

# Expanse Group Ltd

Independent Specialist College

## Inspection dates

18–20 October 2016

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

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too few learners who are entered for functional skills English and mathematics examinations achieve their qualifications.
- The quality of teaching and assessment is not individualised enough to ensure that all learners have targets that challenge them appropriately.
- Too few learners have meaningful work experience placements to help them prepare for their next steps in education, supported internships or employment.
- Governance arrangements do not yet exist.
- The curriculum is too narrow with too much reliance on achieving qualifications that do not meet learners' skills and personal development needs.
- The recent company restructure has not yet had a positive impact on improving the rigour of quality assurance and quality improvement arrangements.
- Performance management reviews lack specific improvement targets for teachers and support staff.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Supported internships are good; most learners develop the skills needed for supported employment and achieve their qualifications.
- Partnership arrangements with employers and local authority teams responsible for learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good.
- The college has an inclusive culture that develops learners' confidence and independence skills well.
- Communication between staff and learners' families about issues affecting learners is good, and staff respond well to any concerns learners or their families may have.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Expanse Group Limited was formerly known as The Media College. Expanse Group Limited is a company limited by guarantee. Expanse Group Limited secured a European Social Fund contract for work with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities between 2013 and 2015. An Education Funding Agency contract was secured in 2015 to provide study programmes for learners with high needs. The college is located in premises at Leigh Sports Village.
- Expanse Group Limited offers day provision for learners who have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At the time of inspection, 47 learners were enrolled on programmes. Most learners are recruited from Wigan and Bolton local authorities. The majority of learners have moderate learning difficulties. A few learners have severe learning difficulties or profound complex disabilities.
- Expanse Group Limited also has subcontracted provision for apprenticeships in creative digital media and teaching and learning sectors.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that learners have meaningful targets that they can understand and achieve, and that teachers use these targets to plan appropriate learning activities so that all learners, particularly the most able, make good progress.
- Increase significantly the proportion of learners who have the opportunity to attend meaningful work experience placements and evaluate the impact this has on learners' skills and personal development.
- Increase significantly the proportion of learners who achieve their English and mathematics functional skills qualifications through the accurate assessment of learners' starting points, enrolling them on the right level of course, preparing them well for examinations, and developing their English and mathematics skills in vocational learning as well as discrete lessons.
- Broaden the curriculum to widen learners' experiences and focus on developing learners' individual personal, social and skills development.
- Fully embed the new structure to improve rapidly the quality of provision and learners' achievements.
- Improve quality-assurance and quality-improvement arrangements by ensuring that leaders and managers have an accurate and consistent approach to reviewing the quality of teaching and assessment on learners' progress. Ensure that the outcomes from quality-assurance activities lead to clear targets for all staff to improve their performance.
- Improve performance management by ensuring that managers provide specific targets for teachers and support staff to improve their performance.
- Implement effective governance arrangements so that trustees challenge senior leaders to improve the quality of the provision and ensure that it meets learners' needs.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Expanse Group Limited secured funding from the Education Funding Agency in 2015 to provide study programmes for learners with high needs. In 2016, Expanse Group Limited completed a restructure; newly appointed key leadership and management roles now include a care and development manager, a curriculum manager and an education inclusion manager. However, the changes have not yet led to good quality of provision.
- The curriculum is too narrow and focuses too much on the achievement of accredited qualifications which do not meet the needs of learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, classrooms are not equipped to develop learners' daily living skills through practical activities such as bed-making and simple cooking tasks.
- In 2015/16, almost all learners were enrolled on English and mathematics functional skills qualifications, and for many these were not appropriate to their level of development and starting points. As a result, too many learners failed to achieve their English and mathematics qualifications. The English and mathematics curriculum has been revised for the current year and now matches the needs of the majority of learners.
- The self-assessment process involves most staff but is not sufficiently rigorous. The self-assessment report includes many strengths and a few of the weaknesses identified by inspectors but it is mainly descriptive and too positive in its judgements of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and study programmes for learners with high needs.
- Quality assurance and quality improvement arrangements are not robust enough. The lesson observation process does not always evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment accurately. Lesson observers do not evaluate the progress that learners make sufficiently and fail to evaluate the impact teaching has on learning. As a result, observers are overgenerous in their assessment of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Performance management requires improvement. Staff have quarterly performance reviews but these do not include the areas for improvement that emerge from managers' reviews of the quality of the provision, including lesson observations. Consequently, the performance reviews lack specific improvement targets for teachers and support staff.
- The programme of staff development is comprehensive in supporting staff to meet learners' health and care needs. All staff complete mandatory training such as safeguarding. However, specific training to support teachers to improve the quality of their teaching is limited.
- Leaders contract with specialist external agencies such as physiotherapists and speech and language therapists to provide appropriate support for learners' physical and communication needs.
- Leaders and managers promote a culture in which learners, their parents and carers and partners feel fully included. The environment is warm and welcoming; it provides a safe place for learners.
- Expanse Group Limited has a wide range of strong partnerships with employers and local authority learning difficulties and/or disabilities teams. Partnerships are effective in supporting leaders to plan future provision for the increasing numbers of learners joining

the college. However, the range of vocational courses is currently limited and will not be increased until the new vocational hub, a partnership arrangement with Wigan local authority, opens in early 2017.

