

Birtenshaw

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

29–31 January 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Governors and senior leaders do not have a sufficiently developed and ambitious strategic overview and vision for the college that lead to high expectations for all learners.
- Governance lacks rigour. Governors do not challenge and support college leaders and managers effectively to bring about improvements rapidly.
- Teachers do not use all the information that is available about learners' starting points to set challenging individual targets that help learners to achieve their full potential.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet high enough.
- Quality assurance arrangements are not yet effective in improving the quality of provision or outcomes for learners.
- Too few learners benefit from meaningful external work experience to help them prepare for their next stages of adulthood.
- Impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance are ineffective and do not raise learners' long-term ambitions and help them to understand what they could achieve independently.

The provider has the following strengths

- Newly appointed college managers have revised the curriculum effectively to match the needs and interests of most learners.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality are good.
- Staff are highly motivated and enthusiastic. They are well qualified to teach and support learners who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Learners develop a good range of daily living and work-related skills through highly relevant practical activities.
- Sensory learners learn effectively through sensory exploration, community visits and practical activities.
- Learners benefit from learning in an inclusive environment that fosters respect for and tolerance of others, and where they feel safe and are safe.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Birtenshaw College is part of Birtenshaw, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, which was established in the 1950s to support children with disabilities. The college was set up in 2014 as a subcontractor of a local further education college in response to a local need. It achieved independent status in 2016. The college provides specialist education and support for young people aged between 16 and 25 who have a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and complex health needs, including autism spectrum disorder.
- At the time of the inspection, 38 learners aged 19 and over attended the college from five different local authorities. Of these learners, 56% were male and 44% were female. The percentage of learners from Black and minority ethnic groups was 19% and this was reflective of the minority ethnic groups in the local community.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - learners benefit from a comprehensive and consistent assessment of their starting points that includes all aspects of their learning and development
 - learners have meaningful personal targets that they can understand and achieve, and which relate to the whole of their learning programme
 - teachers plan appropriate learning activities to meet the needs of all learners in their lessons.
- Improve impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance so that all learners understand fully what they can achieve in learning, in their community and at work.
- Increase significantly the proportion of learners who attend meaningful external work-experience placements and evaluate the impact that these have on improving their work-related skills, personal development and future opportunities.
- Strengthen quality-assurance arrangements to ensure that all leaders and managers improve successfully the quality of the provision across all areas of the college and learners' outcomes.
- Ensure that governors and leaders develop a strategic vision for the college that is ambitious and leads to high expectations of all learners.
- Make sure that governors challenge and support college leaders and managers effectively to make the necessary improvements rapidly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Overall strategic leadership is weak. Senior leaders and governors have not developed a sufficiently clear vision and strategic direction for the college. They have not clarified lines of accountability for the quality of the provision beyond immediate college leaders and managers.
- Annual targets for college leaders and managers are vague and lack ambition. They do not relate to key areas that will improve the college's performance such as quality improvement or the further development of the curriculum. Learner numbers grew substantially in the college's first year of operating independently but this growth has not been acknowledged or supported through strategic leadership and planning.
- Quality-assurance and quality-improvement arrangements are not rigorous enough. The self-assessment report provides statements about the quality of the provision but these are not sufficiently evaluative. The actions in the development plan do not link directly to the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The development plan describes intended new or improved processes but it does not identify the impact of actions taken to improve the provision. As a result, leaders and managers overestimate the quality of the provision. Evidence of quality-improvement planning, including the tracking of progress made against quality-improvement targets, is limited.
- Managers do not monitor, record or report on the progress of learners effectively enough. Monitoring and recording processes are too complex because targets for learners are held in different places. As a result, it is difficult to judge what progress learners are making individually and over time. A new management-information system has recently been implemented. However, this has not yet had any demonstrable impact as it is currently reporting solely on learners' targets for English and mathematics and these are often too generic. Other targets, including those for accredited courses, have not been individualised sufficiently to maximise learners' progress and potential.
- Performance-management monitoring is not rigorous enough to deliver improvements. Although managers hold regular supervision meetings and annual appraisals for staff, reviews do not consider collectively the outcomes of all performance-monitoring activities and they are not linked explicitly to the observations of teaching, learning and assessment. Annual targets for staff are too broad. Records of reviews do not include action plans that are sufficiently specific or detailed to help staff understand exactly what they need to do to improve their performance or how they can share good practice. As the college is small, much of the feedback to staff is oral and is not recorded.
- The day-to-day operational management of the college is effective. College managers are very knowledgeable about their learners and staff. All staff are inspired by their work and report that they are listened to and valued. They appreciate the support they receive from their managers. College managers have a good understanding of where teachers demonstrate good practice and use an effective peer-observation process to help staff reflect on each other's teaching techniques. Teachers report that this approach is helping them to improve their teaching practices. As a result, learners make at least the progress expected of them, particularly in practical lessons. However, learning support assistants do not receive any direct observations of their performance or support to help them to

improve their practices.

