

Expanse Group Ltd

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

24–26 September 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Management of the apprenticeship programme is weak. Leaders and managers do not ensure that the principles of an apprenticeship programme are met.
- Assessors do not identify or use apprentices' existing knowledge and skills to plan and provide individual training programmes. Consequently, too many apprentices do not gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Leaders and managers do not ensure that employers support apprentices fully so that they receive sufficient time for off-the-job training. Assessors do not involve employers in apprentices' progress reviews.
- Leaders and managers do not evaluate sufficiently the quality of apprentices' on- and off-the-job training to enable them to identify areas for improvement.
- Managers who carry out observations of teaching, learning and assessment do not provide staff with clear feedback to help them improve their practices.
- Qualification achievement rates for functional skills English and mathematics at level 1 for learners with high needs are too low.

The provider has the following strengths

- Provision for learners with high needs is good. The large majority of learners achieve their targets and gain their vocational qualifications.
- Support for learners with high needs is effective. Learners benefit from a good range of support strategies that help them to participate in learning and make good progress.
- Staff use their employer links effectively to provide a good range of work placements and supported internships for learners with high needs that meet their interests and help them to develop their knowledge and skills.
- Staff have created an inclusive culture of mutual respect in which learners feel safe.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Expanse Group Limited (EGL) is an independent provider of education, health and social care, and professional-skills development. In 2015 EGL became an independent specialist provider delivering programmes to learners aged 16 to 24 years with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At the time of inspection, 58 learners were enrolled on classroom-based programmes and supported internships in premises located in Leigh and Wigan in Greater Manchester. Approximately three quarters of learners have moderate learning difficulties and the remainder have severe learning difficulties or profound and complex disabilities.
- In May 2017 EGL became a levy-funded apprenticeship provider and began delivering apprenticeship programmes in September 2017. At the time of inspection, there were 34 apprentices undertaking an apprenticeship in supporting teaching and learning in schools. The large majority of apprentices are studying at level 3. Apprentices are employed in schools across two local education authorities in Greater Manchester.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Urgently address the significant weaknesses that exist in apprenticeship programmes by ensuring that:
 - staff use information about apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and behaviours to ensure that they are recruited onto a suitable apprenticeship programme
 - assessors identify accurately apprentices' starting points and use this information to plan and provide programmes and set targets that will enable them to make the progress of which they are capable
 - employers participate in reviewing apprentices' progress and give apprentices sufficient time to complete off-the-job training during working hours
 - apprentices who are not making good progress are identified immediately and swift action is taken so they catch up quickly
 - areas requiring improvement are identified accurately and lead to effective remedial actions.
- Improve the achievement rates for learners undertaking functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics at level 1.
- Ensure that feedback to staff following observations of teaching, learning and assessment provides them with clear and precise information on weaknesses, so they know how to improve their practices.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken the decision to become a levy-funded provider of apprenticeships. However, they have not focused on ensuring that the requirements for a successful apprenticeship programme are met.
- Management of the apprenticeship programme is weak. Apprentices do not develop significant new skills, knowledge and behaviours. They do not receive sufficient well-planned off-the-job training during working hours. Employers' involvement in on- and off-the job training is insufficient. As a result, too many apprentices do not develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours or make the progress of which they are capable from their starting points. The large majority of apprentices are not on target to complete their apprenticeship by the planned end date.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have revised their quality assurance systems to include regular case conferences to monitor the progress of learners and the performance of courses. This has had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners with high needs. However, leaders and managers have not identified or rectified quickly enough the serious weaknesses that exist in the quality of on- and off-the-job training that apprentices receive.
- Leaders and managers have introduced a more rigorous approach to the observation of teaching, learning and assessment. They observe staff frequently and provide them with individual professional-development support plans. However, observers' feedback focuses too much on the positive aspects of teaching and does not evaluate sufficiently the impact of teaching on learning. Areas for development are not specific enough to enable staff to know precisely what they need to do to improve their practices.
- The recent self-assessment report is mostly evaluative. It identifies broadly the strengths and areas for improvement for learners with high needs. However, it does not evaluate the quality of on- and off-the-job training on the apprenticeship programme.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have made improvements to most of the areas of weakness identified for learners with high needs. As a result, provision for learners with high needs is now good.
- Leaders and managers make effective use of their employer links to provide learners with suitable work placements and supported internships. Learners benefit from useful work-related activities and develop knowledge and skills that help prepare them for the workplace.
- Leaders and managers have implemented an English and mathematics strategy for learners that has resulted in a more rigorous approach to assessing learners' individual starting points. As a result, learners' qualification outcomes for functional skills English and mathematics at entry level have improved significantly. Leaders and managers acknowledge that qualification outcomes at level 1 require further improvement. However, there is no clear plan in place to support the development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills.
- Leaders and managers use the funding they receive for learners with high needs

