

Thornhill Park School

24 Thornhill Park, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7LA

Inspection dates

13–15 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- School leaders have ensured that full compliance with the independent school standards has been maintained.
- Trustees of the proprietor group have formed a governing board which has a clear vision to provide a holistic and personalised approach to education for pupils across the school.
- Governors have a wide range of skills and experience which they use to provide a high level of support and challenge to the headteacher.
- School leaders have high expectations and a visible commitment to improving independent living skills for all their pupils.
- School leaders have designed a broad curriculum that is delivered through practical, activity-based lessons and complemented by experience of working in the local community.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the school and say that the personal development of pupils is a strength of the school. Parents speak warmly about the enrichment activities provided by the school.
- Pupils are happy at school, attend well and have attitudes to learning that lead to improved outcomes, particularly in their personal development and independent living skills.
- School leaders have improved the breadth of information they gather on pupils since the last inspection. This has enabled teachers to increase the level of challenge for pupils in lessons and has contributed to the improvement in pupils' personal development. However, the assessment, monitoring and analysis of pupils' acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills are inconsistent and not always used to inform teachers' decisions about how to improve pupils' learning and outcomes well enough.
- School leaders have ensured that pupils who join the school in the early years have access to well-designed primary accommodation and specialist teachers. There are many opportunities for pupils in the early years to develop learning through play, follow their areas of interest and to move on to the next stage of their education securely.
- Sixth-form students benefit from accredited qualifications and work-related learning opportunities which help them with their transition to adulthood.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have sufficient information about individual pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy and are able to use this information to plan accurately for pupils' learning
 - leaders implement the school's framework for the assessment and monitoring of pupils' outcomes consistently across all curriculum areas.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- School leaders ensure that all aspects of the independent school standards are met.
- The proprietor group, trustees and school leaders have created a shared vision and commitment to maximising each pupil's independence and broadening their social opportunities. This ethos is conveyed from the website through all school documentation and can be seen in all aspects of school life.
- School leaders have developed a curriculum that meets statutory requirements and is tailored to the needs of each individual pupil to broaden their knowledge about their local community and develop the skills they need for increased future independence.
- School leaders have ensured that there is appropriate training for staff in the school. All staff have access to corporate training provided by the proprietor group, as well as additional training tailored to the subject interests and skills development required by individual teachers. Training comes in a variety of formats and is having a positive effect in terms of the implementation of school systems, a sense of community and improved staff confidence. Staff report that they feel well supported and the training they receive helps them to improve.
- School leaders have ensured that school buildings and grounds are well presented and provide well-resourced specialist learning environments. The headteacher has ensured that there are sensory areas on all floors of the school building as well as outside in the garden. These facilities are well used by pupils and improve their ability to regulate their behaviour and emotions.
- The proprietor has invested in a staffing structure that provides leadership and management capacity in the proprietor group and in the school. This additional capacity has led to more effective management systems which are beginning to lead to improved outcomes.
- School leaders have designed a system for tracking pupils' progress in accredited programmes and life skills. The information provided by teachers in respect of pupils' personal and social development is comprehensive and allows governors to evaluate pupils' progress effectively. However, the monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress in the functional skills of literacy and numeracy are not implemented consistently across the school. This is leading to gaps in the information provided to governors, which limits their ability to evaluate the progress made by some pupils in this area of the curriculum.

Governance

- The proprietor group is a charitable organisation whose trustees have a high level of personal commitment to supporting children and young people with autism and additional needs. The trustees have established a governing body which is drawn from the board of trustees and has a wide range of professional skills which allows it to scrutinise the work of the school and provide an appropriate level of challenge to the headteacher.
- The governors are well supported by an experienced executive officer and senior education leader who work across the proprietor group, ensuring consistency of reporting of school self-assessment. The headteacher's half-termly self-assessment reports provide

a wide range of information to enable governors to evaluate school performance. However, there is insufficient detail available on progress towards functional literacy and numeracy and, as a result, governors are less able to hold the headteacher to account for pupils' development in these subjects when compared with other curriculum areas.

- The proprietor group works hard to forge local and wider community partnerships to foster progression opportunities for pupils in its care.
- The governing board has invested in teachers with specialist qualifications and added to staff skills through effective training.
- The local representative of the governing board visits the school frequently and, as a result, she knows the school well and is able to provide effective support and challenge to the headteacher.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders have ensured that information about safeguarding and pupil welfare, such as the school's safeguarding policy, is available from the school website and is compliant with current statutory guidance.
- The headteacher has developed well-organised systems to foster and monitor the safety and well-being of pupils and she ensures that these systems are implemented carefully by all staff.
- The headteacher knows her pupils well and the detail in child protection files shows the level of care and diligence taken with every concern raised by pupils.
- The headteacher works closely with local authority partners to ensure that there is adequate support and involvement from other agencies if pupils need it.
- The positive relationships between staff and pupils that are evident around the school contribute to the safety of pupils.
- The proprietor provides high-quality induction and training in safeguarding and child protection and audits training profiles frequently to ensure that all staff are up to date with their training and meeting the expectations of the governing board.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school and the headteacher models very effective practice and high expectations in this area.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers deliver well-planned practical lessons where pupils' progress against a range of personal development targets is monitored closely with the support of additional adults in the classroom. Pupils' personal development is further enhanced through regular visits into the community where the positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils help to build pupils' resilience to being in new places and trying new things for themselves.
- The teaching and assessment of pupils' functional literacy and numeracy skills are inconsistent across the school and, as a result, the information obtained from assessment of literacy and numeracy does not always have sufficient detail to inform plans for pupils' learning. This is leading to weaker progress in these skill areas for some pupils when

compared to the progress these pupils are making in other areas of the curriculum.

