

Strathmore College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

5–6 June and 13–14 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	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Governors, senior leaders, and managers have not rectified the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection.
- Governors, senior leaders and managers pay insufficient attention to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders and managers do not analyse or report on learners' achievements or destinations well enough to inform self-assessment and drive improvements.
- Staff training in the 'Prevent' duty has not yet led to learners having a secure understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Tutors do not develop learners' academic, vocational, literacy and numeracy skills effectively.
- Learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders and managers have not made sufficient arrangements for learners to receive impartial careers education, advice and guidance to enable them to make informed choices.
- Leaders' and managers' actions to improve attendance have not led to improvements. Attendance remains too low for all learner groups.
- Academic support for learners in sessions does not enable them to progress well enough.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers and leaders collaborate well with partners and employers, to inform effective curriculum planning for employment pathways.
- Learners benefit from good and extensive therapeutic services. Access to services has led to improvements in learners' health and well-being.
- Work placements contribute well to learners' preparation for employment. Learners develop a good variety of work-related skills and knowledge.
- Learners have good access to enrichment and additional qualifications that enable them to develop useful and relevant skills, attitudes and behaviours.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Strathmore College is an independent specialist college located in Stoke-on-Trent. The college provides education for learners who have mild to severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The college has a number of learners with autistic spectrum disorder. The vast majority of learners have communication, speech and language difficulties. An increasing number of learners who have previously not been in education, employment or training enrol at the college. A growing number of learners have mental and physical health needs. Of the 38 learners, four are residential, and the remainder attend the college on a daily basis. Most learners are aged 19 to 25, with six aged 16 to 18. The college is part of the Priory Group.
- This was a short inspection that converted to a full inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Governors should hold the senior leadership team to account to ensure rapid and sustainable improvement to teaching, learning and assessment and improved outcomes for learners.
- Ensure that quality improvement and strategic plans focus on improving the provision. Strengthen the performance management of tutors, learning support assistants and staff by systematically checking on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that managers improve the reporting and analysis of learners' outcomes by ensuring that outcomes for learners are reported accurately and succinctly to governors and senior leaders.
- Senior leaders and managers should rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - staff receive appropriate training to better support learners to learn
 - target setting identifies learners' individual learning needs and helps to accelerate their progress and attainment.
- Ensure that all learners receive careers education, advice and guidance to enable them to make informed choices about their long-term careers and transition into adulthood.
- Ensure that all vocational, English and mathematics tutors plan and assess learning in liaison with learning support assistants, to support and develop learners' individual skills.
- Ensure that tutors develop learners' English and mathematical skills through vocational sessions, work placements and supported internships.
- Managers and staff should improve learners' attendance and increase the proportion of learners achieving on their programme.
- Ensure that all learners have a secure understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Governors, senior leaders and managers have made insufficient progress in addressing the recommendations arising from the previous inspection. Senior leaders and managers have focused on improving the development of the multi-disciplinary team and staff training to strengthen behavioural and emotional support. Leaders' and managers' focus on the development of therapies and support for learners has meant that they have not tackled the necessary improvements to teaching, learning and assessment. These include the use of technology to support and enhance learning, the development of learners' literacy skills and improvements to learners' progress.
- Governors, senior leaders and managers have placed insufficient importance on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders' and managers' current strategic priorities do not include the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders, managers and staff do not effectively evaluate the quality of provision. Self-assessment and quality improvement processes do not support the identification of areas for development or planning for improvements. Outcomes for learners and attendance have declined. Too few learners develop their English and mathematical skills well enough or progress to independent living.
- Leaders and managers have not yet developed effective processes to track and monitor the progress of all learners. Managers have only recently introduced systems to record and monitor learners' progress. Information is not easily available and does not provide managers with an overview of learners' progress.
- Leaders and managers place insufficient importance on the skills of tutors and staff to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are of a high standard. Performance management and the observation of teaching and learning are not evaluative enough, and focus too much on learners' well-being. The majority of learners do not make the academic progress of which they are capable.
- Managers and leaders do not give sufficient strategic priority to the development of English and mathematics provision. Managers' actions to address the recommendations from the previous inspection have had too little impact on the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Learners who require skills to complete everyday tasks, including money management and personal budgeting, are not developing them well enough.
- Senior leaders have successfully engaged with partners, employers and local members of parliament in the development of an employment strategy group. Senior leaders and key members of the employment group have significantly increased employer engagement. Partnership work with the Department for Work and Pensions ensures that increasing numbers of learners are supported to move into supported internships and paid work. Increased links with local businesses and partners have brought about additional work experience opportunities for learners, such as in a local café and in manufacturing.
- Managers and leaders are collaborating well with employers and other partners to align the curriculum more closely to local needs. Through partnership working, senior leaders have been able to identify that there are increasing numbers of learners who plan to, and

are able to progress into employment. Managers plan the provision well and have increased the range of pathways into employment for learners.

