

Strathmore College

Independent specialist college

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|--|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Inspection dates | | 25–27 March 2015 |
| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Good-2 |
| | Previous inspection: | Requires improvement-3 |
| Outcomes for learners | | Good-2 |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | | Good-2 |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | | Good-2 |

Summary of key findings for learners

This college is good because:

- learners make good progress in developing skills that help them to become more independent and make a successful transition into adulthood
- teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the last inspection and are mostly good or better
- specialist support is effective at helping learners to engage in lessons, stay on task and achieve their learning objectives
- learners gain confidence and improve their communication and numeracy skills
- the curriculum is planned well to ensure that learners benefit from personalised programmes that focus on practical, work-related and personal development skills
- managers work effectively with partners, including the local enterprise partnership and the voluntary sector, to ensure that the curriculum is responsive to local needs and the needs of learners, reflected in the high numbers of learners achieving their destination goals
- senior leaders set high expectations for learners and this priority is supported by all staff
- self-assessment and performance management processes are rigorous and effective at helping managers to identify areas of weakness and take action to improve.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- the use of technology to support and enhance students' learning and progress is underdeveloped
- students who take qualifications in English achieve well, but in a few lessons teachers do not take opportunities to develop learners' reading and writing skills.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Managers should extend the use of technology to support and enhance teaching, learning and assessment by learning from the best practice in colleges, and training staff further in the most effective use of technology such as interactive smartboards and tablets.
- Managers should review the literacy strategy to ensure that good practice in the classroom is shared more effectively so that all teachers are confident to deliver this aspect of the learners' programmes.

Inspection judgements

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| Outcomes for learners | Good |
|------------------------------|------|

- The majority of provision is at entry level with a small amount at level 1. Programmes focus on independent living and leisure skills in community locations and on vocational skills. Courses have four practical pathways in employment, independence, healthy lifestyles, and relationships and community. Mainly, staff integrate English and mathematics into the curriculum, and also provide some discrete sessions. College managers work with partner organisations to offer work placements, volunteering and mainstream further education where appropriate.
- Outcomes are good. Learners' study programmes help them to progress and gain increased independence, personal and social skills, confidence and work skills. Teachers match learners' goals carefully to individuals' aspirations for the future.
- Where appropriate, learners enter for accredited qualifications. Success rates are high. Qualifications include functional skills in English and mathematics, carpentry, craft design and technology, land-based studies, catering and retail. Learners also achieve well in Duke of Edinburgh awards, and gain medals in Special Olympics competitions. One student has achieved bronze, silver and gold in the former, and another won two gold medals and one bronze in Special Olympics badminton competitions.
- As part of their study programmes, learners develop their personal, social and employability skills well. They make good progress to become more confident and independent as well as learning work-readiness skills.
- Students learn to travel with greater independence and to manage their behaviour so as to integrate successfully into everyday life. One learner, with initially high levels of anxiety, could not remain in sessions or tolerate examination conditions. Through careful tutoring, he has now achieved qualifications and skills. He has gained a place successfully on a sports leadership course at a local further education college, having impressed them with his motivation and positive attitude.
- Learners' good work skills are evident. One learner uses her personal work schedule very effectively to help her complete her duties at work in a local café. Her improving confidence and skills enabled her to increase her placement to two days a week, and she has now gained a placement helping out at a children's nursery to extend her experience. The manager of a local social enterprise spoke about the positive contribution learners make and how skilled some become in tasks, like bakery, while volunteering there.
- Students learn to work collaboratively in teams and support each other well. In a horticulture session, one student acted as instructor to his autistic colleague to help him learn how to complete a path-clearing task. The learner used consistent instructions, began each request with his colleague's name, repeated quietly and with patience. He did not comment if the instruction was not followed correctly but congratulated success on every occasion, employing strategies

devised by speech and language specialists. As a result, the task was completed to the standard expected by the grounds keeper.

