

Inspection of Freeman College

Inspection dates:

17–19 September 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Freeman College is an independent specialist college based in the city centre of Sheffield. It provides residential and day education for young people with challenging behaviour and complex learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection, 27 learners were on education programmes for learners who have high needs. Learners study on programmes that use practical activities and therapies and include subjects such as English and mathematics, metal and wood crafts, horticulture, cooking and art subjects. Leaders offer programmes to help young people to overcome barriers to learning, develop practical skills, and return to their communities with greater independence. Twenty-five learners study on integrated learning for living and work programmes and two learners study on the Gateway supported internship programme. Fifteen learners are aged 19 to 25 and the remainder are aged 16 to 18. The college is a member of the Ruskin Mill Trust group.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners develop new knowledge and skills that support them to develop greater independence and find ways of overcoming personal barriers. They benefit from a well-planned curriculum that enables them to experience and learn through using traditional art, metal and wood crafts, biodynamic horticulture, catering and drama. Learners use the creative skills that they develop to form positive relationships with others.

Learners' behaviour and attitudes are exceptional. Learners receive good support and training from staff that helps them to develop strategies and to understand how to manage their own behaviour. They make strong progress in developing their self-control and consistently demonstrate high levels of respect towards peers, staff and visitors on college sites. Learners are tolerant of others and enjoy working in a safe and inclusive environment.

Learners demonstrate high levels of commitment and motivation across a broad range of college work placements and community projects. These include raising funds for local charities and demonstrating craft techniques at industrial heritage events. They play an active part in community life and produce items of a high quality, such as silver decorations that are presented as gifts for premature babies at the local hospital and designs for wooden cabinets in a library. They confidently serve customers in the college's art gallery and cafe and undertake roles such as performing on stage and being attendants at the college's theatre. Learners enjoy their learning and confidently use the skills that they acquire.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and staff provide a carefully considered curriculum that meets the needs of socially disadvantaged young people. They ensure that programmes support learners who have high needs to make personal choices in preparation for adult life.

Staff sequence curriculum activities at the market garden site effectively. This supports learners to develop the knowledge and acquire the skills that they need to live independently. For example, learners make decisions about the vegetables they want to grow and develop good practical skills in planting and harvesting the crop. They then select recipes and use the vegetables to prepare and cook healthy meals in the college's kitchen. A high proportion of learners develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they need to move on to their next stage of training or to become more independent.

Staff consistently provide high-quality therapeutic and communication support that enables learners who face persistent difficulties to make the adjustments that they need in order to participate fully. They take swift action to support learners who are struggling with their behaviour. For example, staff use breathing techniques and calm discussion to help learners to express their level of anxiety. Learners ask teachers for advice on how to calm down in practical lessons. Learners develop

strategies to improve their emotional resilience and understanding of themselves as part of their learning. Consequently, learners behave consistently well.

Teachers provide effective and sequenced travel training support so that learners who travel by college transport or taxi develop the skills that they need to try new experiences. Learners practise using public transport for short journeys and, as their confidence and understanding develop, staff extend the training to include more complex journeys. For example, learners apply the skills they have learned from taking local journeys to travel confidently to large cities using a range of public transport systems and to stay overnight in hotels. Learners make at least good progress in developing their personal skills and independence in their everyday lives, often from a very low level.

Teachers use their subject expertise very effectively to support learners to build their knowledge and develop new practical skills. For example, learners acquire an understanding of simple peg weaving and tapestry techniques and then extend their knowledge and skills to produce increasingly complex collage designs using weaving looms.

Teachers use practical teaching and assessment activities skilfully to develop learners' English and mathematical skills. They design the curriculum so that learners have a good understanding of sentence structure and basic calculations. For example, learners recall how to place words using the first letter and build on this to confidently arrange words using the second letter. In horticulture lessons, learners count the eggs they collect and use them to accurately calculate multiple numbers in preparation for their mathematics assessment.

Governors support and challenge leaders effectively to improve the quality of education. Governors, leaders and staff have worked well together to address the areas of weakness identified at the previous inspection. Governors ensure that staff receive significant support to develop their specialist skills and knowledge. For example, staff's work programmes allow them time to share good practice during team meetings, undertake training to develop their professional teaching practice, and to participate in research about special educational needs. Governors and leaders also carefully consider staff's health and well-being.

Learners receive good advice and guidance at the start of their programme. They develop clear and realistic plans for their programme and work experience at the college, and most achieve their personal goals. Learners coming to the end of their programme receive helpful careers guidance and preparation for work or further study opportunities. However, learners in the early stage of their programme do not receive sufficient support to gain local employment or appropriate work activities.

Leaders and staff engage in successful partnerships with a broad range of groups to provide opportunities for learners to take an active part in local communities. Leaders ensure that curriculum activities reflect the craft heritage of the city and the Ruskin Mill Trust ethos of experiencing practical learning to develop transferable skills. However, until recently, leaders did not engage sufficiently with employers to

develop a curriculum that is relevant to local employment opportunities. They have recognised this and have taken actions to develop links with employers and to provide learners with a broader range of work opportunities and supported internship pathways.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff place a high priority on the safety of learners. Leaders have implemented appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff and learners know who to contact if they have a concern. The designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained, and they implement referral procedures thoroughly. Learners are safe and secure in their learning environments and work safely in practical lessons. However, leaders are right to recognise that learners' understanding of the risks to their personal safety in their own locality is an aspect of their work that they should develop.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the range of employers that leaders and staff work with to provide greater opportunities for learners to access local work opportunities.
- Ensure that learners benefit from good advice and guidance at all stages of their programme in preparation for appropriate work activities or further stages in their education.
- Improve learners' understanding of the risks to their personal safety in the context of the areas where they live.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132002
Address	Sterling Works 88 Arundel Street Sheffield S1 2NG
Contact number	0114 2525940
Website	www.rmt.org/freeman
Principal/CEO	Angie Iversen
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	22–24 June 2016
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the further education and skills inspection handbook and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visits to learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Tracey Mace-Akroyd, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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