

Activate Community and Education Services

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

25–27, 30 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Require improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not good enough to enable all learners to make good or better progress.
- Teaching on the individual programmes for learners with complex learning and communication difficulties is not sufficiently effective in meeting their individual needs.
- Teachers and learning support assistants do not record accurately the progress that learners make in all lessons and over time.
- Much of the organisational restructure is recent and has yet to improve the quality of the provision.
- Lesson observers are inconsistently effective in identifying learners' learning and skills development.
- Managers have not put in place the range of external work experience and community projects at both centres to meet learners' needs.
- Most teachers and learning support assistants do not have the skills required to meet the full range of learners' specialist needs.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers use performance management processes very well to identify, challenge and support underperforming staff.
- The revised curriculum matches the needs and vocational interests of the majority of learners to support them in their destination goals.
- Learners benefit from good teaching and learning in drama, horticulture and animal care, which promotes good progress.
- Most learners demonstrate increased confidence and communication skills and an ability to participate and successfully complete tasks.
- Teachers and learning support assistants provide good support for learners to help them improve their behaviour.
- The employability coordinator provides good support for learners after they leave.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Activate Community and Education Services (Activate) is a charity that provides a range of specialist services for young people who have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities; a minority have complex learning and communication needs. It is in its third year of delivery of funded provision. Activate offers full-time day provision over 37 weeks. Activate has two sites; the main one is located in Knowsley and the second is in the Wirral.
- At the time of the inspection, Activate had 63 learners, of which 37 were based at the Knowsley centre, 14 of whom had complex needs. The study programme provides learners with support towards independent living, work and community engagement. The Knowsley site has a range of vocational facilities including horticulture and animal care.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- As a priority, complete the organisational restructure by implementing the detailed action plans; measure the impact of actions on the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment at all stages to ensure it improves the quality of the provision for all learners.
- Improve the observation of teaching, learning and assessment so that following an observation each teacher and support worker is very clear about the impact their work has on individual learners and the quality of the learning and skills development.
- Strengthen the delivery of individual programmes for learners with complex needs by ensuring that relevant staff have the skills to assess and support the development of learners' communication and choice-making skills. Provide specialist training to enable staff to use assistive technology effectively in well-planned learning opportunities.
- Ensure that all staff complete the planned qualifications in working with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to increase their understanding of how their students' learning is affected and enable them to develop learning resources that promote learners' independence in practical tasks.
- Extend the range of work experience and projects to ensure that all learners have access to opportunities that develop their employability skills.
- Use the electronic learning plan and progress tracking system effectively by:
 - providing coaching for all staff on setting learners clear and specific targets, including for employability, English and mathematics skills that reflect their learning needs and destination goals
 - working with staff on using learners' targets effectively in lessons
 - ensuring that staff identify and record progress effectively for individual learners to provide a clear summary of skills developed over time
 - monitoring the quality of the tracking of learners' progress and skills development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have carried out a significant review of the provision during 2015. The resulting staffing restructure focuses on improving the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment and learner outcomes. All teachers now have a relevant qualification. Appropriate staff training has taken place each term for trustees, managers and staff to support the changes. The structural changes and new processes have yet to impact fully on improving the quality.
- The management team provides effective leadership and promotes a culture of respect and openness. Leaders and managers have the skills, experience and enthusiasm to drive forward further improvements; this is strengthened by the recent appointment of a quality coordinator. Managers use performance management systems very well to identify, challenge and support underperforming staff.
- The revised curriculum matches the needs and vocational interests of the majority of learners well in relation to their destination goals. A good range of training is in place for teachers and learning support assistants to improve their general skills and knowledge. Leaders and managers link effectively with the local network of specialist provision to enable key staff to visit and see good or better provision.
- Leaders identify in the self-assessment report 2014/15 that staff specialist skills require improvement and have identified a range of training for all staff to complete to increase their understanding of the impact of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities on learning. Currently, staff do not have a sufficient range of relevant skills to meet learners' complex needs fully.
- The recently revised electronic individual learning plan and progress tracking system is not used sufficiently well by teachers to record accurately the progress learners make over time. Not all aspects of tracking, such as employability skills and advice and guidance plans, are integrated within the system.
- Senior managers focus well on improving teaching, learning and assessment through the recently revised monthly observation process. Observers are improving their skills at judging the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment. While the written observation feedback is detailed, a few observers focus too much on teaching rather than on assessing its impact on learning.
- The self-assessment report is evaluative and honest. It accurately identifies most of the areas for development found during the inspection. Improvement plans have detailed and specific actions to improve the quality of the provision but not all aspects have been implemented.
- Learners are increasingly prepared well for life in modern Britain. The college provides good experiences for many learners to mature, develop their self-confidence and understand how they contribute to their local communities, for example by volunteering at a food bank in Knowsley and maintaining a municipal garden in the Wirral.
- The strategy to ensure that learners are protected from radicalisation and extremism is appropriate but at an early stage of implementation. For example, in one lesson learners read newspaper reports about recent terrorist attacks but the discussion was not sufficiently well managed to extend their understanding of the wider issues.
- Staff promote a culture of respect for differences well. Learners demonstrate respect for each other and for staff, and support each other well. Inspectors observed exemplary behaviour across both sites. Learners report that incidents of bullying are managed well.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Leaders and trustees have taken strong and decisive action on restructuring the provision to improve the quality and secure Activate's financial resilience. Detailed action plans are being implemented well and monitored effectively. The board of trustees has extended its membership well to ensure that its skills match the needs of the provision effectively. A trustee with extensive experience in further education has joined the board. Trustees have a clear understanding of their strategic role but acknowledge that during this period of significant change they provide support for operational development. An effective academic board is now in place and provides appropriate challenge to senior managers.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Regular training gives staff a good awareness of the potential risks faced by the learners in Activate centres, the wider community and at home. The effective emphasis on giving learners the skills to keep themselves safe increases their confidence when taking part in external placements or community projects.
 - Activate follows recommended practice for safe staff selection and recruitment well. Annual audits of

