



Thornbeck College

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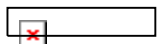
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Basic information about the college



Name of college: Thornbeck College known as Tyne and Wear Autistic Society Adult Services

Type of college: Independent residential specialist

Head of adult services: Allan Tutty

Deputy Head of Adult Services

(Head of Extended Education): Christine Dempster

Address of college: 14 Thornhill Park, Sunderland SR2 7LA

Telephone number: 0191 5102038

Fax number: 0191 5672902

Chair of governors: Valerie Palmer

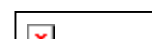
Chair of the society: Martin Morey

Charity reference number: 1028260

Name of reporting inspector: Christine Steadman HMI

Dates of inspection: 1-5 July 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

Thornbeck College is an independent, residential, specialist college for adults with autism and Aspergers Syndrome. It was opened in 1994 by the Tyne and Wear Autistic Society in response to requests from parents to provide post-19 provision for students with autism. The college has recently changed its name to the Tyne and Wear Autistic Society Adult Services, and now admits students of 19 years of age funded by social services for life placements and from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for educational placements from the age of 19.

The society is affiliated to, and registered with, the National Autistic Society (NAS) for autistic provision. The college provides 19 residential placements for 52 weeks a year. Six additional placements are also available for day students. All current residential and one-day placements are funded by social services. The LSC currently funds one day student. The majority of students have complex social and communication difficulties, and some have challenging behaviours.

There is a range of residential accommodation, including Thornbeck and Thorndale houses, which provide services for 12 students who require high levels of individual support. Inverthorne and The Court are two homes in the community, providing semi-independent accommodation for students who are able to take more responsibility for their budget and daily living needs. The college has recently opened a workshop in the community to provide students with appropriate work experience in a supportive and realistic environment.

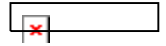
The Tyne and Wear Autistic Society Adult Services has a mission statement which promotes the values and aims of the society through 'striving to be a centre of excellence in education, social, vocational training and care for people with autism and Aspergers Syndrome'. They aim to achieve this by providing individual tailor-made programmes that give students the opportunity to experience a range of social, vocational and educational activities.

How effective is the college?

The college makes satisfactory provision for students with autism and Aspergers Syndrome. Teaching is satisfactory overall and a small proportion of it is good. Achievements are good for most students in relation to their specific disability on the autistic spectrum. Residential accommodation is of a high quality and there is a good range of specialist materials and resources specifically adapted for autistic students.

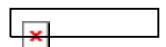
The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below:

Keys strengths



- high-quality residential accommodation in community houses
- use of local community provision
- workshop facilities in the community
- achievement of objectives related to autism
- the range of practical activities for learning
- effective behaviour management
- good staff training for autism.

What should be improved?



- low expectations for more able students
- health and safety for in-house work experience
- the coherence of the curriculum

- unsatisfactory literacy and numeracy provision
- insufficient promotion of issues relating to race and gender
- unsatisfactory careers education
- inadequate tutorial programme.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the full report.

How effectively is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management of the college are satisfactory overall. The college has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection, and continues to promote values and aims that are appropriate for students with autism or Aspergers Syndrome. Operational management is good and staff are well informed about procedures in the college. Strategic management is less well developed. The long-term plans for the college are not well articulated or clearly understood by staff. Quality assurance procedures are satisfactory with good monitoring and review of staff and student performance. The self-assessment procedure is effectively shared with the staff, but lacks the detailed targets required to improve educational standards. The arrangements for appraisal and supervision of staff are good, with staff development linked to areas identified for development in the strategic plan. Behaviour management is good with the college responding effectively to all forms of bullying and harassment. Complaints and issues of concern are responded to quickly and efficiently. Governance of the college is satisfactory, although the memorandum and articles requires updating. There are good procedures for management of the funds of the society. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

To what extent is the provision of the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory with students successfully included in all activities. Individual care and learning programmes are designed to meet the specific needs of students as identified through appropriate assessment procedures. Good use is made of provision in the local community with students funded by the LSC attending the local further education college for part of their programme. Opportunities for appropriate supported work experience in the community are unsatisfactory. Equality of opportunity and issues related to gender, race, sexuality and citizenship are not well promoted in the college. There are two students from minority ethnic groups. Issues about world religions and cultural diversity are given insufficient attention in the extended curriculum. The college's equal opportunities policy does not make reference to legislation relating to disability discrimination. There is unsatisfactory access to all college buildings for students with restricted mobility.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

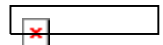
Support and guidance for students is good overall. Students are well supported in the residential provision with care, behavioural and intervention programmes, as appropriate. The key worker programme is effective for residential students. Tutorial provision for day students, however, is not well developed. Programmes and activities are not always appropriate for all students. There are

not enough opportunities for some of the more able students to gain work experience on training in the workplace, and some of the college activities are insufficiently demanding. The promotion and monitoring of literacy and numeracy are unsatisfactory. Links with the local careers service are unsatisfactory and students and their advocates are not fully involved. There is insufficient specialist contribution to assessment and programme development by speech and language therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists.