effectively. Classrooms are bright and display information that reinforces learning. Learners have access to a range of information and communication technology (ICT) resources, including assistive technologies to engage learners and support learning.

- Managers ensure that learners receive effective careers information, advice and guidance from internal staff and external specialists. As a result, learners have clear and realistic plans for the future. The large majority progress onto further learning or supported internships. A few learners progress into paid employment.
- Staff have created an inclusive culture of mutual respect in which learners feel safe. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection, a new board of governors has been established, which includes external representatives, senior leaders and parents. Governors have a good range of skills and experience, including experience of special educational needs, health, finance and business. Governors use their expertise well to lead on a specific aspect of provision, for example special educational needs and disability awareness, to support managers.
- Governors have recently started to receive regular reports, including data, that enable them to provide challenge. However, this is still in the early stages of development and currently they do not focus sufficiently on the quality of apprentices' on- and off-the-job training.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have a comprehensive range of safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff have clear guidance on how to recognise and report concerns. Leaders and managers ensure that all safeguarding concerns are carefully recorded and monitored and, where appropriate, referrals made to external agencies.
- The designated safeguarding officer is trained to carry out her role effectively. She liaises frequently with external agencies including the local authority safeguarding team and social services to support learners, particularly those who are the most vulnerable.
- Leaders and managers carry out safe recruitment practices, including disclosure and barring checks. All staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example how to stay safe online.
- Leaders and managers have a 'Prevent' duty action plan that they review regularly. Governors, staff and learners receive appropriate training on the 'Prevent' duty. However, learners with high needs do not have a good enough understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation or extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Assessors do not identify apprentices' starting points to plan and provide learning that

meets their individual needs. For example, apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and behaviours are not taken into account when planning their apprenticeship programme to ensure that they develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

- Assessors do not set targets that ensure that apprentices make good progress. Too many apprentices' targets do not identify specifically areas for improvement or ensure that apprentices who are falling behind catch up quickly.
- Assessors do not provide apprentices with useful feedback to help them improve their work including the development of English skills. Too often feedback focuses on the completion of tasks to achieve units of qualifications rather than the development of knowledge and skills to improve their performance in the workplace.
- Assessors do not ensure that apprentices benefit from sufficient well-planned off-the-job training. As a result, they make slow progress.
- A minority of staff do not record effectively the progress that learners make towards achieving their education, health and care plan outcomes. Tutors focus on what learners do or the activities they have been involved in rather than identifying clearly the progress that they make. As a result, learners have limited understanding of their progress and what they need to do to improve.
- Staff use a range of assessments to establish learners' starting points. Most tutors use this information appropriately to ensure that learning meets the needs of individual learners, including support requirements, to enable them to make good progress.
- Tutors are highly qualified. They have suitable experience of working with learners with moderate and severe learning difficulties and profound and complex disabilities. They use their knowledge skilfully to plan and provide effective learning activities. For example, learners read and interpret bus timetables to help them to become independent travellers and they use money correctly to increase their knowledge of personal finance. However, for a few less-able learners, activities are too difficult and not reinforced sufficiently or consolidated before moving on to new topics. As a result, these learners do not benefit fully from the activities.
- Most learners with high needs develop good English and mathematical knowledge and skills. Tutors use group tasks and topical discussions to develop learners' communication skills. As a result, learners increase their knowledge and skills over time. However, a few English and mathematics targets are not sufficiently personalised to help individual learners to improve.
- Most learners and apprentices produce work that is appropriate for their level of study. For example, they deliver presentations and take part in oral discussions. However, a few apprentices do not produce work that is of a high enough standard. Assessors do not identify this in their feedback to help apprentices improve their work.
- Learners benefit from effective support. They receive appropriate levels of support in lessons, including one-to-one support, that helps to promote learning, build confidence and increase engagement. As a result, the large majority of learners make good progress.
- Specialist support for behaviour management is good. Staff use a range of techniques, such as tactile and stress objects, personal headphones and an effective 'time out strategy'. Staff acknowledge positive behaviour with a reward system. As a result, most learners remain engaged with their learning.