- Additional adults in the school provide well-trained and skilled support to the pupils which helps them move from social time to lesson time and remain engaged on learning tasks for extended periods.
- The headteacher has developed a model for delivering lessons in the local community for pupils who are struggling to manage the demands of being on the school site. Many of these pupils have had extremely poor engagement with education prior to joining the school; however, they are now attending well and working in a wider range of learning environments more confidently. Teachers on this programme work to the school's curriculum policy and use a range of community environments, such as libraries, a livery stable and sports centres, to provide bespoke programmes for pupils. Pupils' independent living skills are developed through the work-based learning opportunities available through this off-site curriculum and the support provided by the team of adults working around each individual pupil.
- Parents report that school staff keep them very well informed about the progress of their child and they feel that teachers have a good understanding of their child's needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The headteacher personalises each pupil's timetable to ensure that enrichment opportunities which build on the pupil's own interests are provided as part of the weekly timetable.
- Pupils have access to a wide range of experiential learning, including visits out in the locality, work experience with local conservation groups and museums and through the school's social enterprise company. All of these opportunities contribute significantly to the development of pupils' self-esteem and social skills.
- Parents value the work of the school and, in particular, the way the school provides opportunities to help their child practise and improve their life skills out in their local community through, for example, travel training and trips to shops and cafes. Pupils say that they appreciate the life skills they are taught in school.
- Teachers create themed, cross-curricular learning weeks to develop citizenship skills and to teach fundamental British values. For example, at the time of the inspection, pupils across the school were involved in a range of lesson activities on the theme of anti-bullying and respect for all.
- The staff team know their pupils well and are skilled in providing a range of community experiences for them. These experiences help build pupils' resilience to managing new environments and this supports the development of their independent living skills. Those parents who contributed their views during the course of the inspection commented on how much their child has improved in their time in the school in terms of engaging in their local community.
- Pupils attend well and are happy in the school. They speak very positively about having friends and enjoying the wide range of social and enrichment events that the school

provides.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils show good attitudes to learning as a result of teachers providing well-planned lessons and all staff showing consistently high expectations of engagement.
- Pupils who made their views known say they feel safe in the school and this helps to reduce their anxiety and allows them to concentrate effectively on school work. Pupils are mutually supportive of each other in lessons and at ease around the site during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Behaviour logs show a gradual reduction in incidents over the past three years. There are still some incidents of unsettled behaviour by pupils but the staff team are effective in managing these incidents and, as a result, the school is a calm environment.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Independent living skills are promoted effectively by staff and achievement albums kept by the school, which record pupils' personal achievements and experiences, show strong progress in improving pupils' personal development from their different starting points.
- The numbers progressing to employment or training have remained stable.
- Pupils' attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now in line with that of all pupils nationally.
- Parents think highly of the school and those parents who made their views known to the inspector spoke of the progress they had seen in their child during their time at the school.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The sixth form is embedded in the post-14 phase of the school and lessons are taught in mixed-aged groups in this phase.
- Sixth-form students follow a curriculum that allows them to develop life skills and gain publicly recognised qualifications, including occupational studies, literacy, numeracy and ICT. These qualifications, as well as the experiences students have working in the local community, support their progression to further employment and training.
- The headteacher ensures that there is impartial and personalised support and guidance for future employment and training and a wide range of information on preparing for adulthood is made available to students and parents.
- Students have opportunities to try a range of courses in further education colleges as well as work experience in local businesses and charities, and the proprietor group offers extended work placements in their social enterprise company. These opportunities develop students' occupational skills and contribute to successful destinations for students when they leave the school.
- Students are able to provide peer leadership in the school which supports their personal development, for example leading the school council and organising the school's

Christmas play, which required students to allocate roles, cost out props and costumes and go into the local community to buy items for the play.

School details

Unique reference number	108877
DfE registration number	394/6015
Inspection number	10053828

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	John Phillipson
Chair	Gavin Bestford
Headteacher	Christine Cave
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,640 to £103,301
Telephone number	0191 565 3965
Website	www.ne-as.org.uk
Email address	thps@ne-as.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–10 December 2015

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils aged 4 to 19 years with autism spectrum conditions. Some pupils have additional neurodevelopmental needs.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan and this is a requirement to be admitted to the school.
- The school has capacity for 35 pupils with 33 on roll at the time of the inspection. There

were no early years pupils in the school at the time of inspection.

- The school has a staff team of 40, comprising the headteacher, five teachers, 29 teaching assistants, and five administrative and site staff.
- The school's last standard inspection was on 8 to 10 December 2015. There has been no change of headteacher or chair of the governing body since the last inspection.
- The proprietor group has formed a board of trustees that provides the function of governance in the form of the governing board, which meets every six weeks.
- The school has no specific specialism or religious affiliation.
- The school is based on one site. The school has an off-site delivery programme designed to support pupils who require an extended transition to the main school building.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

- One inspector was allocated to this inspection and carried out the following inspection activities:
 - a tour of the school, with visits to all the classrooms and social areas
 - a check of the school premises against the independent school standards
 - seven lesson observations
 - observations of the finish of the day, breaktime and lunchtime
 - a scrutiny of pupils' work, covering all subjects
 - a scrutiny of the school's website and documentation checks
 - meetings with staff, the headteacher, trustees and governors
 - contact with parents through face-to-face meetings and via responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View
 - contact with local authority partners
 - meetings with pupils
 - analysis of responses to the Ofsted questionnaire completed by staff.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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