

# AutismAble CIC

Monitoring visit report

---

<b>Unique reference number:</b>	148048
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Steve Hailstone, Her Majesty's Inspector
<b>Inspection dates:</b>	6–7 July 2021
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Address:</b>	Captains Row South Shields NE33 5AS

# Monitoring visit: main findings

## Context and focus of visit

From autumn 2019, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to independent specialist colleges newly funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) from August 2018 onwards. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

AutismAble CIC is an independent specialist college that provides education programmes to learners aged between 16 and 25 who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It was founded in 2015 and received a contract to provide programmes directly from September 2020. Most learners are referred to the provider by South Tyneside Council. Learners are on programmes from entry level to level 3 and follow one of five pathways, which are life skills, preparation for work, vocational skills for digital media, vocational skills for business, and vocational skills for customer service. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 36 learners on programmes.

The provider's centre remained open during the period of COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions, but many learners studied remotely. Almost all learners have now returned to studying at the centre.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

## Themes

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant learning programmes that are clearly defined and tailored to suit the individual needs of learners?**      **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have a clear intent for their curriculum, which is reflected in their mission to provide education and experiences that enable learners to develop in an autism-friendly environment. A well-designed programme provides opportunities for learners to progress from courses that develop their independent living and employability skills to vocational courses that prepare them for employment in the business, customer service and digital sectors.

Leaders successfully integrate into the programme a wide range of opportunities for learners to participate successfully in volunteering and work experience. They include

innovative approaches to increasing learners' confidence about work, such as virtual work-experience opportunities that prepare learners for on-site work placements.

Staff are appropriately qualified and trained to carry out their roles. Training for all staff includes autism awareness, behaviour management, equality and diversity, and using online learning platforms. Many staff carry out useful additional training on topics of interest and relevance to their role, such as data protection, promoting sexual health and suicide prevention.

Leaders have effective quality assurance arrangements in place. Until recently, these arrangements lacked sufficient rigour, but following changes to the management team, they have improved significantly. Leaders and managers now identify specific and relevant actions for improvement and monitor their implementation closely. This has already resulted in improvements in governance, staff appraisal and monitoring learners' progress. However, as these new arrangements have been in place for only two months, it is not possible to evaluate the full impact.

Recent improvements to governance have resulted in much closer involvement of governors in overseeing the work of the provider. The board now has an appropriate range of expertise. Board members receive frequent reports from managers with specific responsibilities, such as for quality and safeguarding. They successfully challenge leaders and managers to provide a high-quality experience for learners.

Leaders ensure that the additional funding received from the local authority to support learners with high needs is used effectively to provide the right individual support at an appropriate level for each learner.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality learning programmes that develop independence, communication and skills and help them to achieve their personal and/or work-related goals?**      **Significant progress**

Tutors successfully plan and teach the curriculum in a logical order to build learners' knowledge and skills. In business, learners develop their communication skills first, and cover more complex topics, such as storage and retrieval of information, later, when they have acquired skills and knowledge that they can apply to the topic. Tutors successfully use activities that help learners to retain the content of their lessons. They frequently carry out recap activities to help learners remember what they have learned earlier.

Tutors identify accurate starting points for learners using each learner's education, health and care plan and an early assessment. They use this information well to plan learning that meets individual learners' needs.

Tutors use assessment methods effectively to check learners' progress. They

carefully observe learners completing practical tasks and ask relevant questions to check learners' knowledge and understanding. This means that, in most instances, tutors have a good awareness of how well learners are acquiring new knowledge.

Learners develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours that prepare them well for transition to further training, employment and independent living. They receive good support to improve and apply their skills in English and mathematics. Parents and carers comment on how the training transforms the lives of their children, citing significant improvements in confidence, interaction and preparation for employment.

Learners benefit from high-quality work-experience placements, such as in the provider's café, which is open to the public. They gain valuable experience of workplace environments. They increase their confidence in work situations and acquire skills that they will need in future job roles.

Learning support staff have appropriate experience and expertise. They benefit from useful training in working with learners with ASD, providing effective support and evaluating learning. However, in a few instances, support staff intervene unnecessarily when a learner is able to complete a task independently, and this occasionally slows the progress of a few learners.

Learners have access to a wide range of information about future career opportunities. They gain valuable skills in writing CVs, completing job applications and identifying suitable job roles.

### **How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding and take relevant action to keep learners safe. They identify learners who are at risk and provide appropriate support and intervention. They act swiftly in response to any concerns raised. Staff contact learners who do not attend classes to ensure that they are not at risk. All staff, including those with specific responsibility for safeguarding, receive appropriate training.

Leaders implement safe staff recruitment arrangements. After identifying a lack of full compliance in completing Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks before staff take up post, they tightened their procedures. All staff, volunteers, governors and contractors now have DBS checks before they begin working with the provider.

Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding, including online safety and staying safe when travelling independently. They feel safe and know how to report concerns. Parents are very positive about how staff protect their children.

Staff place a high importance on the risk to learners of being drawn into radicalisation and extremism, and provide learners with appropriate information and guidance. However, learners are not able to explain how these risks might affect them.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2021