

LifeBridge ASEND

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

5–7 June 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	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 good enough. Learners are not challenged sufficiently to make the progress of which they are capable.
- English and mathematics are not given sufficient strategic priority across the provision. Learners do not make good enough progress in developing these skills from their starting points.
- Leaders, managers and tutors do not have high enough expectations of what learners can achieve.
- Target-setting and monitoring do not record learners' individual progress effectively, particularly over time, and are too focused on the outcomes of accredited qualifications.
- Performance management processes require significant further development to ensure that they help staff to improve their practice.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements require improvement to ensure that trustees, leaders and managers address sufficiently and swiftly all areas for improvement and ensure that the post-19 provision is of a high quality.
- Governance arrangements require improvement. Trustees and senior managers do not have a sufficient strategic overview of the quality of the post-19 provision.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders and staff have developed highly effective partnerships with a large number of employers, which enable learners to have valuable and meaningful work experience and placements that lead to permanent employment or volunteering opportunities.
- Staff support learners to develop high levels of confidence, communication and social skills.
- Learners enjoy their learning, particularly their work placements and enrichment activities.
- The proportion of learners who undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is high and learners' achievements are particularly exemplary.
- Leaders and staff promote an inclusive and safe learning environment that fosters tolerance of and respect for others and in which learners feel safe.

Full report

Information about the provider

- LifeBridge ASEND is a specialist post-19 institution and registered charity that was established in 2015 as an alternative, niche option to other providers in Bolton for learners leaving a local special school. It achieved independent status in September 2016. Its main purpose is to support young people aged between 19 and 25 to achieve the skills they need to gain meaningful paid employment or volunteering positions. The college provides education and support for learners who have moderate to severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment and other health needs, including autism spectrum disorder.
- At the time of the inspection, 35 learners attended the college, all of whom were from the Bolton local authority area. Of these learners, 21 received funding through the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all leaders, managers and tutors have consistently high expectations of what learners can achieve.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - tutors monitor carefully and regularly the individual progress that learners make from their starting points in all their subjects and activities
 - learners have meaningful personal targets for both their accredited and non-accredited programmes that are sufficiently challenging and help them to achieve their long-term goals and ambitions
 - tutors use these targets to plan suitable, age-appropriate learning activities to meet the diverse needs and abilities of all learners in their groups so that they make good progress
 - learners' development of their English and mathematical skills is at a level that challenges them and prepares them effectively for their next steps
 - tutors provide clear, developmental oral and written feedback to learners to enable them to understand what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work further.
- Strengthen governance arrangements so that trustees support and challenge leaders effectively and hold them to account for the quality of the provision and the progress that learners make.
- Implement effective self-assessment and quality-improvement processes to ensure that leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college's provision, including the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and that areas for improvement are rectified swiftly.
- Improve the rigour of performance management of all staff by ensuring that they have specific and measurable targets that ensure that learners have a high-quality learning experience and make the progress of which they are capable.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Trustees and leaders have an ambitious vision to help learners who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities in the Bolton area to develop work-related skills that will help them to gain meaningful and sustainable paid employment, both during their time at the college and when they leave. At the time of the inspection, of the seven ESFA-funded learners who will leave the college at the end of this academic year, six will progress to paid employment. The success of this aspect of the provision is recognised as exemplary by parents, the local authority and professional agencies.
- Leaders, managers and trustees do not have a thorough enough strategic overview of the quality and content of the whole provision. The five-year strategic development plan does not indicate sufficiently how leaders will manage and monitor their vision, the curriculum, the anticipated growth and the overall success of the college over the period of the plan.
- Managers and tutors do not have high enough expectations of what all learners are capable of achieving based on their starting points. Classroom-based learning is not sufficiently challenging and is too reliant on learners achieving a generic qualification that does not meet their skills and personal development needs effectively. Consequently, learners are not prepared academically for their next steps, including in their English and mathematical skills, and too many learners make slow progress from their starting points in their subject-specific learning.
- Leaders and managers do not have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The observation process does not identify clearly what tutors and teaching assistants need to do to improve their practice. Feedback on lesson observation records describes what happens in the lesson and does not evaluate effectively the impact of teaching on learning. Observers are overgenerous in their assessment of the quality of teaching practices. The new peer-coaching model is an effective tool to help tutors to develop their teaching skills, but it is not yet having the required impact on improving the practices of weaker tutors.
- Quality improvement arrangements do not demonstrate that leaders and managers understand fully the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The process for reviewing the quality of the provision lacks rigour and does not reflect accurately the strengths and areas for improvement at the college. The quality-improvement plan does not provide evidence that appropriate actions are in place to address improvements swiftly.
- Performance management processes require further development. Managers have introduced recently a new approach to appraisal, but this has not yet had a discernible impact on performance. Targets set for senior tutors with management responsibility, who have had an appraisal under the new system, do not relate to improving their teaching practices or to improving outcomes for learners. The headteacher receives support and challenge from a school improvement partner (SIP). The SIP sets targets in the headteacher's appraisal and challenges the outcomes for post-19 learners during his reviews. However, this arrangement is in place for the 11 to 19 school and is not a formal process for LifeBridge ASEND. Targets set for the post-19 provision relate only to increasing the numbers progressing to employment and independent places. Trustees

recognise that the post-19 provision requires its own specific support and challenge arrangements.

