

# Short inspection of Linkage Community Trust

Inspection dates: 26–27 February and 18 March 2020

## **Outcome**

Linkage Community Trust continues to be a good provider.

## **Information about this provider**

Linkage Community Trust is an independent specialist college based in Lincolnshire that supports people with learning disabilities. It provides learning programmes for 133 learners with high needs. Learners have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, from moderate to severe, including Down's syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome, Williams syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, speech and language difficulties, visual impairment, hearing impairment, epilepsy and physical disabilities. Learners are based on three campuses: Toynton Campus in Spilsby, Weelsby Campus in Grimsby, and Boutham Park Education Centre in Lincoln.

Learners are referred by eight local authorities, with most learners being referred by Lincolnshire County Council. There are 41 learners enrolled on the independence pathway, 86 on the employability pathway and six on the supported internship pathway. There are 57 learners aged 16 to 18, and 76 are over 18 years of age.

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

Learners benefit from an education that supports them to achieve their aspirations. Lecturers provide learners with experiences that are life changing and support them to achieve more than they thought they could. Learners who never thought that they could live independently now aspire to do so and are working towards living on their own or in supported living.

Learners value the welcoming atmosphere at the college. Staff celebrate diversity, and learners work well together, respect their peers, and have empathy towards each other's disabilities. Learners show positive attitudes in all aspects of their college life and display professional behaviour when they attend work experience.

Residential learners continue their learning in their living accommodation. They are involved in cleaning and cooking rotas and help with washing their clothes and make their own beds. All learners value the social life of the college. The highlight of the week is the disco, where learners socialise and make new friends.

Learners benefit from high-quality resources that help them to make good progress. They use the impressive grounds to develop their knowledge and skills in gardening and photography, attend the drama studio for performing arts, and use a well-equipped gym to keep themselves fit.

Staff at all levels know their learners very well and use this information to support them effectively. Staff provide an ethos of care and support that enables learners to flourish. Learners develop confidence and resilience, becoming more confident in, for example, crossing the road and taking the bus.

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

Leaders ensure that learners follow a flexible curriculum that is carefully based on their individual needs and interests, with vocational options that match their future plans. For example, learners who would like to work in the hospitality and catering industry work with the catering team at the college and attend work placements in hotels and cafes.

Lecturers carefully plan the content of programmes to build learners' knowledge, skills and behaviours in a logical order. In catering, lecturers teach learners the basic foundation techniques such as cutting, peeling, slicing and dicing. Learners then use these skills to produce cold and hot food. In vocational sessions, lecturers set clear targets for learners that cover the vocational knowledge and skills that learners need to develop.

Lecturers provide helpful demonstrations and use questions effectively to ensure that learners can remember important points. In customer service, lecturers check that learners remember what is appropriate to wear for work. Staff use questioning and observation well to assess whether learners are developing the knowledge and skills that they need to make progress.

Learners benefit from high-quality work experience placements that are related to their vocational pathway. During their placements in local hotels and cafes, learners on catering courses develop their knowledge of how to serve customers, lay a table, use a till, weigh ingredients and prepare food. Learners gain in confidence during their placements and develop the skills that they need for their next steps.

Learners benefit from helpful careers advice from college staff and from an independent careers adviser. However, too few learners for whom it would be appropriate move into paid employment or supported internships.

Progress coaches use learners' education, health and care (EHC) plans and diagnostic assessments to identify accurately the knowledge, skills and behaviours that learners need to develop. They then record precisely what learners need to do to achieve their goals and communicate this to lecturers. However, in a few instances, lecturers do not use the targets recorded in individual learning plans to

develop learners' personal and social skills and their English and mathematical knowledge.

Lecturers plan and deliver a comprehensive programme to develop learners' skills in maintaining and improving their physical and mental well-being. Learners improve their understanding, covering topics such as healthy eating and the benefits of getting sufficient sleep, and exercising. Learners have high levels of attendance at college.

Leaders, managers and trustees have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Linkage Community Trust. They have made good progress since the last inspection in improving teaching, training and assessment, and they recognise the need to address inconsistencies in teaching practices, develop lecturers' pedagogical skills, and to embed concepts effectively in learners' long-term memories.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff respond quickly to safeguarding concerns and work with external agencies, where appropriate. They review safeguarding incidents very thoroughly so that they can learn lessons and further improve their response to safeguarding incidents.

Managers identify themes from safeguarding concerns and then deliver sessions on these themes in tutorials. For example, lecturers cover topics such as sexual abuse and online safety.

Managers understand local risks well. For example, they are aware of the increase in child sexual exploitation and the development of 'pop-up' brothels in Grimsby. Managers are aware of the risks to vulnerable learners.

Managers ensure that learners have an appropriate understanding of safeguarding and know to whom to report a concern. Learners are made aware of 'stranger danger' and know whom to contact if they get lost. However, learners' understanding of radicalisation and extremism is superficial. Managers have identified the need to improve learners' understanding, and have begun to take appropriate action.

Leaders ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for the storage of controlled drugs and medicine, and for fire safety. As a result, learners are kept safe. However, as they rightly recognise, leaders do not apply consistently enough their policies for auditing medication stored on site and for ensuring that fire risk assessments are regularly updated and recorded.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Identify effective strategies to enable learners to remember what they have learned about the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Ensure that policies on auditing of controlled drugs stored on site and on fire safety risk assessment are implemented fully and consistently.
- Increase the number of learners who move into paid employment or supported internships.
- Ensure that all lecturers plan the curriculum to enable learners to develop better their personal and social skills and their English and mathematical knowledge.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131913
<b>Address</b>	Toynton Campus Toynton All Saints Spilsby Lincolnshire PE23 5AE
<b>Contact number</b>	01472 372301
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.linkage.org.uk/">www.linkage.org.uk/</a>
<b>Principal</b>	Martin Shelton
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15–16 November 2016
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	N/A

## Information about this inspection

Ofsted is aware of the challenges that Covid-19 is currently posing to those we inspect. During the visit on 18 March 2020, the inspectors took into consideration the impact of any measures being taken to slow the spread of Coronavirus by the provider. This has included the effect these measures have had on the current attendance of the students and staffing arrangements.

The inspection was the second short inspection carried out since Linkage Community Trust was judged to be good in February 2013.

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 observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Jacque Brown, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rachel Angus	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Hailstone	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jamie Richardson	Regulatory Inspector

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