

Inspection of Ruskin Mill College

Inspection dates:

16 to 18 May 2023

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

Information about this provider

Ruskin Mill College is part of Ruskin Mill Trust Limited. The college is situated on a large site in Gloucestershire. It is a medium-sized specialist independent day and residential college. It provides a curriculum based on craft activities, performing arts and agriculture for young people with learning difficulties, disabilities and a wide range of complex needs. The college has 73 young people, with six students aged 16 to 18 and 67 students aged 19 to 25. The residential settings managed by the college are inspected by the Care Quality Commission and therefore were not in scope for this inspection.

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

Students enjoy the calm and peaceful environment at college. Trustees, leaders and staff model positive behaviours. They have a calm approach and they communicate clearly and respectfully with the students. As a result, students welcome the support of staff and learn new skills, such as felting.

Staff use modern and traditional methods, in industry-related practical workshops, to enthuse students and introduce them to learning and skills that they would not previously have experienced. For example, students use a wood-fire forge to make coat hooks and art from iron.

Students take pride in their work and develop a broad experience of heritage crafts. They enjoy completing projects and being able to sell or gift the products they make. Students develop skills in handling money, taking orders and talking to unfamiliar customers.

Skilled therapy and support staff help students to identify how they can self-regulate their behaviours effectively. For example, they use self-regulating techniques such as finger clicking, sensory touch or weighted blankets. Staff use de-escalation strategies very effectively when students start to demonstrate heightened behaviours, reducing the need for further intervention.

Students work well with their education, health and care managers (EHC managers) to devise a curriculum that helps them develop skills and behaviours to support them in their future lives. For example, adding sessions with therapy staff help to prepare students for internal and external work experience.

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

Leaders have developed a curriculum and ethos that enable students to experience an individualised timetable of therapeutic and practical craft activities. Staff help students to become more able and to achieve the outcomes that are stated in their education, health and care plans. Students are supported to choose those activities that best meet their needs from an extensive range of craft and land-based activities. Students can safely participate in their preferred activities and they speak confidently and positively about their experiences at college and what they enjoy.

Staff understand the ethos of the curriculum and know their students well. They know the support needs of each student and support them effectively to achieve the incremental steps needed towards their intended outcomes. For example, EHC managers can identify the skills and behaviours that individual students are developing, such as confidence and social communication, and how they are overcoming their barriers associated with their specific needs to start to enjoy learning.

Students are taught in small groups, or alone, by highly skilled tutors. Tutors

demonstrate skills, produce visual aids and support students to achieve tasks, which become more complex over time. As a result, students produce high-quality work that they are proud of. Staff support students to take proportionate and appropriate risks. For example, students use sharp tools to whittle wood. This helps students to understand about risk and the safety measures associated with the risk. In undertaking this activity, students also build their self-esteem and learn what perseverance and seeing things through to completion can enable them to achieve.

Students take relevant qualifications that support their long-term goals. As a result, students gain a sense of accomplishment, as for many this is the first qualification they have ever achieved.

Functional skills tutors accurately assess students starting points in English and mathematics. Students use English and mathematics in most sessions, improving their knowledge and skills. They learn how to use this knowledge in everyday activities, such as using money and calculating change or sending an email home to family. However, opportunities for students to develop their social communication skills with their peers are not fully utilised. Too often students only interact with staff and are not supported to foster friendships during breaks and social times.

Tutors carefully assess the levels of support that students need to be ready for the world of work, to be included in the community and to manage their own health and well-being. Tutors use this information well to arrange the correct support that students need in craft and agricultural sessions to help the students to become more independent. However, specific work skills such as timekeeping, completing application forms and knowing what to wear for particular jobs are not taught to all students. Therefore, the progress of a few students towards being ready for their next steps is too slow.

Leaders have not ensured that all students who are ready receive the opportunity to undertake external work experience placements as part of their programme of study. Leaders do not use the information about where students move on to after college to inform future curriculum development.

Those students who have accessed work placements are prepared well for work situations by therapy and support staff. For example, students learn how to handle food that they do not like and how to speak to customers. Employers have a good understanding of the students' needs and support them to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to complete their qualifications. Employers value the students as members of their team.

Leaders apply quality assurance processes consistently. They accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement throughout the college. Leaders and trust members regularly visit sessions, undertake formal observations and ensure that staff have opportunities to share good practice. For example, during behaviour meetings, all EHC managers discuss their students' needs and share strategies with colleagues for successfully supporting them.

Trustees have a good understanding of the college and are regularly on site. Leaders feel well supported and trustees provide appropriate challenge. The trustees have recently added a specific sub-group to look at the quality of education and care to ensure that appropriate scrutiny is applied to this important aspect of their work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff manage safeguarding well. The safeguarding team comprises both residential and education staff and they work well together. The safeguarding team ensures that cases are well managed and regularly reviewed. As a result, actions are put in place swiftly.

Students demonstrate a basic understanding of safeguarding, such as internet safety and how to identify safe adults. Students are very clear that they would go to trusted adults within the college if they had any concerns or were worried.

Staff undertake comprehensive risk assessments of the college grounds, activities, work experience placements and for each student. Students are shown how to complete tasks safely and understand the risk associated with the task that they are being asked to do.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all students have the opportunity to undertake work experience as part of their programme while at the college.
- Ensure that all students are well prepared for their next step in education, employment, training or in preparing for adulthood and independent living.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133036
Address	The Fisheries Stroud Horsley Gloucestershire GL6 0PL
Contact number	01453837500
Website	www.rmt.org
Principal	Steve Ferguson
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	18 May 2015
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the 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 students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Tracey Zimmerman, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Esther Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Gillian Paterson	Ofsted Inspector

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