

Inspection of The Northern School of Art

Inspection dates: 8 to 11 February 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

The Northern School of Art is a further and higher education art and design college in Middlesbrough. Further education provision is delivered at a purpose-built facility that opened in September 2021. At the time of the inspection, there were 450 learners studying creative arts programmes which include vocational qualifications, A levels and access to higher education courses in art and design. Of these, 434 learners were on education programmes for young people. Sixteen were on adult learning programmes, and there were 22 learners with high needs.

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

Learners consistently demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their learning. They take immense pride in their work, and their workbooks are neat, tidy and well presented. Learners produce practical work that is of exceptional quality, well organised and richly annotated. They take ownership of their studies and, as a result, work responsibly and independently in very well-equipped art studios and design spaces.

Learners on all programmes are extremely polite, respectful and mutually supportive of each other. The school actively celebrates individuality and diversity, and learners benefit from a strong, zero-tolerance culture regarding bullying, harassment and discrimination. Staff set very high expectations of behaviour, and this ensures that learners develop attitudes that demonstrate they are respectful citizens. Learners who are members of the LGBTQ+ community are clear that peers and staff at the school are highly considerate and respectful of their personal views and preferences.

Learners gain valuable new skills and knowledge due to the effective partnerships which lecturers have secured with local employers. In three-dimensional design sessions, lecturers closely align the course content to new and emerging practices in interior design so that learners are familiar with immersive design techniques. Learners on level 3 vocational graphic design programmes learn about new technology in motion graphics, which is a growing employment opportunity in the region.

Learners study in a safe and highly supportive environment that enables them to flourish. Learners with high needs benefit from having access to a specialist zone which provides them with a quiet area when they struggle with busy environments. Student services staff effectively support learners by providing quick access to a range of support services for those who experience mental ill health. Learners highly value the support that they receive from their lecturers and support staff.

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

Leaders and managers provide an exceptionally current and relevant curriculum that enables learners to develop specialist knowledge and skills in creative arts. They have invested in a new, purpose-built arts centre which provides learners with access to highly specialised equipment and resources that enhances their studies. As a result, learners are well prepared for progression into careers in the creative arts industries and higher education. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 studying photography benefit from accessing specialist resources such as a photoshoot gallery, dark rooms and specialist commercial printers to support their learning. On completion of their final major projects, they are highly competent in creating a range of professional photographic images such as watergrams, cyanotypes and chemigrams.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have a very secure oversight of the quality of education that is provided for all learners. They have taken positive and productive steps to improve the quality of the very few areas of provision that they have identified as underperforming. Governors challenge leaders and managers very effectively to ensure that all learners continuously receive a high-quality learning experience.

Lecturers are highly skilled and expert in their arts specialisms. They participate in relevant professional development activities by attending workshops, exhibitions and conferences. Many continue to work in the creative industries outside of their teaching roles to maintain their design expertise. Leaders host an annual further and higher education conference that allows staff to share best teaching and industry practice.

Lecturers sequence their teaching exceptionally well to help learners learn and recall key artistic concepts before moving onto more complex art projects that further develop learners' knowledge and skills. In fine art sessions, lecturers teach learners about the scope of materials that they can use in painting. Learners then move on to studying and producing initial line drawings in black and white, and then to integrating colour and tone. Adult learners on access to higher education programmes successfully acquire knowledge of formal elements and principles of drawing techniques and apply this knowledge in their coursework, enabling them to master advanced skills quickly.

Learners respond very positively to the high expectations set by their lecturers. They approach challenging, employer-led projects enthusiastically and creatively. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of wider social issues and the beneficial impact that the creative industries have on society. They take on active roles in artistic projects set by lecturers and employers that enable them to contribute to improving their local communities. For example, learners develop and apply their understanding of tactical urbanism through a project on which they submit artwork designs to an international competition that focuses on the town council's regeneration of the town centre. They develop ideas on engaging communities in regenerating derelict spaces, taking good account of social needs, well-being and mental health.

Leaders and managers have developed a very effective careers education programme that provides learners with useful information about different progression routes available to them, including higher education, apprenticeships and employment. Lecturers provide a very wide and inclusive range of additional activities that enable learners to access activities that prepares them well for their next steps. For example, leaders have renamed Wednesday afternoon activities 'Professional Studies', a time when learners access presentations and guest speakerships from industry specialists and curated talks by leading designers from specialist design studios. As a result, learners better understand routes into employment and are increasingly more aspirational in their career ambitions.

Leaders and staff create an extremely calm and orderly environment where learners are supported in their learning to develop behaviours and attitudes that prepare them very well for their next steps. Lecturers on level 3 graphics programmes reinforce expectations of learners to focus on and be diligent in their studies, reminding them after breaks that they should promptly focus on their individual projects and stay on task. As a result, learning is highly purposeful and productive, and learners develop work-ready skills such as dedication, focus and commitment.

Leaders and other staff identify appropriate and timely personal goals for learners with high needs. The special educational needs and disabilities coordinator regularly assesses individual learning plans to ensure that goals and education, health and care plan outcomes are met. As a result, learners with high needs make good progress in acquiring the wider skills they need to prepare themselves for adulthood.

Lecturers successfully incorporate wider social issues into their teaching. Learners develop very mature attitudes about being tolerant and wholly accepting of difference. As a result, learners consistently demonstrate a very secure understanding of fundamental British values in their behaviours and their artistic work. For example, learners maturely explore and consider challenging stimuli such as racism, hate crime, homophobia and the rule of law that results in exceptional project work incorporating, through multimedia approaches, social themes such as feminism.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have highly effective systems in place to safeguard learners. The designated safeguarding lead and deputies are highly experienced and have a very secure oversight of safeguarding concerns. Leaders have appointed appropriate staff who respond well and appropriately to learners who are referred to them with serious safeguarding concerns. These staff manage each case carefully and refer to additional external support services, such as general practitioners, mental health advocacy services, social services and the police, where necessary.

Learners trust staff at the school implicitly and know that staff will take very swift actions to assist them with any safeguarding concerns. For example, during the darker winter months, learners raised concerns to staff in the student services team about their fears of taking a dark route to the train station. Managers took prompt action to provide learners with personal alarms and gave specific instructions on how to use these by applying the 'trigger, throw and run' method.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130571
Address	Newport Road Middlesbrough TS1 1LA
Contact number	01642 288000
Website	https://northernart.ac.uk/
Principal/CEO	Martin Raby
Provider type	Further education college
Date of previous inspection	2 June 2009
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of further education, 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

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