

# Arden College

## Independent specialist college

Inspection dates		8–10 May 2013
Overall effectiveness	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider requires improvement because:

- The college does not capture learners' progress well enough to show all the skills and knowledge they have made over time.
- Learners' functional English, mathematical and information technology skills are not developed consistently across all sessions.
- Managers at all levels have not ensured that quality assurance processes are sufficiently rigorous and, as a result, this is delaying the speed of improvement across teaching, learning and assessment.
- The parent company's supervisory body does not monitor sufficiently all key aspects of the college's performance including self-assessment and equality and diversity to ensure improvement.
- Some accommodation, especially the Oxford Road site, is poor and provides an unsuitable environment for learning.
- While awareness of equality and diversity has been raised across the college, the analysis, monitoring and reporting of equalities data and information remains underdeveloped.

#### This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners make particularly good progress in developing their communication skills.
- Learners' achievement of qualifications is high.
- The comprehensive communication strategy is implemented very effectively across the provision to enable learners to access the curriculum.
- Learners access a good range of additional learning opportunities including social, cultural, sporting and work-related activities.
- Managers have used targeted staff training and performance management well to aid the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers and staff summarise and use learners' feedback well to help improve their college experience.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and use of learner core targets by ensuring that these are embedded in all sessions effectively and provide specific steps to promote learning.
- Strengthen staff recording and tracking of learners' overall progress by more consistent monitoring of the quality and completion of recording across all aspects of the provision, including tutorials. Ensure that termly reports provide a clear record of learners' progress.
- Create increased opportunities across all areas of the curriculum for the development of learners' English, mathematics and information learning technology skills. This can be achieved by reviewing and implementing fully the functional skills strategy and ensuring that all staff understand and embed it in their sessions.
- Strengthen considerably the quality assurance processes within the college and use data better so that managers can measure more effectively the impact of their actions. This can be achieved by using trend data better through self-assessment and by ensuring improvement plans have clear and measurable targets that focus sharply on the college's key priorities. In addition, ensure managers clearly track actions from meetings and staff complete all required documentation in detail.
- Improve the supervisory body's scrutiny on all key aspects of the college's performance, including self-assessment and equality and diversity. Ensure the proposed changes to corporate governance provide robust monitoring and scrutiny of key college performance areas so they can ask more challenging questions of managers and be assured of the rate of improvement being made against targets.
- Implement fully the college's refurbishment plans to eradicate poor accommodation, particularly at the Oxford Road site, and ensure all classrooms provide effective environments in which to learn.
- Strengthen the analysis, monitoring and reporting of equality information by managers, including achievement data and learner surveys. Measure more effectively the impact of actions to increase the promotion of equality and diversity. Better promote equality and diversity in lessons.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- Outcomes for learners are good. Learners make good progress relative to their starting points in developing the skills they need for their future lives. A significant strength of the college is the very effective focus on the development of learners' communication skills. In addition to making good gains in their personal and social skills, many learners increase their levels of independence and the ability to manage their own behaviour.
- More recently, learners are becoming adept at using tablet computers and mobile technologies as communication aids. They are more able to express their choices and communicate more effectively with others. For example, tablet computers are beginning to be used by learners in shops and social events to communicate choices.
- Learners make good progress in achieving externally accredited qualifications. In 2011/12, the success rates across all courses were high. Learners have access to an increased range of meaningful qualifications that accredit both their personal and vocational skills development as appropriate. Achievement gaps between different groups of learners were minimal in 2011/12, although these data are not analysed sufficiently over time.

- Many learners progress by one qualification level during their time at the college. For example, 12 learners progressed from Entry level 1 to Entry level 2 in Functional Skills mathematics in 2011/12. Learners do not, however, always have sufficient opportunities to develop their functional skills further throughout all sessions.
- Initial and baseline assessment are comprehensive and used effectively to identify learners' starting levels and individual learning plans. The quality of target-setting varies across the provision and the recording of learners' progress against their targets is not sufficiently consistent in identifying what learners can do. The college is aware that this area requires improvement.
- Many learners attend work placements to improve their work-related skills by learning to be punctual, to follow routines and instructions. They familiarise themselves with and learn to cope in different settings.
- Learners' attendance and retention rates are high. They enjoy and fully engage in their learning. A good proportion of learners achieve their long-term goals and progress to their chosen destinations. Many leavers progressed to some form of further education or training over the last three years. A few learners gain paid employment. A minority of learners succeed in moving onto supported living arrangements.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Not enough lessons are good or better, although a very effective communications strategy and good support have led to good outcomes for learners.
- Teachers generally have high expectations of learners and understand their needs well, planning flexibly to meet changing needs. Most staff use questions well to help learners think, although not all teachers wait long enough to allow learners to answer in their own time. Behaviour management is effective. Practical lessons involving real tasks such as gardening or cooking are particularly successful and staff in these lessons reinforce health and safety well.
- Resources to support learning require improvement. Although tablet computers and mobile technologies are increasingly used, the college does not yet have enough computing equipment. Too few teachers use computers confidently for the benefit of learners. Learners do not all have enough access to the technological aids that help develop independence. The college teaching environment is not consistently conducive to learning. A sensory room is in its first year of use and is appropriately equipped.
- Most learning support is provided by teaching assistants who know individual learners well, help them manage their behaviour effectively and enable them to concentrate on learning. However, few education support staff are appropriately qualified and not all produce effective records of progress. A few teaching assistants speak too loudly for some learners with autism.
- Specialist speech and language therapy and support are good. An experienced consultant speech and language therapist works closely with the college to assess learners' starting points and produce strategies to help effective development of their communication skills. A well-designed development programme for staff is improving their ability to work well with learners.
- The college has a good communications strategy using speech, signing, gestures, images and symbols to communicate with learners. However, the use of technological communication aids is not yet fully developed.
- The process for establishing learners' starting points is thorough but on-going recording of learners' progress requires improvement. Teachers record learners' achievements with varying degrees of thoroughness against their targets in lessons but the lack of a computerised system means that a central record of learners' overall progress is incomplete. Learners' termly reports are not sufficiently clear in outlining the overall progress made.

