

Arden College

Partial reinspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Gill Reay HMI

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: 40 Derby Road
Southport
Merseyside
PR9 0TZ

Telephone number: 01704 534443

Introduction

The college's last inspection was in April 2010. Leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. The monitoring visit in October 2010 judged that reasonable progress was being made in most identified areas for improvement. This partial reinspection has judged the quality of leadership and management.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Aspect of the common inspection framework	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Leadership and management	4	3

Context

1. Arden is one of three independent, specialist, residential further education colleges operating as part of Craegmoor. At the time of the inspection Craegmoor was undergoing a merger with Priory Group. Based in Southport, the college provides education for 24 residential and 27 day learners, all of whom have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Arden has strong vocational programmes and it makes substantial use of its residential homes and the local community for teaching and learning. The college offers a wide range of national awards. The primary goal of Arden College is to help people lead independent and fulfilled lives.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

2. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection the management of the college has stabilised. The strengthened college management team is bringing increased direction and purpose to the work of college. Staff have confidence in the management team. The college improvement programme is bringing about a more professional approach which staff appreciate.
3. Learning managers' roles have developed significantly and they provide good operational support to their teams. However, there is insufficient investment in training to develop their leadership and management skills, and the skills gap is hindering timely change. Improved quality systems and processes are beginning to identify poor practice and support the improvement and management of the provision. However, the pace of improvement in the observation of teaching and learning is slow.
4. The college appraisal system is effective and supported by Craegmoor's systems. Clear links are made between performance, improved pay scales and action plans for professional development. The new parent company, the Priory Group manages 20 schools and seven colleges and provides a good

infrastructure that offers comprehensive staff development opportunities and support functions.

5. The college has invested in information learning technology resources and further investment is planned for summer 2011. The appointment of an information technology technician provides increased capacity that can be shared between the three colleges. However, staff training in their use is limited and not yet established across the college.
6. Significant investment has been made in the accommodation at Norwood. Adaptations have been made to provide a low arousal environment for more complex learners. Feedback from stakeholders about the new provision indicates high levels of learner engagement and enjoyment. The main college building has some significant limitations but staff make best use of it. The college is currently participating in an integration exercise with The Priory Group. Staff throughout the college speak positively about the recent major changes and say that communication and integration with the Priory is effective.
7. The use of data is satisfactory. Data is collected and used effectively to analyse learners' performance and take corrective action. However, the analysis of destination does not sufficiently identify learners' long term aims.
8. Craegmoor has improved critical oversight of the college. The appointment of a Craegmoor director of education and a quality-development manager nine months ago provides effective support across the three colleges. These appointments have adequately supported the college to develop quality-assurance systems focused upon quality improvement. The provision is audited to monitor progress against the strategic plan and quality-improvement plans. Learning managers provide good day-to-day oversight of the college.
9. The college has developed an extensive and accessible range of teaching and learning materials using symbols, pictures and photographs to support learners in all locations of learning. These help tutors in providing individualised support to learners in lessons. The materials available are generally colourful, well-presented and clear, though they have insufficient reference to ethnic difference. An equality and diversity audit has recently been developed and piloted. However, its introduction is too recent and too limited in use to provide a clear indication of its impact. The college has responded effectively to the changing cohort of learners by developing provision for those with more complex learning requirements. There is clear evidence of progress by individuals using this provision. The college is seeking Investors in Diversity status, steered by its Equality and Diversity Committee. Learners' achievements are routinely analysed to show progress, including specific analysis by gender, but there is insufficient analysis of achievement by disability or ethnicity. Recruitment of learners from minority-ethnic groups is under developed.

10. User engagement is satisfactory. The college involves learners in discussing their learning and personal support goals. There is an active student council. Learners' views about areas for improvement are listened to and acted upon. However, learners are not sufficiently involved in curriculum development and wider community activities.
11. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate, though it fails to identify some areas for improvement, for example, the slow pace of improvement in teaching and learning. Quality-improvement plans are satisfactory and provide a framework for the college to deliver change management. They identify and deal with all of the recommendations for improvement from the last inspection and the college has used data gathered and analysed to further inform the plans. The plans are reviewed and monitored, although they do not always adequately record and measure impact.
12. Financial management by Craegmoor is good. Arden College provides satisfactory value for money.

What does Arden college need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by rectifying teachers' identified areas for development in a more focused and timely way.
- Further develop learning managers' leadership and management skills through externally well recognised training that will equip them with the skills they need to take the college forward at an acceptable rate of change.
- Provide the learners with appropriate accommodation that promotes learning, by improving the college site and facilities.
- Measure the impact of quality improvement by using a thorough analysis of progress made, against quality-improvement plans.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

What progress has been made in supporting teachers to develop stimulating and challenging lessons and to ensure teaching has a demonstrable impact on learners' progress?