### **The governance of the provider**

- Although leaders are planning to have a board of trustees to oversee the work of the college, provide challenge to leaders and managers and hold them to account, there is no external oversight yet in place.
- Managers from local authorities who have responsibility for providing the additional funding for learners at the college monitor the use of this money closely and provide high levels of challenge to managers during learner-review meetings and contract-compliance meetings.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff participate in relevant training on safeguarding to ensure that learners feel, and are kept, safe. Learners report that they feel safe and know which staff to go to if they have any issues or concerns.
- Staff have had training on the 'Prevent' duty but they have limited understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and how to communicate these to their learners. As a result, staff are unsure of what to look out for to protect learners from the threats of radicalisation and extremism outside of the college.
- Managers take appropriate actions to resolve safeguarding concerns or refer them where necessary to appropriate agencies such as social care or the local authority designated safeguarding officer.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Requires improvement**

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Teachers do not ensure that they meet the full range of abilities within their lesson well enough. This results in the most able learners not receiving sufficient challenge to progress to a higher level. Teachers do not involve all learners sufficiently in questions to check understanding, particularly the less confident learners, before moving on to the next activity. On too many occasions, learners find it difficult to understand teachers' instructions, which then have to be repeated, and this slows down the pace of learning.
- Teachers and learning support staff use resources that contain spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Learners are not developing the necessary skills to improve their written work and continue to make the same mistakes.
- Target setting requires improvement. Detailed assessments of learners' starting points help teachers to identify learners' individual needs and long-term learning goals. However, they do not use the results of these assessments well enough to set relevant individual targets for learners against which to measure their progress. In too many learners' records, their targets are simply the criteria to achieve the qualification and are not broken down into small enough steps of learning to enable teachers to monitor accurately learners' progress.
- In a few cases, teachers and learning support staff fail to support the development of

learners' independence skills, for example by manipulating the computer mouse or touchpad instead of supporting learners to improve their physical skills to control technological equipment.

- Learners on supported internship programmes benefit from good teaching and learning. Learners practise skills needed for employment in practical lessons through skilful mentoring by teachers and staff. Learners' skills are comprehensively assessed by teachers before learners are placed with employers to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for the workplace.
- Learners enjoy their learning; they concentrate well and focus fully on tasks and activities. Learners work well on their own or in small groups. Consequently, they develop good communication skills and high levels of self-confidence. Teachers work skilfully with learners with complex needs to ensure that learners complete tasks and activities successfully.
- Frequent reviews of learners' progress are detailed and easily accessible through a new electronic system. The effective use of this system means that there is a shared understanding between learners, staff, parents and carers of learners' achievements.
- Those teachers who ensure that learning is planned to meet the needs of all learners in the group devise learning activities around a theme that effectively supports the least confident and challenges the most able learners. For example, teachers prepare highly stimulating digital and creative media lessons where learners enjoy working on their own individual projects and make good progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Requires improvement

- Learners enjoy their programmes but too often make slow progress in developing their English and mathematics skills. Teachers have not used information about learners' starting points well enough to plan what learners need to do to develop their English and mathematics skills. Teachers are currently using detailed assessments of learners' skills and understanding of English and mathematics, but it is too soon to measure the impact of this.
- Too few learners have regular and frequent enough work experience to allow them to become confident about a future that may include employment.
- Learners do not receive information and guidance about their next steps after leaving the college early enough. Parents of learners in their first year of study do not always know where to go to for advice about the next steps that learners need to take.
- A few staff are not careful enough when preparing learners in wheelchairs to be moved and a few learners are upset when moved without prior notification. Occasionally, staff do not allow enough time between transitions to new activities or spaces for quiet reflection for those learners who find sudden changes difficult. As a result, a few learners become distressed.
- Learners are prepared well for life in modern British society. Activities such as sustainability and recycling help learners to think about their actions and how they affect the environment.
- Most learners are able to manage their anxieties and behaviour well. Learners'

communication and social skills improve during their time in college. They take increasing amounts of responsibility for themselves and become open to a wider range of new experiences. Learners develop skills which help them to shop independently, take part in pantomimes or take calculated risks such as going on a zip wire.

- Learners form a mutually supportive learning community. They show respect and care for each other. Learners help to keep each other happy and well.
- The college's communications with learners' families and carers about issues that affect them are frequent, reassuring and greatly valued by parents. Staff are highly accessible, supportive to learners and their families and respond well to any concerns learners or their families may have.

## Outcomes for learners

## Requires improvement

- Achievement rates for functional skills mathematics and English in 2015/16 were poor. Of the 24 learners entered for mathematics functional skills at entry level 2 or above, none achieved their qualification. Although slightly better in English, achievement was still very low. Managers recognise that learners were entered for qualifications that were not appropriate given their starting points. As a result, managers have a more rigorous extended assessment of learners' English and mathematics skills this year in order to assess individual learners' needs and ensure that they are enrolled on the right level of course, and their suitability for examinations.
- Achievement rates for the limited range of vocational qualifications vary too much. All 29 learners taking foundations for learning and life achieved their qualifications. However, of the 18 learners taking skilled for life qualifications, a third of learners did not achieve them.
- Learners do not always make the progress of which they are capable given their starting point. Learners that are most-able make slower progress in their learning as many teachers expect learners to complete the same work, regardless of ability or individual learning needs.
- The majority of learners who completed their study programmes in 2015/16 progressed to further education courses or supported internship, but six learners who were capable of gaining employment have not done so.
- Achievement rates on supported internship programmes are high, with almost all learners achieving their supported internship qualification. Learners produce high-quality work and make good progress. Employers support learners to achieve their qualifications and help them to develop the skills needed for employment.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	141738
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	22
Principal/CEO	Mr Tony Brown
Telephone number	01942 877715
Website	<a href="http://www.themediacollege.co.uk">www.themediacollege.co.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	29	18	–	–	–	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	–	–	–	–	–	–		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	47							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operations director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls 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.

## Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Pippa Wainwright

Ofsted Inspector

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