

Inspection of Norton College Tewkesbury

Launchpad, International Drive, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL20 8UQ

Inspection dates: 26–28 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Norton College Tewkesbury provides a calm and safe place for pupils to learn. This was summed up in the following comment received by inspectors: 'The service you provide is so important to so many young people, enabling them to be included in a learning environment which can greatly improve their futures.' Pupils recognise the help and support they get from staff. They are beginning to understand the importance of education and to enjoy their learning. However, at times, pupils have too much freedom in their learning. This is slowing their achievement.

Pupils feel safe and staff keep them safe. Pupils know that they can talk to an adult about their worries and anxieties. They say bullying is rare, but they are confident that this would be sorted out quickly and effectively if it were to happen. Pupils talk about the many ways staff help them to regulate their emotions and behave well.

Teachers are developing the curriculum. They acknowledge that there is much more work to do in some subjects. Expectations for pupils' learning vary across subjects. There is still a number of subjects that do not build on what pupils already know and can do. When this is weaker, pupils do not achieve as well.

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

All pupils who attend this school are highly vulnerable. Their previous experiences of education have not been positive. Many have had significant periods out of the education system.

Relationships between adults and pupils are impressive. Pupils describe how they 'love the school' and how the school has a 'cosy feel for young people'. As a result, on arrival at Norton College, pupils settle quickly and learn to trust the staff. Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors welcome all that the school does. They appreciate the help staff give to their children to enable them to build a more positive attitude to education and learning. As parents told inspectors, 'Staff time given to these young people is impressive. Their understanding of trauma in their lives is significant.' Consequently, pupils' attendance rapidly increases, and they demonstrate more positive attitudes to their learning. These attitudes are reflected in their behaviour. Pupils are polite, respectful and well mannered.

Pupils do not achieve as well as they could across some areas of the curriculum. The sterling work that staff do to reduce pupils' anxious behaviours and improve their emotional and mental health can, at times, get in the way of pupils' achievement. Staff use the interests of pupils as a launch pad for their learning. However, too often, pupils can swop lessons or activities too quickly, which impedes the progress they make.

In some subjects, such as woodwork, curriculum plans are complete. However, this is not the case for other subjects. For example, the teachers of English and mathematics are currently looking at the content choices and sequencing of their

subjects to close gaps and increase pupils' knowledge. All staff have pastoral responsibilities for pupils. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught by the newly appointed subject specialist. These curriculum developments appear to be helping pupils in their learning, but leaders recognise that it is too soon to be sure that pupils are learning and remembering more.

The headteacher and teacher of English share a passion and determination that every pupil will become a confident and fluent reader. When pupils start at the school, their reading ability is checked. Where gaps are identified, pupils are given the support they need to catch up quickly. However, staff are aware that many pupils are reluctant readers and have significant gaps. Staff provide these pupils with a range of suitable reading materials. For example, newspapers and motorbike magazines are enticing pupils to read. Leaders are working hard to instil a love of reading in pupils but recognise that there is still work to do. This is because of pupils' low self-esteem and the worry of failure.

The subject knowledge of teachers is not always secure. Pupils may have some lessons taught by staff who are not subject specialists. This is because they have built a trusting relationship with an individual staff member. Leaders are not ensuring well enough that teachers have the required knowledge and expertise across the subjects they teach. As a result, teachers do not always identify pupils' misconceptions and help them gain the knowledge they need.

Leaders, including directors, ensure that they meet all of the independent school standards, for example in ensuring that they maintain the premises to a high standard. They complete health and safety actions in a timely manner. However, they do not check the quality of education closely enough. As a result, staff are not held to account for their work and leaders do not know how effective their work has been. Leaders' development plans do not state precisely what needs improving and how. There is insufficient information as to when and by whom actions taken are going to be checked. This means that leaders do not know well enough what is, and what is not, working well, and why.