- Learners have access to a good range of ICT and assistive technology resources to aid their learning. Tutors identify learners' support requirements early in their programmes. Equipment is provided swiftly. Tutors use ICT and assistive technology to involve learners in their learning and help them to develop their knowledge and skills. For example, learners are encouraged to use voice recognition on tablet computers to check the spelling and meaning of words.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners gain confidence and develop a good range of knowledge and skills that prepare them for employment and independent living. Most learners' behaviour is good, and they demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They work independently and collaboratively. Learners demonstrate high levels of respect for their tutors, peers and visitors. For example, when speaking with inspectors learners were well mannered and courteous.
- Learners' attendance is good. They demonstrate good attitudes to learning and most learners arrive on time for their lessons. Staff monitor learners' absences effectively. They provide good support to ensure that learners catch up on any work that they have missed. However, too many apprentices do not attend their off-the-job training or cancel reviews due to issues such as understaffing at work. This seriously impedes their progress.
- Learners develop good social and communication skills through a range of learning activities. These activities help learners develop and enhance their communication skills in everyday life and in the workplace. For example, they develop their speaking and listening skills through topical discussions. They listen carefully and respond respectfully to opinions and suggestions from their peers.
- Learners benefit from work experience and supported internships that are planned skilfully by staff to meet learners' individual needs and interests. Staff use their links with a range of employers effectively, including a nationwide retailer, a fast-food restaurant and the local football club, to provide good work experience placements for learners. As a result, they develop a good range of knowledge and skills that prepare them for the workplace, including communicating with customers and stock-taking duties.
- Learners understand the importance of having good English and mathematical skills for everyday life and for the workplace. They develop and enhance these skills regularly in lessons and can produce a curriculum vitae (CV), use dictionaries to find the meanings of unfamiliar words, interpret information on bus timetables and manage their personal finance.
- Learners understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Most make healthy lifestyle choices and engage in a range of physical activities which include going to the gym and playing in a local football team. They can explain the importance of eating healthy foods and the health risks associated with smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Learners receive good information, advice and guidance from tutors and specialist staff from an external agency to help them make informed choices about their next steps. Learners complete job application forms, produce CVs and make visits to prospective employers. Most learners understand the importance of skills such as being able to work effectively with others, good timekeeping and using English and mathematics in the

workplace. Consequently, the large majority of learners have clear and realistic goals for employment, especially learners on supported internships.