Students' view of the college

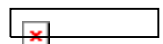
Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below:

What students like about the college



- talking to staff
- playing football
- the homes in the community
- the workshop
- the food
- going to the shops.

What they feel could be improved

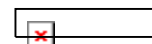


- students were unable to identify any issues for improvement.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Overall provision is **satisfactory (Grade 3)**

Scope of provision

1. Following the in-depth assessment of each student's abilities and interest, the college designs individual learning, care and behaviour plans across the extended curriculum. A range of social, vocational, care, independent living and education activities are provided. These include work-related activities in college and in the college workshop, which is situated in a light industrial unit based in the community. All students follow independent living programmes in the houses and in the locality. An individual leisure and fitness programme is designed for all students making use of local facilities. LSC-funded students attend the local further education college for vocationally accredited courses on a part-time basis.

Achievement and standards

2. Students achieve good standards of work in the workshop and in working on their own in the in-house work experience. Students have achieved well on sector college programmes. All three students who have been funded by the Further Education Funding Council or the LSC during the last three years have passed courses at level 1. These have included National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 1 in floristry and Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) course. One of those students left Thornbeck at the end of their programme to attend the local college of further education on a full-time basis. The student who leaves this term is still unclear about his plans, but is hoping to take further courses at the local college of further education. Students make good progress over time in meeting their objectives relating to the triad of impairments associated with autism. Most students make satisfactory progress in independent living skills. The work and activities for some students are insufficiently demanding and not enough use is made of external work placements. Retention rates are average and match those of other specialist colleges. There is good punctuality and attendance, although registers are not regularly collated and monitored.

Quality of education and training

3. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are predominantly practical, in real-life settings, and providing opportunities for students to achieve success at different levels. In the workshop, for example, students completed a task at their level of ability, which contributed to a final marketable product. During the week, individual students undertake a range of different activities that maintain or develop their skills. As students become more confident, support and supervision are reduced. The level of support provided depends on the student's ability in relation to the particular task. For example, a student who was on an internal work placement developing materials for staff was encouraged to work independently, with minimum supervision. He was able to evaluate his own progress at the end of the lesson and demonstrate what he had learnt. Teaching was less successful when the rationale for an activity was not clear. In one practical lesson, a student, who

was pre-lingual, was required to join up dots to form a word. The task was too difficult for the student to complete without substantial physical support, and its relevance was not immediately apparent.

4. Most lessons are well planned, with objectives based on the individual learning plans. Where there were no lesson plans and the teacher relied on the scheme of work, it was not clear which specific objectives the teacher was trying to achieve.

5. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is not adequate. Literacy and numeracy has been integrated with practical activity for the past year and is no longer taught in separate lessons. However, there has been inadequate preparation for this change. Teachers have not identified the literacy and numeracy skills that could be developed through the activity. There is insufficient information in the individual learning plan to guide staff. Although some teachers and care staff take the opportunity to develop students' literacy or numeracy skills, this is not systematic and there is no plan for the development of new skills. Any recording by individual members of staff is not collated to review overall progress.

6. The standard of residential accommodation is high. The college has recently moved some students into nearby houses, which have been converted to an exceptionally high standard. The accommodation in the main block is less well maintained. The workshop based in the local community is an excellent resource. It has been adapted to meet the specific needs of autistic learners, with appropriate use of signs, symbols and colour coding to aid sequencing. A greenhouse that has recently been renovated for teaching is not yet adapted for use by those students who are at the most severe and challenging end of the autism spectrum. None of the teaching or residential accommodation has been adapted for use by individuals with restricted mobility. Risk assessments for in-house work experience are inadequate. Students were involved in lifting boxes and handling food products without wearing protective clothing. The storage area was cramped and shelves were stacked without proper attention being given to their security. Some teaching spaces in the main block are cramped, but the information technology facilities are good. All teaching staff have a good range of specific teaching aids to help students with autism. All of the teaching staff are qualified teachers and care staff either have a NVQ level 3 in care or are completing units and working towards the qualification. The induction for all staff includes a detailed training manual that relates to autism. Staff training and development is extensive. Staff are funded for a wide range of short courses as well as further training leading to professional qualifications in teaching or in care.

