

Ambitious College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

26–28 April 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Provision for learners with high needs Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Good	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- An experienced leadership team manages the provision effectively. It drives a culture of continuous improvement so that the college is improving and learners achieve well.
- Learners enjoy their time at the college and make good progress. They improve their social skills and learn to communicate more effectively.
- Learners are well motivated by the individual learning programmes and high aspirations that staff hold for them. All staff are skilled, know the learners well and are caring and sensitive in their approach.
- Staff and managers create and sustain a secure environment in which learners feel safe.
- Trustees and governors are ambitious for the college and learners. They very effectively challenge and support managers to steer the future of the college and improve learners' outcomes.
- Staff manage the transition of learners into and out of the college effectively. Learners settle quickly and are well prepared for their next steps.
- In a few theory sessions, teachers use visual aids that do not help learners understand the topic or remain interested.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not integrate English and mathematics well enough and a few learners make slow progress.
- The choice of subjects is currently not broad enough and lacks a sufficient range of practical and creative subjects to match learners' interests.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Ambitious College is run by Ambitious about Autism, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The mission of the college is 'to make the ordinary possible for children and young people with autism'. The governing body of the college reports to the trustees. Ambitious College has two campuses. The larger is co-located with the College of North East London. The smaller, newer campus is co-located with West Thames College. The college offers four different 'preparing for adulthood' curriculum pathways. These are health, community inclusion, employment and independent living skills.
- Ambitious College takes learners from across London and the Home Counties. All 48 learners have complex autism, and most are on study programmes at pre-entry level. Just under a half of learners are of minority ethnic heritage and the large majority are male.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that learners remain interested and make good progress in all lessons by:
 - ensuring that tasks set and visual aids used in lessons relate closely to realistic situations in order to aid learners' understanding
 - improving the integration of mathematics and English in different subject areas.
- Managers should broaden the curriculum to include more practical and creative subjects so that learners have a wider range of practical opportunities for learning and so remain fully engaged.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management of the provision are good. Managers and leaders have taken decisive actions that have brought about improvements since the previous inspection. Most areas identified for improvement, at that time, have improved significantly; for example, teachers make better use of the detailed assessments of learners to set targets and plan lessons.
- The management of study programmes is good. Managers ensure that learners have individual learning programmes that include qualifications, enrichment activities and work experience that meet their needs. Managers give the development of English and mathematics a strong priority and teachers promote the importance of these skills well so that learners progress to further courses. However, in a few subject areas, English and mathematics are not well integrated to build on learners' knowledge.
- Managers and leaders use management information well to monitor the provision very effectively. They provide governors with the information they need to provide effective support and challenge. As a result, the college is improving and growing at a fast rate.
- Managers and leaders develop strong partnerships with a number of agencies and employers that bring benefits for learners, such as work experience. Work with the co-located further education colleges results in shared learning and good opportunities for learners to learn new skills through work placements. The principals at both colleges report that the partnerships are mutually beneficial and developing well.
- Managers ensure that new staff receive a comprehensive induction and are well supported in their roles. Staff appreciate the support, good supervision, opportunities for advancement and the way their ideas are listened to. Staff absence rates are low, and more staff are retained in their jobs. Staff receive good-quality training, including in the use of positive behaviour strategies. They become skilled in using this technique and report that this training gives them confidence in their practice with learners.
- Leaders and managers use a robust process to evaluate the provision, which makes good use of the views of learners, parents, partners and staff. As a result, they know the provision well and their self-assessment links effectively with the quality improvement plan.
- Effective observations of teaching, learning and assessment are carried out regularly by managers and lead to improvements in practice. Teaching has been improved through the recruitment of additional staff members who are knowledgeable about autism. However, the observation system is relatively new and managers have not picked up adequately on a few areas of weak practice, including the use of visual aids that do not help learners' understanding.
- Managers have been successful in improving the quality of classroom support for learners. An effective competency framework has been designed for support staff and observations take place three times a year. Managers accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in the sessions observed jointly with inspectors.

