

Short inspection of Education and Services for People with Autism

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 October 2022

Outcome

Education and Services for People with Autism continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Education and Services for People with Autism is an independent specialist college with its head office in Sunderland. It provides further education and training for learners with high needs aged between 16 and 25 from two delivery sites in Sunderland, one in Newcastle upon Tyne and one in Stockton-on-Tees. The college specialises in teaching learners with autism. It offers both day and residential provision. At the time of the inspection, there were 85 learners enrolled on personalised programmes in line with the targets recorded in their education, health and care (EHC) plans.

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

Learners enjoy attending college, and most have good attendance or have made good progress in improving their attendance during their time at the college. Learners benefit from the actions of staff to encourage them to attend college when they have significant barriers to attending, such as severe anxiety. For example, staff visit learners at home and arrange counselling for them.

Learners receive useful careers information, advice and guidance which helps them to plan their next steps. They participate in work experience and volunteering activities that help them to develop useful employability skills and to identify what they may want to do in the future. For example, at Path Head Mill learners are engaged in a year-long volunteering project to improve the site. They learn new skills and are proud of the work that they do. However, leaders rightly recognise that they need to broaden the range of meaningful work placements following the COVID-19 restrictions.

Learners who are not likely to progress to employment or further education and training attend valuable transition events at which they meet with staff from relevant agencies to discuss supported living and community activities.

Learners participate in engaging and meaningful activities which expose them to a range of experiences, improve their confidence and develop their physical fitness. For example, they do trampolining, visit art galleries and exercise at the gym. As a result, they improve their communication and social skills. Learners develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills through vocational subjects such as woodwork and art.

Residential learners benefit from a 24-hour curriculum where they continue to develop the skills learned at college in the residential setting in which they live. They practise the skills that they need for independent living, such as making beds, budgeting and planning healthy diets. This helps to reinforce their knowledge and skills.

Learners feel safe at the college. They have a good understanding of how to protect themselves online and when using social media. For example, they do not accept friend requests from people they do not know, and make their settings private on social media. Staff identify learners who are at risk from online activity and provide effective one-to-one support for them.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear curriculum strategy that they implement successfully. They provide personalised learning programmes to learners with high needs to prepare them for the next stage of their education, employment or personal lives. Leaders and managers provide a specialist curriculum for learners with autism which they frequently review to meet the changing needs of the learners and to respond to local opportunities. For example, the growing number of transgender learners benefit from attending advocacy workshops with a nationally acclaimed specialist.

Leaders and managers recruit staff who are well qualified and experienced in working with learners with high needs. They recruit learning support staff with a wide range of relevant backgrounds, such as psychiatric nurses with extensive experience in dealing with challenging behaviour. Leaders and managers recognise that they need to recruit a new speech and language therapist to provide specialist support to learners as quickly as possible and are in the process of doing so.

Leaders and managers ensure that tutors and learning support staff attend useful training to improve further the teaching and support that they provide for learners with autism. For example, staff attend training about understanding autism and learn about strategies to help learners with autism to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Leaders and managers have effective oversight of the quality of the provision, including that of the subcontracted provision. They have a comprehensive quality cycle in place and complete a range of activities, such as observations of teaching, to review and improve the quality of programmes.

Leaders and managers have accurate oversight of the progress of learners. Managers meet frequently to discuss and review learners' progress, and they put additional support and new strategies in place for learners who are at risk of falling behind to enable them to catch up.

Governance is effective. The board of trustees and the advisory board are comprised of members who have expertise in key areas such as education and autism and who use their specialist knowledge to provide effective scrutiny and challenge to leaders.

Teachers complete a thorough initial and diagnostic assessment of learners to identify accurately their starting points. They use this information very well to identify the most appropriate curriculum for learners to enable them to achieve the targets in their EHC plans and their long-term aspirations. Learners benefit from a highly individualised curriculum. For example, learners who are interested in information technology and games design attend a local further education college to study these subjects.

Teachers use a wide range of assessment methods to check learners' understanding. They observe learners completing practical activities such as making toasted sandwiches in life skills sessions, and use questioning well to ensure that learners remember the steps needed to make drinks for the class. Most teachers provide learners with useful feedback about how to improve further. However, a few teachers give feedback that is too confirmatory and do not provide learners with sufficient constructive information about what they need to do to improve.

Teachers support learners well to improve the English and mathematics skills that they need for adulthood, by integrating the learning of these skills into lessons, linking them to learners' interests and making them relevant to learners' lives. For example, in employability sessions, they teach learners to recognise notes and coins up to £20 and to estimate how much items will cost to buy.

Teachers work well with learning support assistants and, together, they encourage learners to work independently to complete tasks, such as peeling apples to make an apple pie. Learners gain new skills and apply these at home, including helping with the gardening. However, in a few cases learning support assistants are not fully effective in supporting learners in the classroom. Occasionally, they are slow to support or encourage learners.

In a few cases, teachers do not plan to meet learners' individual needs well enough in lessons. In these instances, they do not identify how the activities that learners complete link to the targets in their EHC plans. As a result, these learners do not make progress as quickly as they could.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead has the appropriate training and experience to be effective in his role. He has a good understanding of local risks and the risks that learners with autism may face.

Leaders and managers implement appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures which they use to keep learners safe, and have a clear reporting process in place. They implement an appropriate safe recruitment process to ensure that staff are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

Leaders and managers ensure that learners are safe from the risk of extremism and radicalisation. Teachers cover potential risks in tutorial sessions, but learners with more extensive needs struggle to recall this information. However, all learners have an individual 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan so that they are kept safe from risks.

Teachers complete comprehensive behaviour management support plans based on the detailed knowledge that they have about learners. They identify clear strategies to support learners to improve and manage their behaviour.

Teachers talk to learners about safe and healthy sexual relationships. They ensure that learners know what happens to the body during sexual activity. They also ensure that learners can recognise the signs of an unhealthy relationships, such as controlling behaviour. Learners who joined the college in September are scheduled to complete this training in the very near future.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all learning support is effective.
- Ensure that all teachers plan sessions well to meet individual learners' needs.
- Ensure that leaders and managers develop a broad range of meaningful work placements following the COVID-19 restrictions.
- Ensure that a speech and language therapist is recruited as soon as possible to provide effective specialist support to learners.
- Ensure that all tutors and support staff give feedback to learners that helps them to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours further.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131872
Address	Ferryboat Lane Sunderland SR5 3RL
Contact number	01915 165080
Website	www.espa.org.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Patrick Cahill
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	9 to 11 November 2016
Main subcontractor	Gateshead College

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Education and Services for People with Autism was judged to be good in November 2016.

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, 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

Jacquie Brown, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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His Majesty's Inspector

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