7. The initial assessment takes place over five days, following a pre-assessment observation in the student's current placement. The initial assessment includes an autism-specific assessment, an independent living skills and a care assessment. There is insufficient emphasis on students' prior educational attainment. All students have risk assessments that are updated on a regular basis. The initial assessment for literacy and numeracy was too easy for one student, and did not provide a suitable basis for planning a programme to meet his needs. The individual learning plans and care plans that are designed for each student are good. Lesson evaluation is not always used as a basis for further development for individual learners. The progress review documentation has improved since the last inspection. The reviews take place more frequently, and are more specific and have a focus on 'distance travelled' by each student. The staff update progress in relation to autism-specific behaviours, but this is currently distinct from the formal review of progress sent to the LSC. A weakness in the review process is the insufficient attention paid to progress in literacy and numeracy, with little recording of any specific progress, even where it is identified as an area for development on the LSC schedule and purchase order. Parents, carers and advocates are regularly informed of students' progress.

8. Each student has an individual timetable, though all follow the 'essential skills' framework. This framework is not appropriate for all students. The college has not yet integrated the autism-specific curriculum with the independent living skills curriculum, so it lacks overall coherence. Where appropriate, students are able to go to the local further education college to undertake programmes of study. Pre-entry and entry level accredited courses for those students who could benefit from them are not provided. The work is not sufficiently demanding for all students. Some could benefit from less individual work and more contact with the local community to develop their social use of language. This is particularly a concern where students attend the college on a daily basis and do

not benefit from wider social contacts in the evenings and at weekends. The emphasis on the development of group skills is particularly strong in the extended curriculum, where students play a major role in the daily running of the houses and go out together in groups. The college arranges for those students who wish to choose from three activities in the evening. There is good use of the local community to widen students' experience.

9. Support for students is good. Individual student care plans and behaviour intervention plans are detailed and effective. Key workers and teachers have regular contact and share 'transition plans', which outline any issues to be taken into account in relation to individual students. The students can make use of local specialists with whom the college has an agreement. Services include a dietician, a clinical psychologist, an ophthalmologist, and a speech and language therapist. However, there is insufficient specialist contribution to assessment, programme development and evaluation by speech and language therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists. Behaviour management is good, and incidents and occurrences are well monitored. There has been a significant reduction in their number over the last year. There is insufficient careers advice for LSC-funded students, particularly for those who could participate in general further education college programmes. The college has experienced difficulty in making an appropriate contact within the careers service. The tutorial system is not working effectively and the college has identified the need to develop guidelines for tutorials in its self-assessment report. There are regular student meetings in the residences where issues that affect students are discussed.

Leadership and management

10. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The Tyne and Wear Autistic Society is in the process of redefining its role and the college is in the process of redrafting its mission in response to this. The senior management team effectively promotes the values and aims of the mission statement throughout the college. Operational management and communication are good. The staff are updated in weekly staff meetings. There are four daily hand-over meetings. The strategic plan is regularly monitored and updated, but does not clearly differentiate between operational objectives and longer-term strategic aims. The teaching observation scheme, introduced in January, is thorough in identifying areas for improvement. Notice is taken of parent satisfaction surveys and actions are taken, where appropriate. Staff were involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report identifies many of the weaknesses, but it does not identify targets for improvement of the educational provision. There is a staff appraisal system and regular supervision of all staff. Training needs identified at appraisal and in supervision are responded to satisfactorily. There is no formal annual review of the teaching programme, but modifications are introduced where the need for change has been identified.

11. There is an appropriate range of policies, including policies relating to care of students. Copies of these are available in each house. The equal opportunities policy needs updating and does not take account of recent legislation. There is insufficient promotion of equal opportunities issues such as race and gender, although there is good attention given to disability. The college responds appropriately to bullying and harassment, and complaints and issues of concern are dealt with quickly and effectively.

12. Tyne and Wear Autistic Society is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The college governing body is advisory and is in the process of redrafting its articles and instruments. The chair of the college governors is also on the board of directors of Tyne and Wear Autistic Society and is the main channel of information between the governing body and the main board. Governors do not receive regular reports about the curriculum, although they do receive copies of the strategic plan. The financial arrangements are sound. Staffing ratios are good and resources for students are satisfactory overall. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

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