

The Orpheus Centre

Independent Specialist College

Inspection dates

1–3 March 2016

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	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not good enough.
- Too few teachers and learning support staff are sufficiently qualified or trained to meet the specialist needs of the students.
- The arrangements to capture students' progress from their starting points are not working effectively, and do not provide managers with timely information about the college's performance.
- Too few students improve their English and mathematics skills because they are not studying at a higher level than when they started.
- Personal tutors do not have sufficient oversight of all aspects of students' work, and do not review progress frequently enough.
- Students who do not live on site do not have sufficient opportunity to develop their independent living skills.
- First-year students do not have work experience.

The provider has the following strengths

- Trustees, leaders and managers have taken very strong and effective action to improve the financial resilience of the college.
- Students benefit from the strong focus in the arts curriculum on performance, which enables them to practise a range of different performance and creative arts skills.
- Most students demonstrate significantly increased confidence in completing tasks and in communicating effectively with others.
- Students study in an inclusive environment which fosters respect and tolerance for others, where they feel safe, where bullying is not tolerated, and where they gain a good understanding of their own rights and those of others.
- The partnerships and outreach work with other educational organisations and disability arts organisations enrich the experiences of students as they engage productively with others in the community.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Orpheus Centre is an independent specialist college located in Godstone, Surrey. It provides education for students with moderate learning difficulties and a wide range of other physical and sensory disabilities and medical needs. At the time of inspection 20 students, from 12 local authorities, were studying at the college. Of these, half attended on a daily basis and half lived in supported housing on the site. The college also supports students funded by social services, but this provision was out of scope of the inspection.
- The focus of the college's curriculum is to use the visual and performing arts as a medium for the development of independent living skills, so that students can progress to semi-supported destinations.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- As a priority, make sure that teachers and learning support assistants (LSA) have the skills, knowledge and understanding to support and challenge all students effectively.
- Continue to fund teachers to become qualified and increase the level of specialist training in order to meet the specific needs of the students.
- Make sure that students who attend on a daily basis receive the therapeutic support, particularly speech and language therapy, that they need.
- Carry out more frequent observations of teaching, to make sure that teachers and LSAs have understood and are implementing the training they have received.
- Build on the progress made in using electronic data to capture students' progress from their starting points, so that management information is more robust and provides timely information about the performance of students.
- Provide a clearer, more succinct baseline when students start at the college, and review their overall progress more frequently.
- Ensure that personal tutors have an overview of students' progress in all subjects and activities, and focus on skills, knowledge and understandings developed, rather than on tasks completed.
- Make sure that students study English and mathematics at a level that challenges them and enables them to improve.
- Increase the opportunities for students who attend on a daily basis to develop their independent living skills in realistic settings, so that they engage more with the community for day-to-day activities such as shopping and eating in local cafes.
- Expand work experience opportunities to include students in the first year of their programme.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Following the inspection in 2014, a new head of learning started at the centre, and leaders and managers carried out a significant review of the provision. Lines of responsibility are now much clearer and the number of LSAs and teachers has increased. The head of learning has introduced significant changes to the learning programme, with a much stronger and appropriate focus on the development of independence through the medium of the arts. However, much is recent, and the changes have yet to impact sufficiently on the quality of the provision.
- The centre staff promote an inclusive culture, in which individual differences are respected, and where students are encouraged to work together. They use arts subjects productively to promote British values, such as individual rights and democracy, and the managers have introduced intensive themed weeks that focus on topics such as anti-bullying.
- The students' council plays an active role in identifying ways in which their experiences could be improved. They have, for example, successfully suggested that the college makes use of the online talking books service so that they can listen to their favourite authors and extend their knowledge of others.
- Students benefit from outreach activities that foster greater awareness amongst the public about disability. For example, a group of students spent a week in a pupil referral unit, and by the end of the week performed a short concert of songs composed jointly with pupils from the unit. Similar weeks have been spent working in a prison.
- The quality-assurance arrangements have improved, and the improvement plan clearly, and accurately, identifies what remains to be done. However, managers overestimated in their self-assessment report of 2014/15 the extent to which the changes impacted positively on the quality of the provision.
- Managers have improved the performance-management arrangements and the scheme to observe teaching and learning. They have identified and supported those teachers whose work requires improvement. During the inspection their identification of strengths and weaknesses largely matched those of the inspectors. They recognise that more needs to be done so that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good or better.
- The recently devised electronic arrangements to capture the progress of students from their starting points are still in development, and not all aspects of the programme are yet sufficiently well coordinated to enable managers to have immediate access to management information. Managers are not able to evaluate the quality of the provision from year to year.
- Most teachers are well qualified and experienced in the subjects they teach. However, few have teaching qualifications at an appropriate level, and none have teaching qualifications to a sufficiently high level in English and mathematics. Managers currently fund three teachers to gain postgraduate teaching qualifications, but too few staff have received sufficient specialist training linked to the specific needs of the students.
- The teaching facilities are good overall, but the accommodation for the teaching of independent living skills such as cookery are poor. As a consequence, students who do not live in supported housing on site do not have sufficient opportunity to develop these skills. The students' representatives on the Student Council pointed out these students also had too few opportunities for travel training and activities such as shopping.
- The curriculum now focuses appropriately on preparing students for their transition to adulthood and greater independence. The most recent student survey, following the induction process, shows an improvement over the previous survey in 2014 in the extent to which students feel that they have been provided with advice about what to do on leaving the course.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Since the last inspection, the trustees have worked very productively with managers, and have taken decisive action to restructure the educational programme and, at the same time, have overseen significant improvement in the college's financial resilience. The chair and trustees bring a wealth of experience to the board, which includes two student representatives, and they play an active role in the centre, visiting the site regularly.
 - The learning sub-committee members have supported the college's leaders in their journey to transform the curriculum. However, it is too soon to have impacted fully. Trustees recognise that more needs to be done to change the culture and implement the changes fully.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- The safeguarding arrangements have improved since the inspection in 2014. The safeguarding manager has been trained to a high level. She regularly updates staff and trustees on safeguarding issues and takes appropriate steps to protect students from harm. Teachers make students aware of issues relating to e-safety, and know who to go to if necessary. Incident reporting is thorough and a summary of incidents has identified frequency and types of incidents. Teachers carry out risk assessments for students, and update them where appropriate.
- The managers have been trained by the local authority 'Prevent' officer and have developed, and started to implement, a strategy for dissemination. Not all teachers and trustees have attended face-to-face training, but all have received online information.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Too little teaching, learning and assessment is good. Few teachers have teaching qualifications at a sufficiently high level.
- Teachers do not take sufficient account of students' starting points when planning learning. As a consequence, most students in lessons undertake the same activities even though they have very different needs. In the majority of lessons, teachers do not challenge students sufficiently, and as a result many students do not progress well enough.
- Teachers do not routinely set specific, short-term targets against which progress can be accurately measured and recorded. In the better lessons individualised objectives focus on learning effectively, but too frequently targets describe tasks to be completed rather than skills to be developed or understandings to be achieved.
- Teachers do not review students' progress often enough. A full term is too long between reviews for students to benefit from revisiting their targets.
- Personal tutors do not have sufficient oversight of students' programmes to monitor their learning effectively. They have too little working knowledge of students' starting points, their progress in key areas such as English and mathematics and the skills developed during work experience. Consequently, they are not able to make timely interventions in order to maximise students' achievements.
- In the most effective lessons in the visual and performing arts, teachers are skilled at planning learning which releases the natural talents of the students, and builds their confidence as they participate in new experiences and develop new skills. In the best of these lessons teachers focus on the quality of the students' responses, challenging them to perform at their best. In music technology and music performance, students enjoy learning new techniques, exploring their emotions and working together to build very effective means of communication.
- Teachers do not use questioning consistently well in order to check learning. Too frequently teachers ask general questions such as "Is anybody finding this hard?" rather than devising activities to check learning. Teachers do not always check that students have fully understood one phase of the lesson before moving on to the next, which slows the progress for those students who are subsequently unsure what to do.
- In the most effective discrete English and mathematics lessons, teachers use a wide range of interesting and relevant activities to enable many students to make progress. However, other teachers are less successful in embedding English and mathematics into their subjects.
- The most effective LSAs provide discreet, encouraging and effective support, but too often other LSAs are too quick to intervene in students' development of skills and understanding, by providing ready-made solutions to problems. In a few cases, LSAs carry out activities on behalf of students, who passively observe them.
- The initial assessment of students does not include the identification of specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, and as a consequence the students do not receive specialist help, which slows their progress.
- Most teachers ensure the safety of students. In one lesson, students explored aspects of internet safety when using social media and developed a good understanding of how to minimise risk. However, in another lesson basic health and safety regulations were not observed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- Students take pride in their work and enthusiastically engage in learning. They grow significantly in self-confidence and make progress in developing their communication skills.

