

CfBT Inspection Services  
Suite 22  
West Lancs Investment Centre  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 01695 566862  
**Direct F** 01695 729320  
**Direct email:** rcowley@cfbt.com



10 May 2015

Ms Sarah Wilson  
Nortonthorpe Hall School  
Busker Lane  
Scissett  
Huddersfield  
West Yorkshire  
HD8 9JU

Dear Ms Wilson

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Nortonthorpe Hall School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school.

### **Evidence**

I considered a range of evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have not taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

### **Context**

Nortonthorpe Hall is a special school providing education for boys aged 7 to 16 years. Currently, the school has 62 pupils on roll. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, or an education health plan, relating to their social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Most pupils are from White British

backgrounds. A lower than average number of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and 1.6% speak English as an additional language. The school has a much higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are known to be eligible for the government's additional free school meals funding. Pupils are admitted at any time during the school year and at any age from seven upwards. Since the last inspection the school has experienced significant turbulence in staffing including the frequent and long-term absence of school leaders and classroom teachers and some key personnel changes, which have affected the continuity and impact of the leadership and management of the school. A new headteacher joined the school a year ago and the Chair of Governors, Vice Chair and a new senior leadership team have been established in the last two terms. Three staff are currently absent and temporary teachers are teaching their classes.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Whilst there are more recent signs that pupils behaviour is beginning to get better this is from a low baseline and further substantial improvement is needed. The new leadership team are taking action to tackle the very high rates of exclusion and absence that had become the norm since the previous inspection. As a result, rates of exclusion have fallen dramatically since September 2014, in response to the creation of more facilities for pupils to use when they begin to feel angry or upset. Leaders have successfully taken action to tackle the transport issues earlier in the year that led to high numbers of pupils arriving late to school. This has led to a smoother start to the day and significantly improved punctuality: only one pupil was late during this inspection.

Pupils' arrival at school is calm and orderly and many staff are present to greet pupils and escort them to their classrooms. The vast majority of pupils proudly wear the newly introduced school uniform with a few, mainly older pupils, who have chosen not to do so. Staff give pupils some time and space to settle to being at school before beginning lessons. Most pupils choose activities that they enjoy during this period, and at break and lunchtimes, and they are adjusting well to the school's expectations of them. However, a small minority of students are struggling to meet the high expectations contained in the 'learning agreements', particularly to be polite, caring and helpful and many more do not come to school every day. Whilst discussions between staff and pupils are positive and friendly, pupils do not always treat each other with the same respect when they talk to each other, and they use disparaging language.

Leaders and governors recognise that further work is needed to tackle low attendance, which declined further in 2014, and to enhance support to re-engage pupils who have been out of education for some time. However, this has yet to gain the traction needed, for example, over one quarter of pupils were absent from school during this inspection and persistent absence rates are too high. Plans to enhance pastoral support and integrate health professionals into school teams are beginning to be implemented and the re-organisation of staff roles is due to complete by September 2015.

Staff are vigilant about pupils' safety throughout the day, and especially at break and lunchtimes. For example, staff acted quickly to intercede to stop smoking by a few older pupils in the schools' grounds during this inspection. Further work is

currently taking place with the support of health professionals to help a small number of pupils to kick this habit.

In the lessons visited during the inspection, pupils generally showed positive attitudes to their learning, particularly in the nurture classes. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally good and staff model behaviour well. Teachers and support staff are skilled in knowing when to ignore some calling out and occasional inattentiveness from individual pupils in order to keep interruptions to learning for the majority of pupils to a minimum. Most pupils participate in lessons and complete the tasks they are given, sometimes with much encouragement from teachers and learning support staff. Pupils sustain concentration very well in practical artistic, technological and sporting tasks and some Year 11 pupils elected to continue their revision for examinations at lunchtime. In a reading session in a Key Stage 3 group, the teacher chose a difficult story about a famous arctic expedition requiring pupils to listen carefully and to think about the unusual language and meaning of some terms. Pupils responded well to the challenge, recalling some features in the story in response to his questioning. Occasionally the balance in planning exciting and challenging learning is subsumed with greater emphasis placed on behaviour. Pupils written work and learning targets are noticeably absent from displays in many classes, although the emphasis given to meeting behavioural targets is more consistent. New and temporary staff say they are well supported to quickly get to grips with school routines and expectations. Systems to summon additional help through staff taking turns to be 'on call' work effectively although incidents in corridors occasionally interrupts learning in lessons.

The pupils I spoke to during the inspection felt that their behaviour is improving, although they recognised that inappropriate comments and derogatory language between pupils sometimes quickly led to incidents 'kicking off'. They are pleased with changes to routines and the shorter lunchtime. Many pupils choose to eat lunch in 'family groups' in their classrooms with fellow classmates, support staff and their teacher instead of the dining room. Pupils say it is less noisy and they feel safe and calmer as a result. This is helping to maintain good order during the day. Pupils talked about the emphasis that is beginning to be placed on attendance and enjoyed participating in reward trips for improving their attendance and behaviour.

At break and lunchtimes and throughout the school day staff are vigilant, they keep a close eye on pupils' safety and are sensitive to pupils' demeanour. Staff try to avoid direct confrontation with some pupils and they work hard to build relationships. A few pupils are beginning to employ techniques to help calm them when they are angry but others are uncertain what to do and rely on staff. Although exclusions are falling, the use of physical restraint remains very high. This pattern is concerning as it reflects greater priority is required to help pupils to learn how to manage their anger to avoid lashing out at others.

Pupils like the school's reward system and the responsibility of deciding how to spend the points they earn. This approach acts as a good incentive to them to support positive behaviour and they are learning to try their best in lessons. The rewards system is carefully monitored to check that staff are using it effectively.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Urgently prioritise actions to establish consistent reductions in behavioural incidents, promote regular attendance, and regularly review the impact of them.
- Ensure that all pupils are helped to learn techniques to manage their anger in order to take greater responsibility for managing their own behaviour and eliminate derogatory language in pupils' social interaction with each other.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Kirklees, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gina White

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc Warwick Firmin, Chair of the Governing Body