- Managers have improved the amount of specialist training available for tutors and staff. Staff have a wider understanding of learners' specific needs, which enables effective therapeutic support for learners. Training in areas such as autistic spectrum disorder, sensory processing and child sexual exploitation has enabled staff to manage the behaviours and social engagement issues of an increasing number of learners. This has led to a decrease in the number of interventions. Reported in-year incidents are now low.

The governance of the provider

- Senior leaders have strengthened areas of governance oversight since the previous inspection and introduced a 'challenge and support' (CAS) group, external to the Priory Group. The CAS group is beginning to provide more scrutiny of senior leadership.
- The information that senior leaders present to governors is not always accurate and is not in a format that ensures that they are able to challenge senior leaders and managers. This means that governors are not always well placed to ask pertinent and probing questions to hold senior leaders to account. Governors have not scrutinised sufficiently learners' attendance and retention. They have not asked sufficient questions around the progress made in improving the quality of provision since the previous inspection.
- Governors, senior managers and staff share a common vision that reflects the values of the college and the Priory Group to increase the proportion of learners progressing into supported internships and good-quality, sustainable work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders have effective practices in place to ensure that all learners are safe when in college. Senior leaders have identified a senior manager to be the designated safeguarding officer (DSO). Additional members of staff are trained to the same level as the DSO. Managers identify local safeguarding issues well. Refresher training linked to local issues such as child sexual exploitation and drug-gang awareness ensures that all staff are aware of how to ensure learners are safe at college.
- Managers have taken appropriate action to respond to the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. All staff have received online 'Prevent' duty training. Managers and staff take quick and appropriate action to support learners where concerns have been raised regarding the risks of radicalisation. Learners are supported well through partnerships with social services when identified as being at risk. Managers attend the local 'Channel' panel. They have implemented additional safety checks on the computer system and for the vetting of external visitors.
- Managers have extensive and rigorous safer recruitment practices. Managers successfully ensure that all staff – including volunteers – have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and reference checks that are completed prior to working at the college. Managers involved in recruitment complete safer recruitment training.
- Managers and staff are well trained to support learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and behavioural needs. Staff use the training and the skills they have

learned to work effectively with learners. This has led to a reduction in behavioural incidents over the last three years.

- Leaders' and managers' accident reporting is not comprehensive enough. Managers do not provide the appropriate level of reporting and scrutiny of accident reporting to governors.
- Leaders, managers and tutors have insufficient focus on developing learners' understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, to keep themselves safe. The vast majority of learners do not demonstrate an awareness of the risks posed within their local communities. They are not able to articulate how they would keep themselves safe from extremist views.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Tutors do not plan well enough to develop learners' English and mathematical skills. Tutors do not set effective targets or provide detailed feedback to learners, to ensure that they develop the numeracy and literacy skills required to achieve on their programme or to progress. Tutors restrict their focus to those skills identified during set assessment tests. Tutors evaluate too frequently the progress learners make on their literacy and numeracy skills through re-testing. Tutors do not consistently identify spelling and grammatical errors; learners are repeatedly making the same mistakes over time, and these factors hinder learners' progress.
- Tutors and staff do not have high enough expectations for learners' academic skills. Tutors do not build on learners' skills sequentially. They plan learning through learners' completion of repetitive tasks. Learners become comfortable carrying out an activity, but their further skills development is insufficient, including the development of the resilience required to progress to next steps. Too often, learners in floristry, product-design and print-making sessions perform similar tasks at the same level of difficulty. The majority of learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Tutors' use of technology in teaching, learning and assessment remains an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Tutors do not plan the use of technology, including assistive technology, sufficiently to aid learners' communication and independent skills; for example, to help access text to support their communication and written skills.
- Tutors' recording of learners' progress, particularly with the development of their English and mathematical skills, is insufficient. The college is using two systems currently to track learners' progress, and so it is difficult for staff to gain an easy and quick overview of overall progress. Self-assessment has identified that targets and recording of progress require improvement.
- Tutors do not effectively plan for or manage the use of learning support staff in sessions. Learning support staff work with learners on repetitive tasks that do not challenge learners sufficiently or build their skill levels. The lack of direction by tutors does not support the learning support staff to understand their role in supporting learners to achieve.
- Managers and staff have effectively increased learners' access to behavioural and occupational therapists through the implementation of the multi-disciplinary team (MDT).

Managers' actions have strengthened the support of learners who have been out of education and/or who have behavioural difficulties. Managers and staff within the MDT work with learners, parents and carers to support learners to return to education and encourage them to manage their own behaviours more confidently. These learners are now making better progress in developing their social awareness and are more able to express their feelings than previously.