the safeguarding arrangements are thorough and lead to detailed and rigorously monitored action plans. Individual risk assessments take good account of the needs of each learner.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement across much of the provision. In the minority of less effective lessons, learners work on the same activity, planning is not sufficiently individualised and does not provide challenge for the most-able learners. The delivery of individual programmes for learners with the most complex needs is not sufficiently effective as too many staff do not have the skills to communicate and work effectively with this group of learners.
- Detailed initial assessment is used well to identify learners' starting points, individual learning plans and destination goals. However, it is not used effectively to set individual targets in lessons. Consequently, the recording and monitoring of learners' knowledge and skill development over time is not effective. The revised curriculum matches the needs and vocational interests of the majority of learners well in relation to their destination goals. They have access to a wide range of vocational subjects including horticulture, catering, animal care, creative studies and drama. At the Wirral centre, learners have access to a wide range of innovative external work experience and projects; however, the range of external opportunities at the Knowsley site is more limited.
- In better lessons, detailed planning is effective in meeting learners' individual needs, activities are varied and challenging, and teachers give learners time to think through a problem or task. Teaching is particularly effective in drama and learners engage in a range of personal development activities that promote good progress in their communication skills and confidence. For example, learners used their developing signing skills to perform a Christmas song together very confidently.
- In the majority of practical and work-related lessons, such as horticulture and animal care, teachers make good use of their vocational expertise to plan a wide range of individual activities that motivate and engage learners; as a result they make good progress in their work and personal skills.
- Teachers effectively assess learners' progress and the quality of their work in lessons. Teachers' written feedback on learners' work provides specific detail on how they can improve.
- Support for learners is good, particularly in helping them to manage their behaviour more effectively. For example, learners who become upset and leave a lesson are supported well to calm quickly and return to class ready to work. In the majority of lessons, skilled support staff work closely with teachers and learners to ensure each individual is able to learn and make progress. A small minority of support staff require further training to understand the need to give learners time to think through a problem or task instead of using verbal prompts immediately.
- Most learners use technology well in lessons to extend their learning. In a few lessons, teaching methods and specialist equipment is not used effectively to enable learners with complex needs to participate fully and develop their communication skills.
- Teachers promote a culture of mutual respect and celebration of diversity well. The promotion of equality and diversity is appropriate across teaching. For example, in one lesson learners discussed the concept of stereotyping and how this can result in inaccurate assumptions about people.
- The majority of learners extend their skills well in the use of English, mathematics and information and communication technologies. Many learn successfully to read, write, listen, calculate, measure and estimate. The majority of teachers identify errors and help learners correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in class or on written work. For example, in a practical horticulture lesson, the teacher used a range of spelling strategies including asking learners to spell words or to write them on the board to help others in the group. English and mathematics targets are not integrated in all lessons to enable the systematic development of learners' skills. Learners with complex needs taking part in animal care practical work receive too many verbal prompts and this does not help them become independent in completing their tasks.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- While the majority of learners gain good communication skills and learn to make choices about their future, learners with more complex needs do not develop their communication and choice-making skills effectively.
- Learners with complex needs take part in active learning in the animal care facility or in horticulture, gaining in confidence, increasing their ability to work with each other and learning routines. However,

learning support assistants provide too many verbal prompts that hinder learners' independence in completing tasks.

- All learners have advice and guidance lessons during their induction period; this process identifies effectively learners' readiness for work in relation to an external work placement, voluntary work or internal work experience. However, the smaller number of external work placements and community projects at the Knowsley site hinders learners' development of employability skills.
- For the minority of learners who participate in external work placements, the thorough preparation and good support from the employability coordinator helps employers provide valuable and realistic experiences; as a result, learners improve their employability skills very well, including social and communication skills through meeting people from the wider community.
- Many learners develop effective functional skills in reading, writing, use of number and handling money through a range of practical activities.
- Most learners demonstrate increased confidence and skills in managing their own behaviour.
- The majority of learners work hard and demonstrate enjoyment in their learning and development of skills. For example, one learner explained with pride how she now waited and listened to what her peers said rather than interrupting.
- Learners work safely and understand how to keep themselves safe. Learners who participate in a work placement or a practical project have an appropriate understanding of health and safety. Risk assessments are appropriate and take account of individual learners' needs.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality are good.
- Most learners know how to keep themselves fit and healthy. Healthy choices are promoted well through Activate's café. Learners' awareness of healthy food choices is developed through the personal, social and development curriculum. For example, one group of learners assessed and discussed the amount of sugar in a range of popular foods and drinks.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- The majority of learners are making good progress in developing their communication skills and confidence and in using these skills in their lessons, work experience and community projects. For example, one group of learners used video links to explain the benefits of the use of technology to primary school pupils.
- A minority of current learners with more complex needs do not make sufficient progress in developing their communication or choice-making skills.
- Success rates for functional skills mathematics results were poor in 2013/14. Current learners make good progress in developing English and mathematical skills. Consequently, a greater proportion are passing their functional skills tests than in the previous year.
- The majority of learners who completed their study programme in 2015 progressed into voluntary work, voluntary work with training, or further education courses at a higher level.
- Where learners' planned progression destinations are not sustained, Activate provides ex-students with a high level of support and guidance to help them identify an alternative path for progression.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	48
CEO	Mrs Vivienne Guy
Website address	www.activateces.org.uk

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+
	1	62	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ No subcontracted provision							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Margaret Hobson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gill Reay	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Thompson	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the chief executive, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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