- Leaders and managers do not have sufficient information to check the progress of learners from their starting points for all aspects of their programmes. As a result, monitoring processes do not provide a sufficiently coherent overview so that leaders, managers and tutors can see clearly learners' progress compared to their long-, medium- and short-term goals. The monitoring of progress towards accredited qualifications is too generic. The learning environment at the town centre site is distracting for learners. While it provides an adult environment and identifies that it is not 'school', it is open plan and often not appropriate for learners who have high needs, especially when several different classes are taking place at the same time.
- Managers and staff continue to develop highly effective partnerships with employers, agencies, community groups and professional organisations. As a result, all learners benefit from access to purposeful and sustainable work placements, work-related learning, volunteering opportunities and support, including from support agencies.
- Leaders and managers use funding appropriately, particularly for developing work-related skills. In addition, managers secure additional funding through bid writing to provide opportunities for learners with specific aspirations to follow their vocational and employment ambitions, for example in art and in horticulture. Resources for classroom-based learning require further development so that learners have access to visual resources and assistive technology where appropriate, for example to enhance and consolidate the learning of some of the young people at the college, and to help them to make better progress.

The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements require improvement. Trustees recognise that there is a limited strategic oversight of the provision. They are recruiting currently new trustees and governors, including parent governors, and those who have the knowledge and experience of provision relating to post-19 learners who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Trustees do not receive appropriate, accurate or timely information relating to the quality of the provision. Consequently, they are unable to challenge leaders and managers on the actions they are taking to improve the quality of the provision.
- Trustees work relentlessly with leaders and managers to support young adults who have SEN and/or disabilities. They explore opportunities to create social enterprises that will help these young people to develop work-related skills, as well as seeking alternative financial support.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Learners are confident about who they should contact if they have any concerns. Senior tutors responsible for safeguarding record and monitor safeguarding incidents and concerns very effectively and make swift referrals to external agencies when necessary.
- Leaders, trustees and staff receive appropriate training and updates on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Staff are clear in their roles and the procedure for reporting any

concerns or disclosures.

- Managers ensure that learners are protected on work-experience placements and community activities, and carry out appropriate risk assessments.
- Leaders and managers follow safe recruitment practices, including the completion and recording of disclosure and barring checks.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Tutors do not set sufficiently challenging targets for learners to achieve their learning goals. In the majority of lessons, tutors do not provide an appropriate level of study to engage all learners in the group, and do not challenge learners sufficiently in their academic studies. Most learners complete the same activities in lessons even though they have very different needs and abilities.
- Tutors do not include learners' medium- and long-term goals in the planning and implementation of their lessons. Learners' starting points are assessed by an online assessment activity and the identification of previous achievements. However, tutors do not combine the results from these effectively in lessons to challenge learners sufficiently so that they develop the skills they need to achieve their long-term goals.
- Learners do not undertake activities in lessons that challenge them to achieve a high standard of work. Tutors often base learning activities on age-inappropriate texts. Teaching does not build routinely on previous achievements and experiences. Tutors provide positive oral feedback that builds learners' confidence, but written feedback is often more positive than the work warrants. It is not sufficiently detailed to enable learners to understand what they need to do to improve.
- Activities to develop learners' skills in English and mathematics are not sufficiently developmental. Learners take part in activities that aim to develop their English and mathematical skills, but tutors do not integrate these skills sufficiently across all lessons and activities. Tutors do not correct spelling and errors in writing routinely or sufficiently.
- Tutors and teaching assistants do not use questioning techniques effectively. They do not ask sufficiently detailed questions to check learners' understanding, extend their knowledge and skills or to engage less confident learners. As a result, learners do not develop routinely more complex answers to questions that extend their learning, and the same learners answer the questions throughout the lesson.
- Teaching assistants are often too quick to help learners in lessons and do not allow learners to attempt tasks for themselves. In a few cases, teaching assistants provide written answers for learners on mini whiteboards, which learners copy passively without understanding the concept of what they are writing down. As a result, learners are not developing the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to become independent.
- Learners enjoy their education and training at the college and develop high levels of confidence. Tutors and support staff are enthusiastic. Learners and their parents/carers appreciate the support they receive from them.
- Learners on the employability pathway become increasingly able to work independently, and this prepares them very well for life after college. They engage in meaningful tasks that develop strong vocational skills in practical work situations. Staff have developed

good relationships with a wide range of employers, who provide realistic work experience matched to the needs and aspirations of learners. Learners enjoy going to work and demonstrate high levels of work-related skills such as timekeeping and dealing with customers. They develop high levels of practical skills, knowledge and understanding such as how to prepare and serve food to industry standards, and how to create a successful wildlife garden.

