding the values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect of those with different faiths.
- Through the outstanding management of learners' behaviour, the number of behavioural incidents that require physical intervention reduce dramatically over the duration of a learner's programme.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** is good

- In the large majority of lessons teachers have high expectations of what learners can do and they set ambitious learning activities.
- Skilled questioning from staff in most sessions enables learners to reflect on their experiences and recognise their own progress. For example, learners were able to recognise the skills they had applied in their work experience, such as listening to instructions from different people, teamworking and what they needed to do to be safe in the workplace.
- In external work experience settings and in the majority of social enterprise lessons, learners quickly apply the skills they have learned. For example, by the end of a practical session on valeting cars, learners were able to work together, unprompted by the teacher, to identify correctly the different parts of a car for cleaning.
- The extensive and high-quality work experience available enables learners to make very good progress in developing their communication, independence and work-related skills during their time at college. The excellent links with employers ensures that they are fully involved in the planning and reviewing of learners' work during their work experience activities. Employers report that many learners dramatically improve their self-confidence and use of initiative over time.
- In a small minority of lessons, predominantly but not exclusively classroom-based, teaching is less effective. In these sessions, teaching strategies do not help learners to extend their technical language and skills, or deepen their understanding sufficiently. For example, in a very few cases learners work on tasks that do not provide sufficient level of challenge or on tasks unrelated to the subject they are learning, which slows their progress.
- Staff use a comprehensive range of information to assess accurately each learner's starting point, which results in a detailed and personalised plan of specialist support. Managers recognise that earlier input from speech and language therapists will further strengthen this and they are appointing a full-time specialist for September 2017. As learners gain increased skills to aid their independence, the level of support they require is reduced appropriately.
- Teachers' development of learners' mathematical skills is very effective in most lessons. Teachers use practical sessions, such as woodwork, horticulture and college business enterprises, to enable learners to practise key numeracy skills such as weighing, measuring and calculating percentages. For example, learners are able to process orders and calculate costings for the general public when selling their handmade confectionary or their bespoke wedding invitations.
- Teachers help learners to develop their English skills well, particularly their individual means of communication.
- Staff's recording and monitoring of learners' progress is good and indicates that the large majority of learners achieve their well-defined short-term targets at the first attempt. In a very small minority of cases, teachers do not appropriately match learners' short-term targets to their level of ability. Consequently, a few learners work on the same targets for too long with little chance of achieving targets which are too challenging for them.
- Most teachers plan carefully how they can help learners understand what it means to live in a diverse, multicultural society. For example, in a Bollywood dancing session, learners were able to consider different types of wedding costume through an inclusive array of wedding images, including same-sex marriage.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** are outstanding

- Staff apply an excellent range of strategies that enable learners to self-regulate their behaviour. This excellent support has helped learners to deal very effectively with a wide range of different social settings and to relate to their peers, college staff and others. As a result, learners are exceptionally well prepared for life after college.
- Most learners make outstanding progress in developing their personal and social skills. Many parents report positively about the notable differences in their child's behaviour and attitudes while at the college and how this has improved the quality of their home life and family holidays.

- The range of external work experience and work-related learning is exceptional and staff go to great lengths to ensure, wherever possible, that work placements are accessible and based near to where learners live. Most learners make significant gains in their communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills during their work experience.
- Along with work experience, the college's social enterprise sessions help learners to develop their English and mathematical skills well. For example, in horticulture a learner effectively calculated all the costs of producing a hanging basket and prepared an invoice.
- Learners are keen to learn and punctual to lessons, and their attendance is high.
- Enrichment activities are wide-ranging and well attended and include swimming, art, healthy living and karate. Staff use tutorials effectively to explore with learners what it is like to live in modern Britain. For example, in a tutorial staff used references to the European Union referendum as a helpful illustration to aid learners' understanding of the meaning of democracy.
- Learners feel very safe and show a particularly good awareness of e-safety, including understanding the potential dangers relating to the misuse of social media.
- Staff provide excellent and highly effective travel training. Many learners who were unable to use public transport unaided at the start of their programme can now do so much more independently.

## Outcomes for learners

are good

- Learners benefit from high-quality learning support and most make at least good progress from their starting points, with no discernible differences between the achievements of different groups of learners.
- For the small number of learners who completed accredited qualifications in 2014/15, all achieved them successfully.
- The majority of learners make very good progress towards their short-term goals and these targets are mostly precise and challenging. In a very few cases, targets are too easy or not appropriate and result in learners not making their expected progress. Learners' long-term programme goals are generally less precise and are not individualised enough to enable staff to gain an accurate view of all learners' outcomes and overall progress over time.
- Learners make good progress in developing their communication and English skills and particularly good progress in developing their numeracy skills, through a range of vocational tasks.
- The standard of learners' work in practical and work-based learning sessions is mostly high. For example, learners produced technically challenging, large-scale wooden garden planters for a recent sensory garden project.
- Learners develop excellent gains in confidence to help them prepare for their future lives and to be more independent. College data shows that the three learners who left the college to enter supported employment have sustained their destinations. Most learners who completed their course in 2014/15 have returned to the college to undertake a supported internship.

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	13
<b>Principal</b>	Mr Chris Surtees
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.ne-as.org.uk">www.ne-as.org.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	5	12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ N/A</li> </ul>							

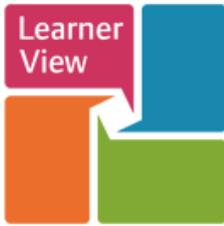
## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bernadette White	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the principal as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the college.

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