

# Ambitious College

Independent specialist college

## Inspection dates

**10–12 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	Good
Outcomes for learners	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 consistently good, and does not provide sufficient challenge for all learners.
- Leaders and managers have not observed and monitored the high proportion of teaching, learning and assessment that takes place in the community.
- The arrangements to track, monitor and review the progress that learners make from their starting points are overcomplicated and ineffectual, so it is not possible fully to evaluate progress.
- Leaders, managers and governors do not have sufficient management data to enable them to evaluate the performance of the college year on year.

### The provider has the following strengths

- The managers and governors have provided strong leadership in establishing new provision for learners with very high and complex needs.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the safeguarding of learners permeates all aspects of the programme, and staff are rigorous in their focus on safety in the classroom and in community activities.
- Many learners improve their use of communication aids with the result that they successfully articulate their choices and viewpoints.
- Support staff are highly skilled in using effective strategies to enable learners to participate in activities in the college and in the community.
- Many learners develop their employability skills through carefully selected internal and external work placements.
- Staff encourage learners to adopt healthy lifestyles by eating sensibly and engaging in many forms of exercise and enrichment activities such as art and sport.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Ambitious College is new, non-residential provision run by Ambitious about Autism, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The governing body of Ambitious College reports to the trustees. The college opened in September 2014 on a site in Barnet and Southgate College, and in September 2015 a second site was opened on the Southall campus of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College. All learners have complex autism, and most work at Pre-entry Level. Around a third are of minority ethnic heritage. All of the learners are studying study programmes. The college offers four different Preparing for Adulthood curriculum pathways. These are health, community access, employment and independent living. Ambitious College takes learners from across London and the Home Counties.
- The mission of the college is 'To enable young people with autism to continue to learn and gain the skills post-school so they can transition to life and work as part of their community and to work with the community to include them'.

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

- Extend the observation of teaching, learning and assessment to include the many learning activities that take place in the community.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that the staff who teach have the appropriate specialist training to teach learners with complex autism.
- Ensure that teaching sessions focus on stimulating activities that engage and challenge each learner in the group.
- Review and simplify the arrangements for the tracking, monitoring and reviewing of progress so that staff capture the progress made by learners from their starting points, and carry out more frequent reviews of progress.
- Make better use of management information so that governors, leaders and managers can effectively evaluate the college's performance from year to year.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Governors and managers have provided strong leadership by establishing a new college for learners with very high and complex needs, having identified a gap in local provision. Very few learners follow accredited courses, and managers recognise that they have yet fully to implement arrangements to capture the overall achievements of learners, and to assure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all settings.
- Managers self-assessed the overall effectiveness of the college accurately, identifying many of the key areas for improvement, including the recording of progress in individual learning plans, and the quality of teaching and learning. They failed to identify that the quality assurance arrangements for teaching and learning in the community were not sufficient. They do not use management data effectively to measure the college's performance.
- Learners undertake activities in the community for about half of their time. Managers do not routinely observe the teaching and learning that takes place there, and the achievements are not sufficiently included in reviews of progress.
- Managers accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in the sessions jointly observed with inspectors, and they know what needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, they have not yet brought about sufficient improvement. Many members of staff are new to the college, and the proportion of trained, specialist teachers is low.
- Managers have started to implement the actions identified in the quality improvement plan. They have enhanced the staff induction procedures and provided more support for support staff, following a very high turnover of staff in the first year. They have introduced management information systems to capture data about the progress of learners; however, it is too soon to see the impact of these actions.
- The programme of mandatory professional development is extensive, and the many new members of staff welcome the opportunities that are provided for them, particularly those related to working with learners with complex autism. The charity requires all members of staff to complete their autism-specific training programme in positive behaviour support, which results in a consistent approach to enabling learners to participate in learning.
- The education programme meets the principles of the study programme. Managers have established productive partnerships with employers and local charities to offer learners work experience and encourage the development of English and mathematics in practical settings. Most learners are exempt from the requirement to take an accredited course. Managers have reviewed the effectiveness of the curriculum and recognise the need to offer a wider range of subjects to interest and motivate learners.
- Managers implement the equality and diversity policy effectively. They have recruited staff to reflect the ethnicity of the learners, including some who speak several minority languages. They promote themed topics that teachers can use in lessons as appropriate, including anti-bullying and current festivals such as Diwali, where they have significance for learners.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - The small governing body is newly established, and has held three meetings. The board members bring a wealth of specialist experience to the college, and have been centrally involved in the development of the business plan associated with the establishment of new provision.
  - Governors are strongly committed to overseeing the quality of the provision: one governor recently carried out a useful visit to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding in the college.
  - The members acknowledge that they now need to oversee the quality of the educational provision, which managers are continuing to develop.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Safeguarding learners is central to the ethos and practice of the college. Staff know how to raise issues of concern which are effectively followed up. Staff training is extensive, including training in the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Managers update staff frequently about any changes to requirements.
  - Staff carry out very thorough risk assessments for learners, covering all aspects of their programme, particularly community engagement. Risk assessments are reviewed and updated in a timely fashion.
  - Managers have responded actively and appropriately to the Prevent agenda, which is in the early stages of implementation across the college. The Principal has attended training, which is now being cascaded to all staff.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Too little teaching, learning and assessment are good. Support staff, known as learning and behavioural specialists (LaBS), are skilful in implementing planned strategies to enable learners to participate in lessons, but teachers do not challenge all learners sufficiently and as a result they do not always progress well enough in lessons.
- The assessment of learners' starting points is detailed and staff engage well with parents, carers and other providers to identify learners' needs when they first enter the college. However, staff do not always make best use of these assessments when developing targets and planning lessons.
- The recording of progress in lessons is insufficiently detailed. The progress learners make in the visits to the community is not collated well enough and does not relate sufficiently to the learners' main individual learning plan.
- The LaBS work skilfully and unobtrusively to support learners and minimise disruption in lessons. Staff demonstrate good health and safety practices in most lessons and make good use of the regularly updated individual risk assessments.
- The learners work very well when the subject interests them, as when for example, an artist in residence ran a workshop to produce ceramic jewellery for a Christmas sale. Learners who had previously been observed in sessions where they participated little worked well, showing impressive levels of concentration. In a visit to a local equine charity, four learners practised basic stable skills and applied them well in their work.
- Too often, teachers plan and devise activities that do not challenge all of the learners. They do not provide sufficient guidance to the LaBS so that they can assist the learners in specific learning tasks. They do not consider sufficiently how to engage each individual, so learners do not participate or progress as well as they could.
- Not all teachers have specialist experience or qualifications in teaching learners with complex and profound learning needs. This means that their use of language is sometimes too complex for the learners, and they are not sufficiently familiar with the communication aids the learners use.
- On occasions, teachers are adept at integrating mathematical skills through naturally occurring activities, such as planning to cook a simple meal. They use questioning well to encourage learners to make choices.
- Teachers make appropriate reference to equality and diversity, for example by making use of the learners' knowledge of media characters when discussing the festival of Diwali.
- Resources to support learners are of good quality and in an appropriate medium to enable learners to find a voice so that they can express their preferences and choices.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Learners benefit from the consistency of the approach used by the LaBS according to individual need. All staff implement the strategies devised by the therapists consistently. This means that the learners feel safe and know what is expected of them.
- Staff ensure the safety of learners in the classroom, skilfully recognising signs of any potential dangers and changes in learner behaviour that may lead to harm. Learners respond well to gentle persuasion and guidance away from potentially harmful situations. These interventions encourage them to learn safer behavioural practices.
- Learners practise making healthy meals and staff sensitively avoid the use of food as a reinforcer so that learners do not overeat. Learners take part in physical activity and particularly enjoy dance and music. Learners have the opportunity to try different sports, such as ice-skating, which they enjoy.
- Many learners take part in good-quality internal and external work experience, which provides opportunities to develop employability skills. These placements include a local museum and retail organisations. Staff work with partners and employers extremely well to ensure that learners are fully supported in their placements.
- Good transition planning to prepare learners for their destinations on leaving the college starts early. Staff identify learners' aspirations and potential outcomes when they enter the college and learners have a clear plan of where they want to go on leaving. This plan is translated into the four pathways of the curriculum and is suitably flexible to allow for modifications should a learner's aspirations change.

