

Short inspection of Thornbeck College - North East Autism Society

Inspection date:

30 June 2022

Outcome

Thornbeck College - North East Autism Society continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Thornbeck College is an independent specialist college and is part of the North East Autism Society. It is based in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham and provides further education and training for learners with high needs aged between 16 and 25. The college specialises in teaching learners who have autism spectrum disorder and/or are neurodivergent. It offers day provision only. At the time of the inspection, there were 12 learners enrolled on learning for living programmes, preparation for work programmes and sensory and communication programmes. Most learners were enrolled on learning for living programmes. Thornbeck College does not subcontract any of its provision.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners enjoy attending college and appreciate the support that staff give to them. They are respectful to staff, peers and visitors, and most have good attendance at college. Learners develop confidence and resilience through staff allowing them to resolve problems themselves. For example, learners can identify when ingredients that are needed for preparing a meal are missing and where to find them.

Learners develop a range of skills by taking part in practical activities in subjects such as horticulture, catering and independent cookery. They attend travel training in the community, visit shops and attend coffee mornings in local cafes. This enables them to engage with others in the community and to improve their social and interaction skills.

Learners improve their behaviour over time through the effective behaviour management strategies that staff use. Staff successfully give learners time and space away from other learners to regulate their behaviour. They support learners to understand the triggers of their emotions.

Learners benefit from useful careers information, advice and guidance which supports them to plan their next steps. They complete useful work-related activities.

For example, learners who study retail and customer service as part of their programme develop their knowledge and understanding of working in these areas through work experience and visits to a range of employers. However, a few learners do not fully understand the careers information that they receive or the purpose of the work-related activities that they complete.

Learners feel safe at the college. They have an appropriate understanding of sexual harassment and violence which they learn about in tutorial sessions. Tutors work with specialist organisations to help learners understand these topics. As a result, learners have a suitable understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship, what is meant by consent and what to do if they have any concerns.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear curriculum strategy that they implement successfully. They provide personalised learning programmes to learners to support them to prepare for the next stage of their education, employment or personal lives. Leaders and managers have designed the curriculum well to allow for movement between programmes to meet individual needs.

Leaders and managers recruit staff who have appropriate qualifications and experience to work with learners with high needs. They ensure that tutors complete effective training which enhances their ability to teach learners. For example, tutors attend training in working with learners with autism spectrum disorder and the regulation of behaviour.

Leaders and managers have effective oversight of the quality of the provision. They complete a range of activities such as observations of teaching to review and improve the quality of programmes. Leaders and managers provide effective coaching and mentoring to tutors to develop their teaching skills further.

Leaders and managers have accurate oversight of the progress of learners. Managers meet regularly to review learners' progress, and they put additional support in place for learners who are at risk of falling behind to enable them to catch up.

Governance is effective. The board of trustees is comprised of members who have expertise in key areas such as education and safeguarding, and who ensure that these areas are prioritised in meetings. The director of education, who line manages all college principals in the North East Autism Society, provides effective scrutiny and challenge and prepares frequent quality reports for the trustees.

Tutors plan and sequence the curriculum well to build on what learners know and can do. For example, learners in travel training begin with following very simple instructions and gradually progress to following more complex instructions. Tutors plan for learners to repeat tasks on a weekly basis so that learners become confident in following instructions and remember what they have learned.

Most learners make good progress in improving their knowledge, skills and behaviours from their starting points. For example, learners in horticulture learn to weed raised beds and use markers to avoid pulling up carrots while they are weeding. In catering, learners acquire skills in using equipment safely and learn to follow safe working practices for storage, cleaning and the disposal of waste. However, a few learners do not make the progress of which they are capable as, in a few instances, tutors do not plan lessons well enough to ensure that learners are fully active for the full duration of the lesson. As a result, some learners complete their tasks before the lesson ends and are not stretched sufficiently.

Tutors successfully use a range of teaching and support strategies that enable learners to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, they use effective communication approaches such as the use of images to support learners who require prompts to help them understand and respond to questions.

Tutors support learners well to improve their mathematics skills through embedding mathematics in practical sessions. For example, in horticulture, learners use number operations to calculate the correct temperature and learn about the volume of watering requirements to grow seedlings.

Tutors and support staff use assessment well in lessons to check the understanding of learners. They provide helpful feedback to learners about what they do well and when a task could be improved. For example, learners in catering understand that they need to speak more loudly and clearly to customers at the snack bar. They use the feedback that they receive to improve their customer service skills.

A few tutors set too many targets in learners' individual learning plans, which leads to confusion about what learners need to focus on in lessons. Consequently, in a few instances, learners do not make as rapid progress as they could in developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding leads have the appropriate training and experience to be effective in their roles.

Leaders and managers implement rigorous safeguarding policies and procedures and have a clear reporting process in place. They use effective safe recruitment processes to ensure that staff are appropriate to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

Leaders and managers complete effective risk assessments and deploy useful behaviour strategies to minimise the risks to learners and provide effective support.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that tutors check that all learners understand the relevance of careers information, advice and guidance and work-related activities.
- Ensure that all tutors plan well for the full duration of lessons so that all learners make the progress of which they are capable.
- Ensure that all tutors set appropriate targets for learners to support their progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132030
Address	Thornbeck College (Aycliffe Campus) Cedar Drive Newton Aycliffe County Durham DL5 6UN
Contact number	01325328088
Website	www.ne-as.org.uk
Principal/CEO	Fay Strong
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 June 2016
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Thornbeck College - North East Autism Society was judged to be good in June 2016.

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Jacquie Brown, lead inspector
Tracey Mace-Akroyd

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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