- Students develop wide-ranging personal and social skills during the many creative activities in which they perform. For example the successful Christmas show 'This is not a Panto' and a production of 'Treasure Island' were each attended by a paying audience of over 300. However, this progress is not sufficiently recorded or celebrated in student records.
- Students attend lessons regularly and the great majority are punctual and ready to learn, although a small minority of students have persistent poor punctuality.
- Students behave well both in lessons and in the social areas of the college. They are respectful and tolerant of each other and show understanding and consideration for the specific needs of others. Students are particularly sensitive to the communication difficulties of their peers and take care to interpret accurately what is being said.
- Students in their second and third years develop employability skills and have the opportunity for relevant work experience. However, the skills students develop during work-placements are not sufficiently incorporated within their central records of progress, and students in their first year do not have the opportunity for work experience.
- Students attended a recent careers fair organised by the college which attracted eleven employers, and enabled them to learn about work opportunities in the local community.
- Therapists provide wide-ranging support for students in supported housing, but those who attend on a daily basis do not benefit from specialist support, particularly in speech and language therapy, which limits their progress.
- Students who do not live on the site do not have the opportunity to develop the independent living skills required to support transition when leaving the college. While residential students in the supported living accommodation on-site make good progress in developing these skills within their living environments, day students do not have comparable opportunities.
- Students feel safe and have a good awareness of how they can raise concerns should they feel bullied or threatened in any way. Students have a good understanding of the dangers of using the internet and the specific actions they should take to limit these dangers.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Managers do not have sufficient data to capture the progress of all students from their starting points in relation to all aspects of their programmes.
- Students achieve well through arts performances. They develop their self-esteem and the confidence to perform in front of their peers and in public.
- Standards of work are high in a few arts lessons such as music, and the visual arts students produce high-quality artefacts. However, standards of work are not high enough in other subject areas.
- All students who enter for accredited qualifications achieve very well, in line with other similar providers, and there are no significant differences in achievements between the different groups.
- The destinations data for the two current students in their final year indicates that they are developing the skills they need in order to progress. One student has already gained part-time work in open employment as a result of her work-experience placement.
- Students who have already achieved qualifications in English or mathematics on entry do not develop those skills at a higher level while at the college.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	18+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	12
Principal/CEO	Mr Graham Whitehead
Website address	www.orpheus.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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	2	18	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							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ No sub-contracted provision							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Joyce Deere, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Allan Shaw	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the head of learning, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews to gather the views of students 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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