- Too few apprentices receive helpful careers information, advice and guidance. A large proportion of apprentices have been employed in the same or similar job roles before starting the apprenticeship programme. Many have undertaken the apprenticeship to retain their employment. As a result, not enough apprentices understand fully the reasons for enrolling on an apprenticeship and what they gain as a result.
- Learners and apprentices have a good awareness of different cultures. They understand the importance of being respectful and tolerant of different faiths and beliefs in British society. Most learners understand their rights and responsibilities. For example, during discussions with inspectors, learners were able to explain their right to express their opinions and their right to free speech. Learners on supported internships understand their rights and responsibilities as employees such as having a contract of employment and the importance of health and safety rules.
- Learners and apprentices feel safe and know who they can talk to if they have any concerns, both at the provider and in the workplace. Apprentices have a good understanding of the importance of safeguarding and how to safeguard the children they work with at school.
- Managers work with employers to identify learners' individual needs and support requirements to ensure that work placements are appropriate. Managers' risk assessments of workplaces are rigorous. Learners and apprentices know how to access online sites safely. They understand the risks associated with disclosing personal information and the potential consequences of posting inappropriate material or comments on social-media sites. Apprentices understand the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Too many apprentices make slow progress. Assessors do not ensure that apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills or behaviours from their starting points. Most apprentices produce work of an appropriate standard to meet the requirements of the qualification.
- A large majority of apprentices do not progress or gain promotion because they have been employed in their current job role for a significant period of time and are completing the apprenticeship to retain their job role.
- Assessors do not monitor the development of apprentices' English, mathematical or digital knowledge and skills. Apprentices make insufficient progress in developing their knowledge and skills to be able to complete functional skills qualifications by their planned end date.
- Managers now assess learners' starting points in English and mathematics more rigorously. Consequently, learners are enrolled on the most appropriate level of course to meet their needs. Achievement rates for learners on functional skills qualifications at entry level have increased significantly and are high. However, achievement rates for functional skills English at level 1 are low. Achievement rates for functional skills mathematics at level 1 are very low.

- Learners enjoy their time at the provider. The majority of learners make good progress from their starting points in developing their confidence, independence, and vocational knowledge and skills. Learners produce work of a good standard. However, for a few less able learners, tasks are too difficult, and they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- A large majority of learners are enrolled on qualifications that help them to gain knowledge and skills for employment and to promote independence. Qualification achievement rates have increased significantly since the previous inspection and are high. According to the managers' data, high achievement rates have been sustained in 2017/18.
- Learners following non-accredited learning programmes develop personal skills that help prepare them for the workplace and independence. For example, they understand the importance of being punctual and managing their money efficiently.
- The large majority of learners who completed their programme in 2017/18 progressed into further learning, supported internships, volunteering or paid employment.

Types of provision

Apprenticeships

Inadequate

- Currently, 34 apprentices are enrolled on the teaching and learning in schools apprenticeship framework. Of these, four are enrolled on the level 2 apprenticeship and 30 on the level 3 apprenticeship.
- The management of apprenticeship programmes is weak. Leaders and managers have not ensured that the apprenticeship requirements are met for all apprentices. Too many apprentices do not have sufficient time away from their job for off-the-job training. Too many apprentices who have been in their current job role for significant periods of time do not develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Leaders, managers and assessors do not plan apprenticeship programmes effectively. They do not take sufficient account of apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and behaviours. Assessors do not use the information they have to identify apprentices' starting points accurately. They do not plan an individual programme for each apprentice that helps them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Headteachers of schools employing apprentices do not have a sufficient understanding of apprenticeship programmes. Therefore, they are unable to support apprentices effectively. Assessors do not involve school staff when reviewing apprentices' progress. Consequently, headteachers and staff are not sufficiently aware of the knowledge, skills and behaviours their apprentices develop off the job and how they can integrate theory into practice effectively to benefit their school.
- Progress reviews are ineffective. Assessors ask basic questions that do not test the progress apprentices make in gaining new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Assessors do not encourage apprentices to make swifter progress. Leaders have introduced a new review system this term. However, it is too early to see the impact of this.
- Assessors do not set clear targets, including for the development of apprentices' English,

mathematics or digital skills. As a result, assessors do not review or record the development of these skills. Too many apprentices are not on target to achieve their functional skills qualifications. When apprentices do not make the progress expected of them, assessors do not set appropriate targets to ensure that they catch up quickly.