- Managers and staff promote equality and diversity well and learners demonstrate respect for other learners and staff. The performance of different groups of learners is carefully monitored to ensure that all are achieving well. Learners learn to be tolerant of differences and celebrate different cultural and religious festivals to help them have a good understanding of the diversity in the communities in which they will work and live.
- The choice of subjects in the curriculum is not broad enough to meet the needs and interests of the learners. Senior leaders recognise the need to widen the breadth of practical opportunities offered and are planning to include more of the creative and practical subjects that learners enjoy, and fewer paper-based activities in lessons.

The governance of the provider

- Trustees and governors are ambitious for learners and are passionate about the future of the college. They contribute well to shaping and communicating its strategic direction by providing support and challenge for senior leaders, and regularly carry out useful visits to evaluate progress and check on quality. As a result, staff are well motivated and learners' outcomes and opportunities are improving.
- Since the previous inspection, the governing body has grown to include members who bring a valuable range of skills and knowledge, which they use well. For example, they have local community knowledge and specialist knowledge of governance, further education and safeguarding; as a result, the managers are well supported in developing opportunities for learners and in keeping them safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding is given a very high priority. Security at both college sites is sound, with only those with fobs obtaining access, which keeps the learners safe. Safeguarding training is extensive and all staff have had training in the 'Prevent' duty. Care is taken to protect learners, and managers have good links with local authority safeguarding staff.
- Thorough risk assessments, with a focus on learner safety, are routinely carried out for all activities and for work-experience placements. Work is in progress to ensure that learners' mental capacity is taken into consideration at initial assessment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff know their learners very well and have high expectations of them. They create an inclusive atmosphere in which learners feel secure and trusted. This means that many learners who initially are only able to attend the college for very short periods, gain the confidence to attend well and participate with their peers.
- Teachers and learning support workers support learners well in lessons. The management of learners' behaviour in lessons is very good. Staff keep learners on task well, with only occasional incidents of distracting behaviour in lessons.
- A multi-disciplinary team makes good use of each learner's education, health and care

(EHC) plan to develop meaningful individual targets that link well to the overall aims of the learning programme. Teachers assess thoroughly learners' abilities when they come to the college and use this as the basis for the individual learning plans.

- Teachers use a comprehensive system effectively to track the progress of learners. Teaching staff plan individual tasks for each learner in lessons and progress is recorded at the end of every lesson, so that the multi-disciplinary team can amend targets if necessary. All teachers have previous experience of working with young people who have high needs and are funded to take higher level specialist teaching qualifications if required.
- Teachers have a good understanding of safeguarding, and relate the concepts of the 'Prevent' duty and British values well to their day-to-day work with learners. Where appropriate, they contact parents, for example, to make sure that learners are using the internet safely at home.
- Learners are engaged well by the way staff use the good resources for learning. The recently refurbished centre includes sensory rooms, a modern kitchen and interactive white boards, as well as a good number of computers. The college is close to good leisure and community facilities that staff use well with learners. Staffing levels and teaching ratios are good, reflecting well the complex needs of learners.
- Learners respond very enthusiastically to arts-based activities. In a music session, learners learned to play the cymbal and a drum in time to a lively rhythm, working together to create a strong sense of group cohesion. In an arts lesson, each student enjoyed creating a clay tile representing aspects of summer, which will be exhibited.
- Learners enjoy going into the community, where they learn to shop, use pedestrian crossings safely and have the opportunity to practise survival skills such as recognising bus numbers and social signs. This helps them to prepare for greater independence when they leave the college.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers planned tasks that learners found uninteresting, dull and uninspiring. In a few cases, tasks were too difficult, particularly where learners were required to complete paper-based activities that were not closely linked to a meaningful context, or where teachers did not use the visual sign system appropriately. On a few occasions, teachers did not use visual representations effectively to encourage and help learners understand the topics.
- Teachers do not integrate English and mathematical skills sufficiently well into activities across the whole curriculum. Not all teachers have yet acquired good skills in developing English and mathematics in all subject areas and activities. As a result, a few learners gain these skills too slowly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners with complex learning needs develop good coping skills through the very good support they receive. A highly skilled support team, led by a behaviour analyst and including a range of therapists, works closely with teaching and support staff to ensure that learners are supported in their personal and social development.
- Learners learn to manage their behaviour well through very good behaviour management support. Detailed behaviour management plans are used well by staff, who carefully track

learners' behaviour. Individual learners make good progress in reducing incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Learners are respectful and polite.

