

Arden College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates		3–5 June 2014
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 provider is good because:

- Managers promote and reinforce high standards in teaching and learning very effectively and have supported staff well to develop specialist expertise in working with students with a wide range of abilities and support needs.
- Students make good progress, particularly in developing their communication and social skills. They become more independent, confident at making choices and interacting with others.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of stimulating and lively learning activities that teachers plan well to meet individual needs.
- The new communication and learning strategy is well developed and central to ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to all students, especially those with complex needs.
- Staff have developed very good links with employers to provide a high proportion of students with good quality work-related learning.
- Baseline and initial assessments are thorough and ensure that most students support plans are specific and promote progress.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Judgements in the self-assessment report are too descriptive and do not provide clear and detailed actions to inform the quality improvement plan and ensure continued improvements.
- The parent company does not provide sufficient accountability or levels of scrutiny to ensure that the college's performance is continually monitored and improved.
- Support workers and classroom assistants do not always receive sufficient direction from teachers to ensure students increasingly develop their skills and confidence to carry out activities independently.
- Long-term planning and goals related to employment and employability destinations are not clear for all students.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Implement fully the work already started to develop and quality assure the provision. In particular, strengthen monitoring of the performance of the college by the parent company.
- Improve the rigour and focus of the self-assessment report to ensure it is more self-critical and informs the quality improvement plan. Use the new approaches to capturing and analysing data in the self-assessment process to make progress more quantifiable.
- Clearly identify students' long-term employment destination goals so that progression planning is comprehensive and more students progress into paid employment and work-related activities. Ensure that targets and strategies to reduce levels of support over time are well articulated, implemented and monitored.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of support staff and classroom assistants. Improve the use of support in learning so that every student benefits fully. Provide support and training and monitor the effectiveness of support through lesson observations and quality improvement processes.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Students make very good progress towards realising and exceeding their planned learning and independence goals. Over the last three years, almost all students achieved their targets. Students make particularly good progress in developing the personal and social skills they need for their future lives.
- Most students greatly improve their ability to manage their behaviour appropriately and this has been central in enabling them to integrate effectively within the community and with their peers. Parents and carers of these students report a significant reduction in levels of frustration and improved behaviour at home. For example, the development of a better understanding of personal space means learners can participate in vocational learning in the community.
- College data indicate no significant variations in achievement of qualifications or wider learning goals between different groups of students. The most able students occasionally experience delays in lessons as they wait for their next target or goal, having achieved their current one.
- Few learners are taking functional skills qualifications but the good integration of English and mathematics within the curriculum ensures students develop these skills within vocational, social and more formal learning. A real strength is the emphasis teachers place on the development of students' communication skills so that they are able to live more independently.
- Almost all students who take functional skills qualifications achieve, and teachers challenge the most able to progress rapidly. Currently, two students are taking their foundation-level qualifications at the local college, having quickly achieved their entry-level qualifications.
- Students produce a high standard of work in vocational learning. In one lesson, students very efficiently weeded and cleared the flowerbeds at the local botanical gardens, working cooperatively with each other to complete the task. In another lesson, pizzas were made for the college lunchtime meal. The college tuck shop is self-financing, and run and managed by the students.
- Students develop and practise their skills in a wide range of local workplaces including shops, cafés and community gardens. They gain skills in teamwork, following instructions, meeting and providing services for unfamiliar people and specific job skills. The college runs a lively café and hairdressing salon where learners confidently make drinks and snacks, take orders, serve

customers, clear tables, wash up and operate the till. Other learners gain useful work-related skills through internal college placements.

- The college works hard to secure workplace opportunities for students within their own local communities when leaving the college. However, planning for transition into employment or employment-related activities does not take place early enough in a student's programme. Too many students are still receiving individual support on their placement at the end of their programme and communication with potential employers in the home area begins too late.
- Attendance and punctuality are good and students enjoy their programmes. They regularly take part in sports and music events and are currently planning and rehearsing for a concert in the park where they will be performing as a live band. This is particularly effective in helping students develop their communication skills and confidence.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Students benefit from consistently high levels of support that motivates them to achieve well. Most teachers and support staff are highly skilled and enthusiastic and have high expectations of what students can achieve ensuring most learners make good progress towards their learning goals.
- Well-qualified and experienced teachers plan learning thoroughly and sessions include a wide range of activities that are lively and interesting. Students participate enthusiastically and enjoy their learning. However, a few teachers do not take full account of all students' abilities and a small minority complete the activities too quickly, as tasks are too easy. As a result, students are not extending and deepening their learning as effectively as they could.
- Careful planning of lessons ensures students work productively towards a range of practical and personal targets that help them develop their social and independence skills well. Where students become anxious staff use 'time out' strategies very effectively to lessen anxiety and help the student return to learning as quickly as possible.
- Behavioural and communication support is particularly good. Many tutors use signing and symbols effectively to support students' understanding and help them make choices. Students receive high levels of one-to-one support, by staff who know their students very well and this successfully motivates them to achieve. Very occasionally, support staff give too much or too little help.
- The safety of staff and students is of the highest priority for the college. All staff are extremely vigilant and provide regular reinforcement of likely hazards and how students can keep safe. When students are in the community the management of risk is exemplary.
- Initial assessment is thorough and staff make good use of this to ensure all students have well-tailored support plans, setting out priorities and strategies for students' programmes of study and personal needs. This ensures that most students receive the correct levels of support and that all staff are clear about students' short-term aims and what they need to do to achieve.
- Teachers and support workers, through discussions, questioning and reviewing work, assess students continually; they use technology well to support students to review their progress. A tablet computer was used in one lesson to record students' performance during a practical cycling activity; students then used this to assess their achievement. A small number of teachers rely too heavily on support staff to assess students' progress and do not check sufficiently that students are progressing and meeting all of their targets quickly enough.
- Students develop good communication skills and develop their written English, mathematics and functional skills to an appropriate level. Teachers reinforce these skills well in learning. For example, in a hair and beauty lesson, a computer was used well by students to describe their learning, using sentences and punctuation correctly. In the college tuck shop students manage the supply of stock, place orders and calculate the amount of profit or loss.
- A well-organised tutorial programme and knowledgeable specialist advisers help students plan for their future destinations, particularly further learning and living arrangements. However, the

