

Inspection of Portland College

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

Portland College is an independent specialist college with charity status located in Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire. The college is part of the wider Portland Charity Group, which provides residential independent living accommodation, day services and short breaks placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 216 learners, all of whom with an education and health care (EHC) plan and high needs.

The college provides education and training to young adults aged 16 to 25 years with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including profound and multiple learning disabilities, severe and moderate learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, complex medical and physical health, hearing impairment and visual impairment.

Learners follow a highly bespoke curriculum, which is designed to meet their individual needs and aspirations. The aim of each curriculum is to develop learners' positive emotional well-being and increase their independence and skills for work through three 'learning pathways'. Learners choose which pathway they study, including land-based and trade industries, design technology, retail industries or service and leisure industries.

Leaders offer a supported internship programme. There were four learners studying this course, who undertake their work placement with external employers.

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

From the moment learners arrive on the expansive college grounds, they are greeted by kind and caring staff, who welcome them each day. Learning and social environments are highly inclusive and supportive. Teaching, support and therapy staff work exceptionally well together to create safe and enjoyable experiences for learners. As a result, learners feel safe because the college is a calm, nurturing and exciting place to learn.

Learners demonstrate high levels of respect for staff and their peers. This is because staff develop an excellent rapport with learners through their compassionate approach. They expertly teach learners how to manage their feelings and behaviours in a positive way. These high levels of respect between staff and learners mean everyone feels valued. As a result, learners are happy and confident to express choices and share their individual personalities.

Learners are taught in high-quality environments. They quickly develop digital technological skills and control their learning environments independently, such as voice control lighting and fridges. Learners who are non-verbal become skilled in using electronic augmentative and alternative communication devices.

Learners access state-of-the-art facilities, such as a sports hall, theatre and a woodland adventure zone. The onsite forest enables learners to participate in activities such as climbing, ziplining, abseiling, wheelchair swing and woodland trails. Learners also enjoy spending time in the animal area, where therapy donkeys and ducks live.

Learners demonstrate a sound understanding of the risks posed by extremist groups. This is because tutors teach learners very well about the risks learners may experience in the world. For example, they know that extremist groups use social media to communicate their extremist views and that they target vulnerable individuals. Learners understand the importance of staying safe and how to report any concerns.

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

Leaders and governors have a clear vision and mission: to improve the lives of young people with SEND. The strategy links strongly to the preparation for adulthood agenda. Health and well-being are at the heart of the strategic plan. Leaders make very good use of national intelligence and local data to inform their priorities. Leaders and governors communicate the strategic ambitions for the college very well, and staff are deeply committed to them.

Governors have a wealth of highly relevant experience from their work and personal lives. They use this experience to work very effectively with the leadership team to set the mission and direction for the college and hold leaders to account. They

frequently visit the college to meet with staff so they can understand what works well and areas they would like to make even better. As a result, governors have a highly effective oversight of the college.

Leaders and managers provide a wide range of highly relevant specialist training for tutors, support staff and employers, which helps them to meet learners' needs very well. For example, training includes moving and handling, sign language, autism awareness, neurodiversity, mental health and positive behaviour support. As a result, staff are highly skilled to teach and support learners with complex needs. Employers are able to meet learners' needs effectively and support them effectively in the workplace.

Tutors, support staff and therapists expertly use their knowledge, skills and experience well to teach and support a logically planned and sequenced curriculum that meets the diverse needs of learners. This is because staff put the needs of learners at the centre of everything they do. They take the time to get to know learners well so they can expertly identify the areas learners need to develop. As a result, learners benefit from a highly personalised and ambitious curriculum and make excellent progress to achieve their learning goals.

Tutors set highly ambitious and personalised targets for learners, which links closely to their aspirations and outcomes identified in their EHC plans. Tutors provide learners with frequent opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to achieve their targets in a range of different learning environments. As a result, learners are aware of their targets, and they make exceptional progress. For example, learners who need to develop their communication skills work in the college café to increase their interaction with unfamiliar people.

Tutors and job coaches ensure that learners participate in highly relevant and meaningful work experience opportunities. Learners undertake various roles within real working environments within the college and with employers within the local community. As a result, learners develop excellent employability skills in real-life working environments. A high proportion on the supported internship programme gain paid employment with, for example, large national charities.

Leaders, managers and tutors have taken a highly considered and practical approach to the teaching of a curriculum that encourages learners to lead a healthy lifestyle. Tutors teach topics such as sexual health, healthy relationships, self-esteem and confidence, the law, cultural diversity and mindfulness. As a result, learners understand well the importance of establishing and maintaining healthy lives.

Leaders and managers have developed a comprehensive and inclusive enrichment programme, which is highly effective in facilitating learners' personal development. There is an unwavering commitment demonstrated by staff to promote and facilitate learners' personal development. Staff work with a range of external agencies to offer a vast range of exciting and engaging activities to learners, including martial arts, rock climbing, dance workshops, first aid, Duke of Edinburgh Awards and a range of external annual sports competitions. As a result, learners significantly increase their

confidence and independence, which enables them to become more active citizens, both at college and within their communities.

Leaders and managers ensure that the comprehensive careers strategy meets learners' and parents' needs. Careers and next-steps guidance starts when learners transition into the college. This means that staff know learners very well, including what their aspirations or next steps might be. Staff support learners and their parents very well to explore their future options and have clear plans to support this transition. As a result, the majority of learners move on to meaningful destinations after college, such as adult day services, supported living, employment or further study.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have comprehensive policies and procedures to safeguard their students. Leaders update these in a timely way to ensure they are relevant to staff and learners. Procedures contain clear guidance for staff on how to make a referral and support learners.

Designated safeguarding leads are suitably trained. There is a strong focus by all staff on keeping learners safe. It is clear that safeguarding is paramount to staff throughout the college. This includes governors through to support staff, who ensure learners receive appropriate help when they need it.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131959
Address	Nottingham Road Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG18 4TJ
Contact number	01623499111
Website	http://www.portland.ac.uk/
Principal and CEO	Dr Mark Dale
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	19 March 2014
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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 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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