- Learners' attendance is very good, with very little unauthorised absence. Where attendance for an individual learner falls below the expectations of the college, this is quickly identified and addressed.
- Learners develop good work-related skills where employment-related targets are identified in their EHC plans. Many learners with complex difficulties are engaged in employment-related activities. For example, one learner is supported in a part-time job delivering leaflets and another has developed his ability to draw cartoons and sell them to members of the public. This is being enhanced through development of a website where his cartoons can be sold.
- Learners develop skills for work well through work experience that helps them develop a good understanding of the world of work. For example, learners have experience of working in a café setting and develop good customer care skills. However, in a few cases, teachers do not plan the work experience well enough to break down the tasks sufficiently into simple targets so that learners' acquisition of skills can be easily recorded and evaluated.
- Most learners improve their skills in English and mathematics well through activities in the local community. For example, learners can recognise what bus they need to catch to attend off-site activities, and in a gym session, learners can record their activities and count required steps or cycles of physical activity. In a music therapy session, counting and sequencing were reinforced through developing a drum and cymbal rhythm.
- Learners are encouraged well to keep themselves fit and healthy. Physical activity is encouraged through use of the college site's outdoor gym and by attending leisure centres. Learners have high levels of support that is mostly one to one. They are safe and those that can, have a good understanding of whom to contact if they have any concerns.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners achieve and make good progress from their different starting points, particularly in communication and independence skills. These skills include travelling on public transport, being able to purchase goods, checking change and being able to make a hot drink safely.
- Learners enjoy attending college and quickly secure good improvements in communication, including speech development and improvements in their daily living skills. Learners learn to use communication aids and become better able communicate what they want to do and, importantly, what they don't want to do. This improved communication enables them to make choices and ask for help.
- Most learners achieve their challenging learning targets. For some, this might be staying calm during lessons, learning to work in a group or remembering to greet people verbally or non-verbally.
- Learners for whom it is appropriate develop good employability skills during work experience and a few obtain paid employment. Learners gain confidence and skills in

horticulture, and others learn office-based and customer care skills. They value these experiences and learn what work they prefer.

- Learners develop more control over their personal behaviour and learn to take time out. They become calmer and reduce the number of incidents of challenging behaviour. They like the calm and enriching environment. Learners who are new to the college settle well due to well-considered transition plans and effective one-to-one support.
- Access to a good range of activities in the local community helps many learners to make good progress in their independence skills. For example, learners use sport and leisure facilities, local shops, amenities and a range of public transport options. Learners speak enthusiastically about attending a cycling venue where they can ride bicycles safely.
- Learners become able to move forward in the next steps in their lives. They reduce their anxieties and become more able to accept help from others. Good techniques used by staff result in learners developing new ways of coping with their anxieties. Learners who previously would not accept help become able to accept guidance with what they need to do next to improve.
- Achievement of qualifications is good for the small number of learners for whom it is appropriate. For example, one learner achieved functional skills English and mathematics at level 1. Achievement rates are carefully monitored by managers and show an increase over the last three years, with female learners achieving slightly better than male learners.
- As it is a relatively new college, few learners have left, so it is too early to fully evaluate the longer term effectiveness of the provision. However, most learners made a smooth transition and moved into positive destinations in the community.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141243
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16–19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	32
Principal	Vivienne Berkerley
Telephone number	0203 8708775
Website	www.ambitiousaboutautism.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	5	42	N/A	1	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			
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	48							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	College of North East London (CONEL) West Thames College							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal (quality), 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, 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 at the provider.

Inspection team

Penny Mathers, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Joyce Deere	Ofsted Inspector
Alun Maddocks	Ofsted Inspector

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