- Staff are caring and encourage learners to feel confident and develop their skills. The more effective learning sessions have purposeful activity, during which learners also develop a range of transferable skills such as information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Learners are able to produce successfully electronic presentations with minimal support. Each week learners increase the range of ICT skills that help them to improve their presentations even further. Tutors link presentation topics effectively to current affairs, such as the worldwide concern over plastic pollution.
- Tutors and teaching assistants manage the behaviour of learners very well in classroom settings, enabling them to remain in lessons and complete their work successfully.
- Tutors promote equality and diversity effectively. For example, learners discuss high profile people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including leading scientists and successful entrants in a recent television talent show. Learners are aware of the dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation and other forms of abuse, including through online activities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners on the work experience pathway develop high levels of confidence and skills. For example, learners can identify products required for customer orders, price products and pack them appropriately in pallets with minimal supervision. The development of these skills enables many learners to progress into paid employment or permanent voluntary roles. Learners begin their preparation for this work in the school bistro, which enables them to develop realistic work skills in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment. They undertake a hygiene qualification which is appreciated by employers. The majority of learners have learned to travel independently to their work placement and to the college.
- Learners demonstrate a clear understanding of how to take turns, listen to each other and value the contributions of others. They are patient when someone gets something wrong and use humour appropriately without upsetting each other.
- Attendance is good and the college monitors absences effectively. Staff support learners who are unable to attend for personal or medical reasons successfully so that these young people re-engage in their learning.
- Learners receive appropriate independent advice and guidance from tutors that enable them to explore the options available to them for their next steps, both within the college and elsewhere. Tutors support learners to complete job application forms during their English lessons. This activity, together with general discussions around applying for jobs, helps learners to understand exactly what they need to do to apply for a job and employers' expectations of them both for an interview and at work.
- All staff manage learners' behaviour effectively. Learners learn to moderate their own behaviour through the use of strategies to minimise anxiety, which enables them to

participate regularly in teaching sessions. In a very small minority of instances, learners have overcome very significant communication barriers through enrichment activities that they find enjoyable, such as drama, and are now able to participate and communicate fully in learning activities.

- Learners feel safe and know who to talk to if they have any concerns. Learners, particularly the most able, learn extensively about how to keep themselves safe from extremism and radicalisation, including online. They produce informative displays that help them to understand the importance of British values and what impact these values have on their personal lives.
- Leaders and managers provide impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance for learners that they purchase from the local authority. Representatives from the local authority hold meetings with learners to help them to decide their progression options after LifeBridge. However, action plans from these meetings are too descriptive and often confusing, and do not identify what support a learner will need to achieve their ambitions.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Learners' personal targets that tutors extract from their education, health and care (EHC) plans do not challenge learners sufficiently to help them to achieve their long-term goals. They do not help learners to achieve the EHC plan targets that have been set for them from their starting points and to identify how they can achieve at least their planned outcomes.
- Tutors know what learners have achieved in their accredited programmes and record progress against qualification outcomes effectively. However, they do not set targets for learners that will help them to make better progress in both accredited and non-accredited activities.
- The standard of learners' work is not always at a level appropriate to their ability. Too often, learners complete tasks that are below their level of ability. For example, learners cut out and paste images onto sheets of paper when they are capable of developing their skills, knowledge and understanding through more complex activities, especially those who have paid employment or meaningful work experience.
- Learners on the employability pathway achieve positive outcomes. The majority of learners gain employment or volunteering positions that are sustainable over time.
- Learners enjoy their learning experience. They develop effective communication and social skills, and are able to speak confidently to people they have not met previously.
- Achievement rates and pass rates are not monitored routinely and achievement gaps between groups of learners are not monitored explicitly. The college's data indicates that the vast majority of learners achieved their accredited qualifications in 2016/17. Learners' files do not show any progress for this current year.
- The proportion of learners who undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) Award scheme is high. Over a third of learners are on this programme. Learners' achievements on the scheme are particularly exemplary. Of the learners entered for the DofE Award, two achieved the gold award in 2017 and attended the ceremony at Buckingham Palace. In 2018, two more learners are due to complete their gold award, with seven learners

continuing on bronze and silver awards. Learners who undertake the DofE Award benefit from the skills and confidence they gain during this programme.

Provider details

Unique reference number	142922
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	19 to 25
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	21
Principal/CEO	Gary Johnson
Telephone number	01204 333600
Website	www.lifebridge.co.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)	-	35	-	-	-	-	-	-
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	21							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by a trustee of the provider, as the 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, parents 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

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Gay

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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