Pupils have lots of different experiences beyond the classroom, such as weekly visits to Acton Mill Care Farm, trips to museums, trampolining and go-karting. Pupils who spoke with inspectors shared how these visits and activities help reduce their anxious behaviours and help them to better engage with their education. Such activities give pupils the opportunity to develop their social skills and make them better prepared for their future education, training or employment.

The communication between staff and parents and carers about their child's pastoral needs is strong. Parents describe how their child is 'a changed child' and how the school 'takes the time and the care' for their children. However, some parents comment that they do not know how well their children are achieving in their studies. Therefore, they say they do not have the information with which to support their child in making their next steps.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders take safeguarding seriously. Staff vetting checks are in line with current legislation and are fit for purpose. The induction for new staff is thorough. Staff receive effective training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe. There is a shared understanding by staff of the need to protect each pupil from all possible risks. Staff are quickly able to spot concerns and take the necessary action with confidence. Pupils feel safe and secure in school. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe because in school, 'we are with staff who we know and trust'.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders' development planning is not yet precise in outlining the actions that need to be taken to improve the school and how, and by whom, these actions will be monitored and evaluated. As a result, improvement work is not targeted precisely enough to address key weaknesses effectively. Leaders need to identify important next steps and outline these clearly in improvement plans, detailing who will make these checks.
- All leaders, including directors, do not have in place clear and reliable monitoring systems for holding staff to account for the quality of education that pupils receive. As a result, they are not able to identify important next steps. Leaders, including the directors, need to be more meticulous in their checking of the impact of their work on the quality of education for all pupils and hold staff to account.
- Leaders are aware that the curriculum is not fully developed. This means that there is an inconsistency in pupils acquiring the knowledge and skills they need across the subjects they study. Leaders need to identify, sequence, and be more precise about the key knowledge that they expect pupils to remember across the whole curriculum.
- The subject knowledge of staff is not consistently secure. This means that they are not able to identify pupils' misconceptions well enough. This hampers pupils' achievement. Leaders need to ensure that all teachers and support staff have strong subject knowledge in the subjects they teach to enable pupils to achieve well.
- Leaders acknowledge that communication is not consistent. As a result, some parents do not feel fully aware of the progress and achievement of their child. Leaders need to implement a communication strategy to ensure that parents fully understand how well their child is achieving.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	146519
DfE registration number	916/6021
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10100091
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Norton College (Tewkesbury) Ltd
Chair	Edward Morris
Headteacher	Crispian Woolford
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,500 to £45,000
Telephone number	01684 423163
Website	www.nortoncollege.org.uk/tewkesbury
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Norton College Tewkesbury is situated in a former vocational training centre located on an industrial estate in Tewkesbury. The site includes the main school building, a yard and a multi-use games area.
- The school opened in February 2019.
- The college is equipped to cater for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs, communication and interaction needs, moderate learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils who attend this college have an education, health and care plan. Admission to the college is through a referral from the local authority where the pupils live.

Information about this inspection

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

- We held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, curriculum leader and teachers. We met with college directors. We spoke on the telephone with representatives from Gloucestershire Children's Services and the business development officer from Acton Mill Care Farm, which pupils visit weekly on a Monday or Wednesday.
- The inspection focused on the curriculum for mathematics, PSHE, physical education, woodwork and reading. We undertook lesson visits, some with the headteacher. We also talked with pupils and teachers. We looked at pupils' work.
- We reviewed leaders' checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. We looked at attendance information, behaviour logs and safeguarding records. We held discussions with senior leaders about safeguarding. We spoke to teachers and support staff about how they keep pupils safe.
- We spoke informally with pupils and observed their behaviour at various times during the day. We also spoke with pupils about how they keep themselves safe and what they do when they have any worries.
- Inspectors spoke with several parents and carers on the telephone, to gain their views of the school. We reviewed two responses to the online survey, Parent View, and additional free-text comments. We reviewed the 14 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Bragg

Ofsted Inspector

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