- Students develop their skills in mathematics well and use arithmetical concepts effectively in practical sessions like horticulture and woodwork. For example, they develop skills in measuring, weighing and counting. One group has tendered successfully for a horticulture contract with a local social enterprise.
- Literacy skills are not as well developed. Teachers do not always help learners who have the capacity to improve their reading and writing to develop these skills, for example to record their work for themselves.
- Students' destinations are good. Last year every student moved on to their preferred destination, which includes further study at local colleges, volunteering and community and social enterprises. Several students successfully maintained the work placements they had started at college and one student secured a shop-fitting apprenticeship on leaving Strathmore.
- Early indications are that students maintain their destination placements well and some have made further progress. Managers have started to collate information on destinations over time to check whether those outcomes have been sustained. All but one of last year's leavers are known still to be in placement and the majority are continuing to do well.
- Data show no significant differences in the achievements of different groups of students. Managers use data well to ensure that all students make good and timely progress, through close monitoring and review.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and this ensures that students make good progress towards their targets. Individual and group work is planned well with an appropriate focus on the development of communication, personal skills and problem solving. Students understand the importance of these skills in relation to their overall learning and make good progress towards them in a range of settings. Learners benefit from experiences within the life and work-skills curriculum to extend their skills and interests, and support them to make informed choices about their future.
- Teachers have high expectations of students within college, the community and work places. They plan sessions thoroughly, with clear links to individual targets for each student. In practical activities, staff consistently implement individual support strategies, which extend students' participation in learning activities and help them achieve their goals.
- Students demonstrate a positive attitude to learning; they respond well to strategies that teachers use to encourage independence and problem-solving skills. In most lessons teachers give learners time to consider consequences of actions and resolve issues based on their knowledge and understanding. For example, good use of questioning allowed a learner to work out where he might find a date to label food in a café. In another lesson, staff waited for a learner to work out how best to store eggs in a cupboard without them falling.
- A small amount of teaching is not structured well enough. Where teachers adopt a whole-group approach, this is not as successful at engaging learners' interest and maintaining their concentration as when they plan work carefully for individuals.
- The use of technology to enhance learning is underdeveloped. Teachers do not use equipment such as smartboards and tablets well enough as a teaching tool, for example to help students measure their own progress.
- Initial assessment is managed well, with input from teachers and specialist staff. Managers have updated the college's assessment and planning to capture students' aspirations in addition to learning needs and use this information well to structure individual programmes.
- Staff give helpful verbal feedback to students within sessions so that they understand their strengths and areas for improvement. They present information in meaningful ways that enhance motivation. This helped one learner to identify texting as an example of an informal

style of writing, and filling in an application form as formal, which allowed him to edit his work appropriately.

- Managers and staff meet together regularly to monitor the progress of each learner and to revise targets where appropriate. Staff record the progress of individual learners in each lesson but occasionally comments focus on the activity rather than the learning that has taken place, with the effect that actual progress is not reflected precisely enough.
- Study programmes include an effective focus on the development of mathematics and communication skills. In lessons, students learn to increase the range of people with whom they are able to interact. They learn to measure accurately as they plan gardening, woodwork and catering projects. Where students are able to work towards qualifications in English and mathematics, staff support them to apply positive coping strategies that increase their confidence and enable them to complete the assessment.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not use opportunities sufficiently to develop reading and writing skills. For example, in one lesson, learners used diagrams to help them plan work but without appropriately simplified written instructions to enable them to practise and improve their reading and writing skills at the same time.
- Learning support assistants are deployed effectively and use individual strategies to engage students. Where support is most effective, staff use questioning skilfully, give students time to respond and use individual strategies to diffuse tensions, which helps the learner to stay on task. In a very few instances, staff provide too much support to students; for example, they direct them to the next step or complete steps of tasks on behalf of students, so that they do not make the progress of which they are capable in working independently on solving problems.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well. They challenge discrimination within sessions. Learners access a wide range of enrichment activities that promote their understanding of race, religion, disability and gender. They learn to understand the needs of other people and show respect for people in college and the wider community. The student council works with staff to plan events to develop learners' understanding of how to use the internet safely; students recognise cyber-bullying and know what to do if they feel unsafe.
- Advice and guidance support students' learning and progression effectively. Learners receive good support from personal tutors to explore options and plan their futures. They understand what they need to do to progress into further study or work. Learners benefit from trying vocational options and work placements during their time at college and learn to make informed choices about their plans when they leave.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The senior leadership team provides a clear vision based on high expectations for each learner. Staff support the priorities of the college, and good communications exist between teams.
- Learners' study programmes are managed well. They benefit from a well-thought-out strategy that ensures that each learner has a timetable matched to their individual needs.
- Curriculum development is good. Managers review the curriculum regularly to meet the changes within the student profile, in particular to adapt to an increasing number of learners with complex social and emotional needs.
- Partnership work is effective at ensuring learners have access to a range of learning opportunities within the community. Work placements are of a high quality and managers ensure that the progress learners make during placement is monitored well. Managers take into account priorities within the local enterprise partnership. This has helped them to identify employment sectors where they plan to strengthen further their links with employers.
- Managers ensure that the communication and numeracy aspects of learners' study programmes are taught well. They have not monitored closely enough the literacy components of the learners' work to ensure that staff share best practice more effectively across the college.