- Managers have introduced significant changes to the learning programme to ensure that it has a much stronger focus on the development of work-related skills and independence. Vocational lessons, particularly in catering, horticulture, the community café and on the farm, provide relevant internal work-experience placements for the large majority of learners. Learners develop effectively their work-related skills, confidence and independence that will help them to be successful in future external work-experience placements. However, the provision of accredited courses requires further development to ensure that each learner achieves the qualifications and levels appropriate to their needs and abilities.
- Managers identify and respond quickly to staff-development needs. The large majority of teachers and teaching assistants are well qualified to teach and support learners who have SEN and/or disabilities. Managers ensure that staff access further and appropriate professional-development activities, on a timely basis, to improve their knowledge and skills, and to support learners' needs effectively. For example, staff recently attended training to understand how to administer medication correctly to a diabetic learner before the learner enrolled at the college. However, further training is required to support the college's 'total communication' approach to learning so that all learners benefit from a good range of total communication strategies to support the sustained development of their communication skills.
- Managers utilise the funding they receive for learners with high needs appropriately. The majority of learners have the support and resources required to help them overcome their barriers to learning successfully. However, a small minority of learners would benefit from additional specific resources, such as assistive technology, to help them make better progress and develop greater independence.
- Staff promote equality of opportunity and inclusivity, and celebrate diversity effectively. Learners demonstrate respect for each other, for staff and for visitors. They learn to tolerate differences. Learners celebrate different cultural and religious festivals to help them develop a good understanding of the diversity in their local community and the wider world. For example, learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn successfully about Islam through a sensory activity to see, touch, smell and hear practices relating to the Islamic faith such as how the Imam would greet people in the mosque. They also learn about the smell of different spices associated with Indian food.

The governance of the provider

- Managers recognise that the governance of the college requires improvement. Governance is provided by the education subcommittee of the Board of Trustees. However, due to highly unfortunate circumstances, a number of members have been unable to fulfil their roles on the committee for a considerable amount of time, including the chair of the committee and the representative from the Board of Trustees.
- Governors, leaders and managers recognise that they need to strengthen governance arrangements quickly. Governors need to develop swiftly their understanding of, and their responsibilities for, the further education and skills provision.
- Minutes of governors' meetings demonstrate that their challenge to college leaders and managers has improved. However, the reports presented to governors by leaders and managers do not include sufficient information about the quality of teaching, learning and

assessment to enable governors to hold leaders and managers to account. As a result, governors do not have an accurate understanding of learners' progress or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers take appropriate actions to resolve safeguarding concerns or refer them where necessary to appropriate agencies such as social care or the local authority's safeguarding team. However, the process for recording actions taken and subsequent outcomes requires immediate improvement.
- Learners feel safe and are safe. Staff and learners receive appropriate training in safeguarding. While governors discuss safeguarding as a standard agenda item, not all governors have received appropriate training.
- Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment practices. However, they need to ensure that records are accurate and up to date. Leaders took immediate action before the end of the inspection to rectify the small number of administrative errors identified in the single central register.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Staff do not assess learners' starting points thoroughly enough. Assessment criteria focus on learners' ability levels in literacy, numeracy and communication. Staff do not focus sufficiently on assessing learners' levels of independence, their behaviour-management needs or their ability to develop their personal and social skills. Learners' assessments do not identify all the learning activities that will help them to make progress across a range of work-related or independent living skills. Consequently, not all learners are supported appropriately to become increasingly more independent.
- Teachers do not take sufficient account of learners' needs when planning learning. Learners' progress cannot be monitored effectively because targets are too broad. Too often, particularly on accredited courses, teachers set targets for a group of learners which do not focus specifically on learners' individual needs and do not enable them to progress towards identified individual outcomes. Most learners in lessons undertake the same activities even though they have very different abilities and needs.
- Teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what learners can achieve in classroom-based lessons. They do not challenge learners sufficiently to develop their knowledge and understanding further. Learners do not retain and build upon their knowledge and understanding sequentially, and make the progress expected of them. However, learners are engaged in lessons, follow oral instructions competently and understand what they need to do.
- Staff do not use routinely activities and learning materials that are age appropriate or suitable for the needs of learners. For example, a small minority of staff use capital letters on learners' work to give feedback or on the whiteboard to outline the content of the lesson. In other instances, learners are given primary-level resources for reading and listening such as 'The tiger who came to tea'. Conversely, other learners with similar needs are challenged to develop higher-level reading skills through books by Charles

Dickens.