Reasonable progress

The further development of teaching and learning action plans are helping teachers to be more confident about taking risks and developing their teaching strategies. Action plans are now a useful and integral part of performance management. They reinforce the relationship of trust and support between learning managers and their teams. Staff appreciate the opportunity for more informal lesson observations and the links that are now made between their teaching and identified developmental needs. Good practice is now better identified and shared across the college.

The restructuring of the college day continues to benefit learners. Teachers now make much better use of learning time, there is less disruption and students have gained in independence. Information and communication technology provision has improved and the college has recently purchased three interactive white boards and has plans for further investment over the summer period. However, staff training in their use is limited and is not yet established across the college. Support workers are not always used effectively to support learning or behavioural strategies. At times they are not sufficiently prepared by teachers for their role in the classroom.

How has the observation of teaching and learning been strengthened to ensure that observers focus more effectively on learning and improve the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons? **Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection learning managers have become key drivers in the improvements to teaching and learning. They have the confidence of the staff who value their expertise, support and willingness to work alongside them. The teaching observation scheme remains thorough with good training and a consistent moderation processes. Feedback from college observers and the Craegmoor quality manager is effective in identifying teachers' strengths and areas for development. However, increasing the proportions of good or better teaching is slow. Where personal action plans identify development needs the timescales to bring about improvements are too long and sometimes too supportive to bring about changes in practice.

Observers and teachers have undertaken training in equality of opportunity and diversity. However, although differences in learners' needs are clearly identified by observers, opportunities in lessons to promote equality and diversity in relation to ethnicity and stereotyping are not always taken.

How has the college improved tutorials so that they are effectively planned to match learners' needs? **Reasonable progress**

A new tutorial system, introduced since the last inspection, provides weekly, responsive guidance for learners. Guidance to staff emphasises progress, achievement and individualised teaching appropriate to academic levels. Safeguarding and transition planning is effectively incorporated into the newly-introduced recording pro-forma but recording is inconsistent. At times, discussion points are recorded but there is no information on development. At other times, information is recorded but achievements are not and on other occasions it provides evaluative information on both progress and achievement. The methods of recording between tutors are variable. The recording pro-forma effectively guides the tutors to address the five every child matters outcomes for learners. Tutorial files, held by the personal tutors, impede access as well as sharing and monitoring of information. There is insufficient scrutiny of the tutors' recording by their line managers. The college acknowledges that monitoring of recording and sharing of information needs to be developed.

What progress has been made in the safeguarding arrangements?**Reasonable progress**

Safeguarding is given a clear focus by the college with accessible guidance for learners in their induction programme. Learners clearly express their understanding of the information and guidance in practical terms. Tutorials successfully support the learners' focus on safety and safeguarding issues. There is good and regular liaison with the local safeguarding board supporting timely responses to legislative changes as well as developing strategies to address concerns that arise. The 'Learner Voice' group regularly addresses concerns raised by learners. Learners understand well the accessible anti-bullying policy. A clear system of prompt and effective responses to safeguarding issues raised by individuals has reduced the number of incidents reported. A wide range of comprehensive risk assessments supports trips away from the college as well as work-experience placements. The college has regular safeguarding training but currently a small minority are not up-to-date. All staff have criminal record bureau checks held centrally, however, a substantial number are over five years old. An e-safety policy successfully deals with concerns of cyber-bullying. Staff are vigilant in filtering access to unacceptable materials on the college's information technology equipment. A well structured and accessible road safety programme supports learners in developing increased independence safely.

How are partnerships being developed and extended to maximise learning opportunities?**Reasonable progress**

Formal partnerships are well developed and provide a wide range of opportunities for learning activities in the community. The local Methodist church provides suitable accommodation for performing arts as well as supporting local people who attend the church in their experience and understanding of people with learning disabilities. External work experience placements effectively extend the learners' experience of work requirements and community life. In 2010, work experience providers judged 64% of learners to be work ready with 24% of learners going into voluntary or paid employment.

The college has successfully developed a useful and effective partnership with two local universities for the professional development of university students. Attempts at developing a two-way partnership with the local further education provider have not been as successful, and a clear strategy has yet to be developed. The long-standing, supportive and formal arrangement with Connexions is subject to change in the near future. A recent successful development with a local learning provider has provided a further opportunity for learners to undertake learning experiences in construction skills. Some progress is being made in developing closer partnership arrangements with the local authorities that refer learners.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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