- The monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment is good and has led to improvement since the last inspection. Managers have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Teachers whose lessons are judged to be less than good receive extra support and then receive another observation. If improvement is not evident, managers invoke capability processes.
- Governance arrangements have been strengthened since the last inspection. The parent company, the Priory Group, has appointed a further education regional manager, who is a key member of the college's governing body and has good knowledge of the learners' needs and teaching, learning and assessment strategies. As a result, governors' monitoring of learners' progress and their challenge to senior managers are more effective. Governors recognise that they need to strengthen the membership of the board, particularly to involve more external bodies.
- Self-assessment is robust and accurate. The college listens well to the views of parents, carers and learners. For example, a review of learning problems encountered by learners led to an increased focus on the development of personal, communication and problem-solving skills. Parents and carers say that communication with the college is generally good.
- Management of equality and diversity policies is effective. For example, the college has improved the frequency of events to help learners understand the cultural and ethnic diversity in the community. Managers monitor data well to identify gaps in achievement by different groups of learners and take action where appropriate. For example, last year, learners with autistic spectrum disorder did not meet their targets to the same extent as other learners. Changes made to target-setting and the curriculum are proving successful in addressing this in the current year.
- Safeguarding procedures are good and meet statutory requirements. Staff receive appropriate training and have good links with external agencies, including social services and the police. Students learn how to keep themselves safe in practical areas such as the woodwork room and the kitchen. They receive support on internet safety, including a session run by the police and by a young man with autism, who explained to learners the problems he had encountered. Staff investigate potential safeguarding incidents appropriately and mostly document them well, but occasionally it is not clear who has completed a written account of an incident. All staff have received training on protecting learners from child sexual exploitation. Managers dealt effectively with a safeguarding incident around the possible radicalisation of a learner.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Strathmore College

| Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate | Overall | 14-16 part-time provision | 14-16 full-time provision | 16-19 study programmes | Traineeships | 19+ learning programmes | Apprenticeships | Employability | Community learning |
|---|---------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | N/A | N/A | 2 | N/A | 2 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 | N/A | N/A | 2 | N/A | 2 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| The quality of teaching, learning and assessment | 2 | N/A | N/A | 2 | N/A | 2 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management | 2 | N/A | N/A | 2 | N/A | 2 | N/A | N/A | N/A |

| Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Grade |
|---|----------|
| Independent living and leisure skills | 2 |

Provider details

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|---|--|-----|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| Type of provider | Independent specialist college | | | | | | | |
| Age range of learners | 16+ | | | | | | | |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 29 | | | | | | | |
| Principal/CEO | Ms Kate Ward | | | | | | | |
| Date of previous inspection | February 2014 | | | | | | | |
| Website address | www.prioritygroup.com | | | | | | | |
| Provider information at the time of the inspection | | | | | | | | |
| Main course or learning programme level | Level 1 or below | | Level 2 | | Level 3 | | Level 4 and above | |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships) | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ |
| | 8 | 26 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | | |
| | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | | |
| Number of traineeships | 16-19 | | 19+ | | Total | | | |
| | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | | | |
| Number of learners aged 14-16 | | | | | | | | |
| Full-time | N/A | | | | | | | |
| Part-time | N/A | | | | | | | |
| Number of community learners | N/A | | | | | | | |
| Number of employability learners | N/A | | | | | | | |
| Funding received from | Education Funding Agency (EFA) | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None | | | | | | | |

Contextual information

Strathmore College is an independent specialist college, located in Stoke-on Trent, which provides education for learners with mild to severe and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has a number of learners with autistic-spectrum conditions, emotional and social-behaviour issues, and speech and language difficulties, coupled with other mental or physical difficulties and/or disabilities. It is enrolling an increasing number of learners with challenging behaviour and/or those who have been disengaged from previous education. Of the 34 learners, 10 are residential and the remainder attend the college on a day basis. Most learners are aged 19 to 25; nine of the current learners are aged 16 to 18. The college is part of the Priory Group. During 2012/13, the college relocated to the Trentham Business Park.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Sue Harrison, Her Majesty's Inspector

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the vice-principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and parents/carers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision.

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement |
|---------|----------------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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