

Strathmore College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 132021

Name of lead inspector: Sue Harrison HMI

Last day of inspection: 17 March 2011

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Information about the provider

1. Strathmore College is part of the Craegmoor College group. The senior and middle managers at the three Craegmoor colleges work closely together. Craegmoor has recently recruited two staff to support colleges at a senior level.
2. Strathmore College, based in Stoke on Trent, is an independent specialist college offering residential and day provision. The college is located in an urban setting and makes use of the community as its base for learning. The two registered residential facilities provide an environment where learners develop life skills.
3. Strathmore is the only specialist residential college in the local area; there is another specialist day college in the same locality. The college provides for learners aged 16 to 25 years who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners' needs range from mild to severe learning disabilities and include students with Down's syndrome, autistic spectrum conditions, behaviour issues, speech and language difficulties, coupled with other health related, mental or physical difficulties. The majority of learners are male and the proportion from a minority ethnic background is small.
4. The college implemented changes to the curriculum from 2009/10 to develop Foundation Learning accredited courses. Working in partnership with a local further education college and another Craegmoor college, Strathmore offers the City and Guilds level 1 award, certificate and diploma in retail, and qualifications in horticulture and floristry. The college also offers adult literacy and numeracy qualifications. A major focus of the curriculum continues to be the promotion of personal development.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners:	
Further education (16 to18)	19 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners:	
Further education (19+)	26 full-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 3
Capacity to improve		Grade 3
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		2
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		2
Equality and diversity		3

Overall effectiveness

- The majority of learners achieve their long term goals as a result of good partnership working, which provides them with community based placements in realistic work settings, and good support to develop independent living skills. They enjoy college life and make a valuable contribution to the local community. Teaching is satisfactory overall and good in practical sessions. The range of provision on offer is satisfactory; areas for improvement are opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills and the range of accreditation on offer. Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving.

Main findings

- The majority of students enjoy their time at college and achieve their long term goals. They improve significantly their levels of independence, confidence and interpersonal skills. Learners taking national qualifications and awards on the Duke of Edinburgh scheme achieve well.
- In lessons, learners make satisfactory progress overall and good progress in practical sessions. Students on work placements acquire a good level of work related skills. Literacy and numeracy are not developed sufficiently.
- Students with challenging behaviour successfully acquire strategies to improve. Learners feel safe in the college. They make a good contribution to the local community.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Staff have good relationships with learners. In the better sessions teaching is well planned to meet individual learner needs but this is not always the case, particularly in non-practical sessions.

- Assessment of learning is satisfactory. A new review process has improved the system to monitor learner progress, but there is still a lack of consistency in how well reviews capture learning and progress, rather than describe student activities.
- College provision satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of learners. Particular strengths are the use of community settings and work placements, and opportunities to develop independent living skills. Less well developed aspects are the range of accreditation on offer to learners, and the extent of opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy skills.
- Partnership working is good. The college makes extensive use of community facilities and links with employers to extend learning and provide challenging levels of realistic working environments. Placements are well matched to learner needs. Travel training is effective at helping learners to become independent travellers where appropriate.
- Support for learners is good. Specialists such as psychologists and a speech and language therapist work well with staff and students to help learners access all aspects of the curriculum, and to develop strategies to enable them to succeed in attaining their goals.
- Staff ensure learners are able to cope with a gradually reducing level of support to develop their independence. Arrangements for transition at the end of college have improved since the last inspection and are now good.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. A strengthened management structure introduced in 2009/10 is improving the quality of provision. The college has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development but quality improvement plans lack rigour. Detailed data are gathered on all aspects of the college work, including learner performance and stakeholder views, but not always evaluated sufficiently well to inform planning.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The college is an inclusive community, which promotes respect for the individual. There has been limited progress to achieve some of the targets the college set itself on equality and diversity.
- Resources to support learning are satisfactory. Plans are in place to improve further the residential accommodation and educational facilities. The proportion of staff with teaching and specialist qualifications is increasing but progress on this has been too slow.

What does Strathmore College need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons that are good or better by spreading good practice in working effectively with the wide range of learner needs that exist in classes.
- Increase further the proportion of staff with teaching and specialist qualifications.
- Extend staff training on how to embed literacy and numeracy teaching within the practical activities learners enjoy.