planning of work experience is generally too late in a student's programme and therefore not all students who could, progress into work after they leave the college.

- College resources are good overall and include a newly refurbished kitchen where students develop a good range of life skills such as preparing and cooking a meal. Teachers make creative use of technology in lessons to support learning. Students make use of interactive whiteboards to record outcomes of a practical task, enabling the rest of the group to reflect and comment on their results.
- Employers provide high-quality work placements where students develop a realistic understanding of the demands of work. Good on-the-job training by these employers develops students' employability and functional skills well. For example, the good use of mathematics and English skills to manage the supply and display of greetings cards. However, teachers do not always make good use of this on-the-job learning to set specific targets to identify the applied skills each student needs to develop in lessons.
- Teachers and support staff establish a culture of respect and understanding across the college. Students work harmoniously together and treat each other with tolerance and understanding. They are particularly good at supporting one another in times of stress and challenge. When students are unable to complete an activity, the rest of the group continue working and discrete support enables them all to complete the assignment.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Managers have developed the provision well in response to the increasing proportion of students who come to the college with complex needs. The new communication and language strategy is central to these changes and focuses very well on linking students' development needs in communication with their wider learning programme. Staff use information from students' initial assessments well to identify targets for individual care and education plans.
- Improving the quality of teaching and learning has been a very high priority since the last inspection. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is now frequent and thorough and teachers receive constructive feedback on the quality of their work and any areas for development. Managers have identified that all support staff now need to be part of this process and plans are in place to implement this.
- Training and development are frequent and regular, and develop staff expertise well in most areas. Staff are particularly positive about its effectiveness in improving their skills and confidence in behaviour management and understanding and managing complex needs. Senior managers recognise the need for further training to maximise the use and effectiveness of support staff in learning.
- Performance management is now thorough and the appraisals and supervisory processes are effective in improving staff performance. Senior managers set high professional standards, for example, in the quality of staff's written work in external reports on students' progress. Procedures for staff recruitment and induction for staff are rigorous. New staff are monitored closely and they receive good support to enable them to become familiar with their students before having to teach alone.
- Operational planning is good. Staff manage complex timetabling well to provide individualised programmes on a daily basis, based mostly on students' medium- and long-term goals. Staff have developed very good links with employers and community organisations to provide a high proportion of learners with work-related learning with external employers.
- Study programmes are effective in providing English, mathematics and work experience for all students. They have good opportunities to progress within vocational areas and to higher levels of English and mathematics.
- Staff use tutorials, daily and weekly meetings, a variety of well-designed forms and the 'learners' voice committee' very well to gather students' views. Staff make good use of these views to influence timetables and to shape the curriculum.

- Recent refurbishment, funded by the parent company, has improved the learning environment and the accommodation at the Oxford Road site. Investment in computing and other technological equipment is beginning to open up more channels of communications for more students and to support the collection and use of information to monitor students' progress and evaluate the provision.
- The college promotes diversity very well, especially in the community. Members of the public praise the college for the contribution its students are making to the community. Work-based risk assessments are thorough and staff use a checklist and further guidance well to monitor the extent to which learners are treated fairly, especially at work.
- Managers have recently identified a new, more specific method for identifying and capturing trends in students' performance. The four categories for defining students' levels of communication and language skills provide more meaningful analysis and comparisons.
- Arden College meets its statutory requirement for safeguarding learners. Recording of incidents is thorough and incidents are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Staff take part in regular mandatory training, including training for some senior managers at level 4. Risk assessments for especially vulnerable students are thorough and they receive rigorous support and monitoring, with good collaboration with key agencies, such as social services.
- Levels of scrutiny of the college's processes and the impact of the provision by the parent company have increased recently, but the move from just checking compliance to providing more accountability has been slow. Restructuring of the parent company in the past few months has seen the appointment of a new management team and a new regional operations director, who is beginning to introduce a more formal communication structure.
- The self-assessment process is well established but key areas for development are not sufficiently sharp and do not link coherently to the quality improvement plan. Managers are still not using data well enough to make evaluations of the provision or students' achievements. However, managers now monitor their progress towards the targets in their short-term action plans well and they are making good progress on most areas apart from governance.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Provider name

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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	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

Type of provider	Independent specialist college							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	43							
Principal/CEO	Mr Mark Musselle							
Date of previous inspection	May 2013							
Website address	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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	34	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	N/A							
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"> ▪ N/A 							

Contextual information

Arden College is an independent specialist college catering for students with severe and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many learners have autistic-spectrum conditions, emotional and social-behaviour issues and speech and language difficulties. Of the 34 students, 17 are residential and 17 attend daily. The majority of students are White British. Arden College is located in Southport, Merseyside and has a training café and hairdressing salon in the centre of the town.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Elaine Clinton HMI
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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 relevant 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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