- Teachers give encouraging instant verbal feedback on learners' achievements in lessons, which they find very motivating. A few learners at higher levels receive helpful written feedback on their work.
- Activities to develop English and mathematical skills have increased but still require improvement. Targets are not sufficiently broken down into small steps in learning. Learners do not always have numeracy targets when calculating in practical lessons. Staff often correct learners' spelling and punctuation in their written work but not all have the skills to help learners improve. Learners do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their information learning technology skills in residences and across the curriculum.
- Learners attend a good range of additional activities including social, sporting and cultural activities. Work-experience arrangements are effective. A good range of work-related communication resources are effective in enabling learners to access their placement fully and evaluate their performance.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Observation of potential Arden learners in the school setting is very effective in providing good information at entry to the college. Transition arrangements for preparing learners for their next stage after Arden are good. Tutorial support focuses appropriately on moving learners towards their next step but records of tutorial sessions are often incomplete, with missing evidence or dates.
- The promotion of equality and diversity needs further development. Staff awareness of equality and diversity issues is improving. Lessons and the wider curriculum often include aspects of cultural diversity but learners do not yet have enough opportunity to discuss equality issues, particularly those that arise in workplaces.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

### **Requires improvement**

- Leadership and management require improvement. The college has recently set a revised strategic vision following its incorporation with The Priory Group in 2011. The majority of the post-merger alterations to the college management structure and systems are completed. The processes to bring about sustained and rapid improvement across all facets of the college's work, however, lack rigour. As a result several key areas, such as the use of data and the recording and measuring of impact from management actions, have not improved sufficiently.
- The supervisory body monitors the college's finances very effectively. However, it does not currently provide sufficient scrutiny or challenge to senior managers on some key aspects such as self-assessment, strategic planning and equalities monitoring. The organisation is aware of the need to strengthen its strategic overview and is putting into place a more coherent reporting process for the summer term.
- The overall quality of accommodation and resources is adequate. Recent investment in information learning technologies, including interactive tablets, is helping to enhance learners' communication and independence. While refurbishment has continued to take place within areas of the main sites and houses, some accommodation such as the Oxford Road site is poor and provides an unsuitable learning environment. Priory Group plans are in place with the aim to refurbish the building completely from the end of the summer term.
- Managers have used targeted staff training and performance management well to aid the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers observe lessons frequently and, in most cases, provide teachers with clear areas for development. Due to a change in the appraisal system in September 2012, less than half of staff were appraised in 2011/12. A new appraisal process is underway for the current year.
- Not all staff take enough responsibility for managing and implementing quality improvement. Quality assurance processes within the college remain insufficiently rigorous, which is a key factor hindering Arden's rate of improvement. Managers do not always record actions from key meetings explicitly or follow these up in a timely manner. Staff completion of records and other documentation is sometimes cursory. While managers are aware of the need to strengthen the

focus on quality further, this has remained a key area for development over the last two inspections.

- The college's self-assessment reports are too descriptive, not sufficiently evaluative and do not use trend data or information well enough to support judgements made. The college's quality improvement plan lacks sharp, measurable targets to enable managers to review and gauge the impact of their actions. Inspectors agreed with several key strengths and areas for development identified within the self-assessment report but found a number of areas, such as equality and diversity, were over estimated.
- Managers capture learners' feedback through several routes and use this information effectively to improve the learners' experience. For example, some learners wanted to pursue skills in plumbing and decorating. As a result the college made a link with a local training organisation that currently provides construction skills training for two Arden learners.
- Learning managers provide good day-to-day oversight of the curriculum and the needs of the learners. The extended curriculum is good and is flexible in meeting learners' needs well. The learning managers have an improved focus on monitoring the recording and tracking of learners' progress. The paper-based tracking system is cumbersome, however, and impedes the effectiveness of quality monitoring and improvement.
- Managers have raised the profile of equality and diversity well across the college. The college's annual cultural event is successfully increasing learners' awareness of cultural diversity and respect. The promotion of wider equality themes, such as sexual orientation, is less effective. While improved since the last inspection, managers' analysis, monitoring and reporting of equalities data and information remains underdeveloped. As a result managers and the supervisory board are not able to review trends and patterns in performance effectively over time.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of learners. The majority of staff have received basic awareness training in safeguarding. Staff record incidents or accidents routinely but the completion of these records varies in detail.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

<b>Arden College</b>			
<p><b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b></p> <p>1: Outstanding                      2: Good                      3: Requires improvement                      4: Inadequate</p>	<b>Overall</b>	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	3	3
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

<b>Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>Overall curriculum grade</b>	3

## Provider details

<b>Arden College</b>	
<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: 42
	Part-time: N/A
<b>Principal</b>	Mark Musselle
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	October 2010
<b>Website address</b>	www.priorygroup.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	1	41	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A	N/A	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	N/A	N/A
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Beacon Learning Limited</li> </ul>							

## Additional socio-economic information

Arden College is an independent specialist college catering for learners with severe and complex learning difficulties. There are a number of learners with autistic spectrum disorder and some have additional sensory or communication needs, or present challenging behaviour. The majority of learners are White British. Arden College is located in Southport, Merseyside and has a training café in the town centre. At the last inspection, the college was owned by Craegmoor who merged with The Priory Group in 2011.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Margaret Hobson HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the vice principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider'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 employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.



## 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:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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