- Travel training successfully helps learners to travel independently, and, where possible, includes training within the location of the planned destination.
- Rates of retention and overall attendance at college are high.
- Learners develop their English and mathematical skills effectively in practical subjects such as independent living.

## Outcomes for learners

## require improvement

- The tracking and monitoring of progress are weak. The implementation of the process to recognise and record progress and achievement is in the initial stages. Although learners make progress, the arrangements to measure their progress from the start of their programme do not provide a complete picture of achievement. The baseline assessment is not sufficiently robust, and managers do not review overall progress frequently enough.
- The communication strategies devised by the therapists to assist learners to develop their confidence and communication skills work well. The development of communication is central to all learners' programmes. Learners learn to use communication aids in order to find a voice so that they can make choices and communicate their wishes freely.
- Learners improve their ability to interact more appropriately with a number of different people. For example, one learner, who previously would not engage with new people, was able to meet with an inspector to express his enjoyment of his college course.
- Learners make progress in managing their behaviour. Many show a marked reduction in challenging behaviour during their time at the college and consequently take part in learning. For example, one learner is now able successfully to lead a horse from the stable. Another learner's support requirements were reduced from two members of staff at all times to one member of staff while in the college.
- Staff and learners treat each other with great respect throughout the college. There is no difference in attainment between different groups of learners.
- Two of the three learners who left the college last academic year moved into positive, planned destinations. One transitioned early into supported living and the other two to a mainstream further education course.
- The four learners who undertook accreditation were successful. The achievement of targets in functional skills has been lower than in other aspects of the curriculum.
- Learners develop skills they need for open or supported employment. One learner who left last year is currently working part time.

## Provider details

<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>	14
<b>Principal</b>	Vivienne Berkeley
<b>Website address</b>	www.ambitiouscollege.org.uk

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	1	34	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	None							

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Joyce Deere, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Ofsted Inspector
Jean Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Brennan	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the vice-principal, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's recent draft self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and survey results to gather the views of learners and employers. These views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, carried out interviews and scrutinised progress documents. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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