

Inspection of Birtenshaw

Inspection dates:

7 to 9 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Provision for learners with high needs

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Birtenshaw is an independent specialist college. It is part of the Birtenshaw Group, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee that was established in the 1950s to support children with disabilities. The college was established in 2014 and achieved independent status in 2016. It provides specialist further education for young people aged between 16 and 25. Learners have a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and complex health needs.

At the time of the inspection, 58 learners attended the college, 54 of whom were in scope for the inspection. Learners follow individualised programmes that focus on communication and choice, learning for life and employability. Seven learners were on the communication and choice pathway, 29 were on the independence pathway, 15 learners were on the employment pathway, and three studied a combination of pathways.

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

Learners are happy at college, where they enjoy taking part in new experiences such as going to the gym. They say it's fun to be a learner. Learners welcome the help and support they receive from staff, who know them very well. Learners develop their independence over time.

Most learners develop new skills as a result of their course. Employability pathway learners learn how to make pastry. They progress to making pies, which they sell in the college café. However, leaders do not ensure that learners develop their knowledge to the same level as their skills. Learners who study English do not routinely develop their use of full stops and capital letters over time.

Leaders and managers have taken positive steps to strengthen the support for learners to progress into work. Most learners have opportunities to take part in internal or external work experience. Learners carry out conservation activities in a local park, where they prune shrubs. However, learners on the communication and choice pathway have little opportunity to experience the world of work.

Learners feel safe. They know what to do if they experience bullying. During anti-bullying week, learners identified positive character traits in each other. They learn about social behaviours, such as being kind and thoughtful. Learners do not develop their understanding of sexuality and healthy relationships sufficiently well.

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

Leaders have developed an appropriate curriculum that meets the needs of learners. They have implemented a flexible and holistic approach to developing learners' skills and knowledge for their future adult lives. While the curriculum rationale is clear, it is not yet fully implemented in an ambitious way for all learners. On occasions, leaders change the curriculum content too readily in response to parental and learner pressure.

Leaders and managers plan and sequence the curriculum effectively so that learners can do more over time. Teachers liaise with specialist services on behalf of learners, securing assessments and resources that support the development of learners' independence skills. Learners transfer the skills they develop to their home lives. They grow in confidence and become less anxious when travelling. Teachers do not link what learners study across different subjects systematically. Learners do not always make the progress of which they are capable in relation to their starting points.

Teachers and learning support assistants are suitably qualified, knowledgeable and experienced. Staff benefit from well-planned professional development.

Most staff create a calm and orderly classroom environment. They establish routines within lessons that give a clear structure for learners to follow. Most learners settle

quickly into class and are ready to learn. Staff do not set consistently high expectations for all learners. A few learners do not show commitment to their learning.

Teachers do not set precise targets for learners in lessons or during activities. Targets lack detail in breaking down the knowledge and skills learners need to acquire. Consequently, learners do not make rapid enough progress towards achieving their learning goals.

The large majority of teachers and learning support assistants use questioning effectively to check learners' recall of what they can do. They identify gaps in the skills learners are developing and make appropriate adjustments to the curriculum to close the gaps. For example, teachers identified that learners who were working on developing independent travel skills did not understand the concept of a safe place to cross the road. They introduced into the curriculum the red and green person pedestrian-crossing symbols, in order to support learners' recognition of the importance and correct use of pedestrian crossings in the community.

Leaders and managers have implemented suitable careers guidance arrangements for most learners. They ensure that learners' transition to the college is rigorous. Leaders assess the knowledge and skills learners have and use the education, health and care plan targets to place learners on the correct pathway. Most learners have ongoing access to careers activities as part of their curriculum. Leaders work with an employment service charity that helps learners to progress into supported employment. Learners on the communication and choice pathway do not have the opportunity to take part in their annual reviews and transition meetings.

Governance requires improvement. Governors do not have enough knowledge about the expectations of a college delivering programmes for learners with high needs. They do not challenge leaders robustly on the quality improvement actions and their impact. As a result, governors do not have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The positive culture around protecting and supporting young people is evident across the college. Staff receive frequent safeguarding training to ensure that they keep learners safe. They report concerns promptly. The designated safeguarding lead maintains comprehensive records of incidents and concerns that staff raise.

Staff have been particularly vigilant about monitoring learners' well-being and safety during the pandemic. They work closely with a range of external agencies, including social care teams, the police and the health service, to keep learners safe.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Fully implement an ambitious curriculum, so that all learners benefit from high-quality education.
- Ensure that learners make swift progress from their starting points by ordering the curriculum content to build learners' knowledge over time, across subjects.
- Ensure that target-setting is precise enough, so that all learners make rapid progress towards achieving their learning goals.
- Provide opportunities for learners on the communication and choice pathway to experience the world of work and take part in their annual reviews and transition meetings.
- Improve the governance arrangements, so that governors provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge to leaders and hold them to account for the quality of learners' education.

Provider details

Unique reference number	142913
Address	Crompton Way Bolton Greater Manchester BL2 2PE
Contact number	01204 602330
Website	www.birtenshaw.org.uk
Principal	Clare Foster (Head of Service)
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	29 to 31 January 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of service, 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Alison Cameron-Brandwood, lead inspector
Bev Barlow
Bernie White

Her Majesty's Inspector
Her Majesty's Inspector
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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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