- Develop the range of nationally recognised qualifications on offer to learners.
- Improve the action planning part of the self-assessment process by having clearer priorities and targets, against which progress can be monitored.
- Analyse the extensive management information available more thoroughly to inform future planning.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- good support from staff
- learning practical skills in work placements
- Duke of Edinburgh activities
- the range of sports they take part in
- making friends
- the ways in which they are encouraged to become more independent.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more activities for day learners
- noise from other learners, especially in the residences.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- support for learners whilst on work placement
- communication with the college on learner progress
- the way learners develop their skills and independence, and make a real contribution to the placement organisation
- the increase in the public understanding of learning difficulties as a result of Strathmore learners work in the company.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more detailed information on learners before they start placement.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

6. The college has made good progress in addressing some of the areas for improvement since the last inspection, including the preparation of learners for their long term goals, and setting objectives for learners. Progress is being made to increase the proportion of staff with teaching and specialist qualifications but the pace of this change has been too slow. Improvements in delivering a literacy and numeracy strategy have also been limited. Managers and staff have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement and inspectors found the self-assessment report to be largely accurate. Quality improvement plans fail to identify priorities and targets sufficiently clearly.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

7. The majority of students enjoy their time at college and attain their long term goals. Most learners for whom independent or semi-independent living is a goal are successful in achieving this aim after leaving college. The majority of students progress to courses at local further education colleges, and many take up voluntary work placements. A few gain paid employment.
8. Learner progress in lessons is satisfactory overall and good in many practical sessions. The more able learners are clear about their learning objectives but in a few cases are not challenged sufficiently. A small number of students with severe learning difficulties struggle to understand the teacher's explanation and cannot complete tasks.
9. Students on external work placements acquire a good level of work related skills; for example, a learner working in the busy kitchen of a large national company was able to prepare food efficiently and with very little support. In a retail outlet, learners who lacked confidence and interpersonal skills when they arrived at college are now able to work well in a team and relate well to customers. A number of learners travel independently as a result of training received at the college.
10. Students with challenging behaviour make good progress in learning about appropriate behaviour in different situations. They develop better respect for other people and are generally co-operative with each other. They increase their ability to listen to others and develop their understanding of other people's point of view.
11. Literacy and numeracy skills are not developed sufficiently. In a café based working environment, learners showed good progress in understanding money

values through taking payments and operating the till. This good practice is not evident across all the provision.

12. Learners taking nationally recognised qualifications, for example in retail and horticulture, achieve well. In addition, a large proportion of learners gain awards on the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, which helps to promote learners' confidence, social, and independence skills.
13. Learners feel safe in the college. They develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through participation in a range of sports and fitness activities, and strategies to promote healthy living. Students are rightly proud of their achievements in competitions at home and abroad, including the Special Olympics.
14. Learners contribute well to the local community in a number of ways, such as a landscaping project with an elderly persons' home and fundraising for charities, such as the local hospice. They are increasingly involved in committees within the college, where their feedback is used to help develop the provision. Some learners are involved in enterprise activities, such as table top sales of produce they have made or grown.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Teaching is satisfactory. Staff have good relationships with learners and adopt a calm and encouraging approach. The most effective teaching is in practical lessons. In the better sessions, tutors plan effectively to meet individual needs and ensure learners understand what they have to do to improve. In others, it is not always clear why learners are completing an activity. Assessment of learning is satisfactory. In the best examples, learners' are encouraged to evaluate their own learning and they are able to identify successfully what they have achieved.
16. Target setting has improved since the last inspection and many staff are now skilful at setting objectives with learners that are meaningful and relevant. The new review process has introduced an improved system of gathering feedback on learner progress across the curriculum; however, comments are not all sufficiently evaluative.
17. College provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. Particular strengths are the use of community settings and work placements to provide realistic situations, in which learners can develop their skills.
18. Although the college is improving the embedding of literacy and numeracy within the curriculum, this remains an area for development. There are insufficient opportunities to extend learners' literacy and numeracy skills within vocational areas. Very few learners take accreditation in numeracy and literacy. The college has plans in place to increase the range of nationally recognised qualifications on offer to learners in this, and in vocational areas.