- College staff communicate effectively with parents and carers. Parents report that they have regular contact with staff at the college through daily updates in the 'home diary' or when they drop off or pick up their young person. Staff are highly accessible, supportive to learners and their families, and respond promptly to any concerns learners or their families have. Learners' termly college reports about the progress that they make against their education, health and care (EHC) plans or personal targets is limited. For example, end-of-term reports do not focus sufficiently on which skills learners have developed competently and which skills they are working to develop. As a result, parents do not know how successfully their young person is progressing towards their long-term goals. However, information regarding what learners achieve in specific subject areas is more detailed and informative.
- Teachers prioritise the development of learners' English and mathematical skills very effectively. They use a wide range of interesting and relevant activities to enable learners to make good progress in these subjects. For example, learners use information and communication technology (ICT) to create the café menu for the following week. Through ICT, they practise their writing skills, learn how to use capital letters and full stops and to write full sentences accurately. When shopping in the community, learners can identify confidently the cost of items and pay for them using the appropriate combination and value of coins.
- Learners develop a good range of daily living and work-related skills through challenging practical activities. For example, learners visited the local pet shop to buy food for animals on the farm. They enquired successfully at the local veterinary practice about myxomatosis injections for the rabbits they look after and made an appointment for two of them. While out in the community, learners practise and demonstrate effective road safety skills. They communicate confidently with members of the public. Each day, pre-entry level learners work industriously in the kitchen, with support, to make lunches for all learners and staff in the college such as salads, sandwiches, paninis and jacket potatoes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too few learners benefit from external work experience. This prevents learners from developing their ambitions for a future that may include employment, either paid or voluntary. All learners, who are able to, experience work-related activities within the college. Staff are developing links with local groups and employers successfully to establish external work-experience opportunities for learners, including supported internships, but the impact of these relationships is not yet evident.
- Support staff are not sufficiently confident to support learners with challenging behaviour. As a result, a minority of learners are not always engaged fully with their learning and so do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers keep a detailed record of all behavioural incidents and use it proactively to identify individual triggers for learners. However, this needs to be shared more widely with support staff.
- Impartial careers information, advice and guidance arrangements are not yet established. Processes for learners and their parents to identify how these young people can aim high in their long-term goals and aspirations, appropriate to their abilities, are not sufficiently developed. The college's 'ambition passport' lacks focus in helping learners to develop

aspirations beyond college and shaping individual learning plans while they are there. Managers recognise that they need to address this and have clear plans, including the achievement of a careers standard, but these plans have not yet been implemented.

- The student council is not sufficiently established to give the learners a sound understanding of democracy and freedom of speech that underpin British values. However, through the council, learners develop skills such as respect for others' views when they debate and agree revised menus successfully and which products they would like to make and sell at the Christmas market.
- Learners enjoy their time at college and make friends within a supportive and positive atmosphere. Their attendance and punctuality are good. The standard of learners' work in their practical activities is particularly high.
- Learners manage their own anxieties and behaviour successfully. The behaviour of the vast majority of learners both in lessons and in the social areas of the college is good. They are respectful and tolerant of each other and show understanding and consideration for the specific needs of other learners.
- Transition arrangements into the college are effective. Learners begin their experience of attending college through weekly visits from school, sometimes as early as two terms before they start. As a result, learners and parents develop good relationships with staff and peers, and learners settle quickly into college when they arrive. Learners' transition arrangements out of the college focus on living arrangements rather than what they could actively contribute to the local community.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Learners' progress monitoring and recording are too complex. Managers do not have sufficient information to oversee the progress of learners from their starting points across their entire programmes. Learners' targets are too generic and not sufficiently personalised to enable them to progress at a rate that is matched to their level of ability and needs. Learners often find the work too easy or too difficult because the work is not broken down into smaller steps that help them to complete the work according to their abilities and needs. The central recording of progress in English and mathematics links to a progress-monitoring spreadsheet which identifies progress to date.
- Learners who take accredited qualifications are successful. However, accredited qualifications are not matched to learners' abilities. All learners who were entered for accredited qualifications in 2016/17 achieved them but all learners achieved the same qualifications at the same level.
- Staff do not monitor the performance of different groups of learners effectively. For example, they do not monitor the achievements of learners in relation to their race or disability. Consequently, they do not know which groups perform more successfully or where there are any gaps in performance, other than between male and female learners. The new management information system has the capacity to support the identification of the progress of different groups of learners but this is not yet available.
- The annual review of learners' EHC plans is thorough. Progress against personal EHC-plan targets are reviewed and recorded effectively. Learners, parents, and health, care and education professionals, where appropriate, understand how well learners are progressing

against their EHC plans.

- The retention of learners is high. The vast majority of learners are retained and complete their learning programme at the college. A very small minority of learners have left the college due to health reasons.
- Learners progress into positive destinations. However, these relate to living arrangements rather than further learning or work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	142913
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16 to 25
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	32
Principal/CEO	Julie Barnes
Telephone number	01204 396865
Website	www.birtenshaw.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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	38	-	-	-	-	-	-
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	38							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of college, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college'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 at the college.

Inspection team

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Gillett

Ofsted Inspector

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