- Assessors do not support apprentices to develop work-related competencies to fulfil their job roles more efficiently. Assessors focus too much on apprentices' completion of tasks and submitting work to meet the requirements of the qualification. As a result, too few apprentices develop their wider personal skills.
- Assessors do not always provide apprentices with feedback that is precise enough to help them to improve their work. Too often feedback is superficial and focuses on whether the work satisfies the assessment criteria. Assessors do not provide helpful feedback on apprentices' English such as sentence construction, spelling and the use of punctuation. They do not identify how learners can improve their work.
- Leaders and assessors monitor the progress of apprentices closely. However, too many apprentices make slow progress for significant periods of time. Interventions from leaders and assessors are ineffective. Consequently, too many apprentices are making slow progress towards completing their apprenticeship by the planned end date.
- Most apprentices present work that is appropriate for their level of study. However, in a few cases their work does not satisfy the assessment criteria and assessors incorrectly accept this as being of the required standard.
- Assessors have good knowledge of their apprentices and they understand the barriers that many of them face in their training. They provide apprentices with useful information, advice and guidance on their next steps.

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

- Currently, 58 learners with high needs are funded by five local authorities. Thirty-nine learners are enrolled across two classroom-based programmes, preparing for adulthood, and work skills, eight are enrolled on work placement programmes and 11 are undertaking supported internships.
- Staff develop highly personalised programmes for learners that build on their prior attainment, increase their independence and prepare them for adulthood and/or employment. They use a range of assessment methods to establish learners' starting points and to provide learning that meets learners' individual needs and support requirements.
- Most tutors use their expertise effectively to ensure that activities enthuse learners and develop their independence and communication skills. For example, learners on the work skills programme take part in preparing a mock democratic vote. They participate enthusiastically in creating ballot papers, writing speeches and designing posters.
- Tutors help learners to develop the knowledge and skills that prepare them for employment. For example, they work together in groups to identify personal skills and attributes and then they match these to different job roles. Staff encourage learners successfully to make personal choices from a range of work placement and employment opportunities to meet their knowledge, skills and interests.

- Staff provide good support to meet learners' diverse needs. They make good use of ICT and assistive technologies to increase learners' engagement in learning, especially for learners who have difficulty concentrating or have complex needs. Specialist support staff use individual approaches to behaviour management successfully to increase participation in learning. For example, these include the use of tactile stress objects and personalised sanction and reward systems. Most learners are well behaved during lessons and breaktimes.
- Careful planning and arrangements for progression to the next level courses for the vast majority of learners ensure that they receive useful information, advice and guidance that help them to have a clear understanding of their employment goals and personal aspirations. Most learners progress to further study, with a few securing suitable part-time employment at a local children's centre and a retailer.
- Tutors and support staff are highly qualified and have access to regular staff development activities. Most tutors use their knowledge and skills to provide effective learning that promotes the development of a range of personal, social and employability skills for learners. Activities are challenging and interesting, and most learners make good progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, in employability lessons learners identify and explain the importance of good time-keeping and working effectively with others.
- A few tutors do not use assessment information available to them to plan and provide learning that meets the needs of all learners. They do not check learners' progress regularly or consolidate key aspects of learning, especially for a few less able learners. As a result, a few learners do not participate fully in all aspects of learning during lessons and they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Learners' attendance is good. Staff encourage learners to work independently and collaboratively and make informed choices and decisions. For example, student ambassadors meet regularly with senior managers to discuss current issues and make requests, including the establishment of a homework club and organising parties for special events.
- Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures. They know what to do if they have any concerns. Learners can explain the potential risks associated with using social media and the importance of not providing their personal details to strangers. Learners feel safe at the provider and in the workplace.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141738
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	107
Principal/CEO	Anthony Brown
Telephone number	01942 877715
Website	www.expansigroup.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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	17	41	–	–	–	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	–	4	–	30	–	–	–	–
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	58							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

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

Elaine Price, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Ken Merry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tracy Gillett	Ofsted Inspector

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