- All staff have a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development that better prepares them to work with the increasingly challenging needs of learners. Training in understanding autistic spectrum disorder and sensory processing has enabled staff to manage the behaviours of an increasing number of learners who have behavioural, social and engagement issues more effectively. This has seen a reduction in intervention incidents over the last two years.
- Tutors and staff work well with parents, carers and employers to share approaches to provide support and to enable learners to access community learning and work opportunities. An increasing number of learners are now able to access external social and workplace environments.
- Learners develop their independent living skills well through practical workshops. Learners benefit from practical sessions that enable them to become more confident in the kitchen, and to make choices and experiment with food choices, to plan and produce meals, and to manage household tasks that prepare them for life after college. In a cooking session, learners were making individual pizzas, adapting recipes to try new ingredients and adjusting oven timings for the new toppings.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Learners do not receive effective support to develop their literacy, communication, reading and writing skills. Learners do not develop the level of these skills required for work and living independently. Learners' skills development is slow and focused on the outcomes from diagnostic testing and the skills needed to pass English and mathematics tests. Learners are guided to use practice papers to improve their skills, particularly in English, with limited tutor input and support.
- Learners do not receive effective feedback from their tutors on what they need to do to improve their literacy or numeracy skills. Tutors provide overly positive feedback to learners completing English practice tests. Tutors do not routinely provide feedback or further learning where answers are incorrect. Learners do not know what they need to do to improve.
- Learners do not receive impartial careers education, advice and guidance to support them to make informed choices about life after college. Planning for learners' post-college destinations does not take place soon enough. Most learners are not clear as to their next steps. Senior leaders have identified that this is an area for development and have planned remedial actions. A new post of careers lead is in the process of being appointed. Managers are working towards an externally accredited careers education, information, advice and guidance award, and they have planned training for staff.
- Learners' attendance is too low. Leaders' and managers' actions to improve attendance for learners who were previously not in education or training are yet to have any impact.

Attendance for all learners has declined in 2017/18.

- Learners do not have a sufficient understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism to ensure that they are safe within their local communities. Managers and staff have undertaken 'Prevent' duty training, but this is yet to have an impact on learners' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Most learners are respectful of each other and are developing their understanding of their roles in society through community links, voting for projects, and visits linked to specific events. Learners in photography visited the National Memorial Arboretum for a project linked to Remembrance Day.
- Learners who have complex behavioural needs benefit from good levels of therapeutic support. Learners benefit from support from highly specialised and qualified staff, including those in occupational health, educational psychology, and speech and language therapy. Staff undertake detailed assessments of learners' emotional, social and learning needs and inform positive behaviour planning and programmes for a minority of learners. Learners become confident in taking 'time out' and voicing their anxiety more effectively to manage their own behaviours.
- Learners benefit from a range of work-experience placements to build their social and employability skills well in preparation for life after college. The number of learners progressing to supported internships, and paid and voluntary employment is increasing from a low base. Learners' placements include working at a farm, with local family building companies, and in a café. Learners benefit from additional job-related training through local colleges. In a minority of placements, learners are developing their communication skills well. Learners have been well supported to recognise and learn the common and botanical names for plants when undertaking work experience at a large estate. Learners are able to respond with confidence to questions from visitors.
- Learners benefit from a broad enrichment programme that improves their personal, social and communication skills. Learners take part in a range of sporting activities leading to learners winning medals at the Special Olympics. Learners develop extensive team working skills through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and widen their life experiences. Learners benefit from adventure weeks for orienteering and canoeing. Learners have been involved in supporting local communities through working on a waterways challenge to open up and improve canal access for residents.
- Learners' standards of work are at an appropriate level to their programme. A small minority of learners have successfully set up their own business with the support of the tutors and staff. Learners develop the practical skills and knowledge needed to be self-employed. Learners on the photography course have developed very good skills and an understanding of composition, lighting and perspective, which is demonstrated in their portfolios and in displays in college and in the community.
- Learners feel safe at college and know whom to go to if they have concerns or are worried. Learners demonstrate a reliable understanding of health and safety practices and how to use the appropriate personal protective equipment on a work-experience placement. Learners demonstrate their knowledge of safety when using equipment and an awareness of the safety of others when carrying hot food and trays in independent living sessions, and when in the community café. Tutors and staff do not routinely challenge learners when bags are not stored safely, or when inappropriate headwear is worn in practical sessions.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Learners' achievement rates for all learner groups have declined over the last three years and are too low.
- Teachers do not pay sufficient attention to learners' academic and vocational starting points or intended destinations when planning and providing learning. Too few learners make their expected levels of progress on their academic and vocational programmes.
- Learners do not develop the level of English and mathematical skills they will need for work or living independently.
- An increasing number of learners enrol at the college who were not previously in education and training. This led to a decline in the numbers of learners who stayed until the end of their programme in 2016/17. This proportion has significantly improved in 2017/18.
- Leaders and managers have successfully acted to reduce those achievement gaps that existed for female and male learners. Female learners now achieve as well as male learners.
- Learners' destinations and progression to employment are improving from a low base. Too few learners progressed into paid or voluntary employment in 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- Learners improve their social, emotional and behavioural skills well. Learners progress well in developing their understanding of their personal behavioural needs through comprehensive behavioural management plans.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132021
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	38
Principal	Kate Ward
Telephone number	01782 647380
Website	www.priorychildrensservices.co.uk/find-a-location/strathmore-college-stoke-on-trent

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+
	6	30	0	2	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
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:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, 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

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