19. Opportunities for residential learners to develop independent living skills are good. Day learners also benefit from provision to develop these skills and the college is considering ways to extend this via short residential placements.
20. Partnership work is strong. The college makes extensive use of community facilities and links with employers to extend learning and to provide challenging levels of realistic working environments. Work placements match learner needs well and include opportunities with large national companies in the service industries, placements in the public sector such as schools and health organisations, and in the voluntary sector.
21. Students also work on projects that contribute to the local community and help learners to improve their confidence, communication and interpersonal skills. Partner organisations in the community and employers speak highly of the contribution the learners make.
22. Support for learners is good. Detailed assessment of communication and daily living needs results in a comprehensive report and strategies for staff to use with learners. Staff involve learners well in making choices through a range of bespoke communication aids and worksheets.
23. Psychologists work closely with those learners who have an identified need for support and contribute well to learners' behaviour management plans. For example, one learner is now more aware of how his emotions trigger certain behaviour and is better able to manage this. A specialist in autistic spectrum disorders works well with learners to help them develop a positive perception of their condition.
24. Staff ensure learners are able to cope with a gradually reducing level of support, for example when accessing a work placement and when learning to travel independently. Job coaches offer useful support within the workplace.
25. Support to help students make the transition at the end of their college placement has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Transition planning starts much earlier in the student's programme and staff increasingly help learners and their families in arranging accommodation, further training, and social opportunities in the student's home area. This contributes significantly to the positive outcomes for learners.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

26. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum delivers local and regional priorities well and is responsive to the changing needs of learners. A strengthened management structure was introduced in 2009/10, which is improving the quality of provision. Communication with staff is satisfactory. The college uses data satisfactorily; it is introducing a new management information system to enable a more detailed interrogation of data to manage performance.

27. Craegmoor, the parent company, has strengthened its leadership role of the college since the last inspection. In previous years, targets set have not been ambitious enough. The newly appointed Director of Education has developed a strategy for the three colleges that provides a clear strategic focus, against which progress will be monitored. Robust financial monitoring arrangements are in place. A quality assurance committee is being introduced to enhance the rigour and challenge of the company in evaluating educational performance. Statutory duties are fulfilled satisfactorily.
28. Safeguarding is good. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and staff and learners are very safety aware. Appropriate checks are carried out on staff. All staff receive awareness training and the nominated safeguarding officers have received appropriate enhanced training. The college has a strong and positive relationship with the local authority safeguarding board and appropriate measures are in place for referral of incidents. Anti-bullying and e-safety measures are promoted well to learners. An effective system of risk assessments is in place for all activities, including the use of community venues, work placements and travel training. There is good promotion of health and safety throughout the curriculum.
29. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The college is an inclusive community, which promotes respect for the individual. The equality and diversity committee organises visits and events to increase learners' understanding of other cultures. An audit of the promotion of equality and diversity across the curriculum has been undertaken recently. The single equality scheme is regularly reviewed and there are satisfactory arrangements for dealing with incidents and complaints. The college collects information about the performance of different groups of learners but there is insufficient analysis to drive further improvement. There has been insufficient progress on targets to increase the diversity of staff and students, and address the gender imbalance of staff.
30. The college engages satisfactorily with users to support and promote improvement. The Learner Voice committee is well established. It provides a useful forum for learners to share their views on the college and to plan social events. A range of strategies is used well to gather the views of parents, carers and other stakeholders. However, evaluation of this information is not systematic.
31. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and identifies most strengths and areas for improvement. Staff are appropriately involved in the process. The observation of teaching and learning is more effective than at the last inspection. The quality improvement plan is repetitive and does not clearly prioritise areas for improvement or demonstrate how proposed actions will affect the learner.
32. Resources are well managed. Residential accommodation has been improved since the last inspection and plans are in place for further improvements to this,

and to the education accommodation. The proportion of staff with teaching and specialist qualifications is increasing, although the pace of this change has been too slow since the last inspection.

Information about the inspection

33. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the college's vice-principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
34. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners, employers and other partners. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Strathmore College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	45	19	26
Part-time learners	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3		
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
Leadership and management	3	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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