

# Inspection of Linkage College

Inspection dates:

13 to 15 June 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
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Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
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Personal development	<b>Good</b>
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Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
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Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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## Information about this provider

Linkage College, part of Linkage Community Trust, is an independent specialist college with four campuses located in Grimsby, Lincoln, Spilsby and Beverley. At the time of the inspection, there were 208 learners with high needs, of whom 118 were enrolled on an independence pathway and 86 on an employability pathway, studying vocational subjects in customer service, hospitality, media, small animal management, sport, retail and performing arts. Five learners were on a project search pathway, and fewer than five were on a supported internship programme. Just over a half of learners are aged 16 to 18.

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

Learners engage well in their learning and work. They demonstrate positive behaviours in lessons and around the college and respond positively to instructions from staff. Learners know that staff will challenge inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying and name-calling. Staff have high expectations of learners, and most learners attend their lessons well and are punctual. Many learners describe the college as the favourite educational setting they have attended.

Leaders and managers have invested in good-quality vocational and therapeutic areas for learners. In the small animal care centre, for example, learners actively participate in sessions that enable them to gain practical experience in animal welfare while developing their understanding of the importance of health and safety. The installation of 'discovery suites' is helping learners to regulate their emotions well.

Teachers and support staff are experienced in their vocational sector and have industry-relevant experience. Those working on the hospitality vocational pathway have significant experience of working in the catering sector. Trainers who deliver small animal care provision have experience of working in animal hospitals and alongside veterinary surgeons. Those who work with learners with behavioural challenges have experience in using communication and de-escalation strategies.

Teachers successfully support learners to develop their confidence. They encourage learners to take part in social activities at breaktimes to develop relationships with their peers, spend time outside and develop friendships. As learners develop their confidence and make friends, they become more confident to engage in a wider range of learning experiences. For example, they made suggestions about a planned charity baking event to help their peers consider different dietary needs and healthy food options that could be used, such as low-sugar or gluten-free alternatives.

Learners feel safe at college. They know how to report any concerns they may have to staff, whom they trust. Staff teach learners how to stay safe online when using social media and how to stay safe in the community. Learners are able to identify places they would not visit at night on their own, such as local parks.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear vision: to support learners to build their confidence, develop their independence and become prepared for life beyond college. They have developed a curriculum that enables them to realise this vision while successfully encouraging learners to build friendships and lead active lives in their local community. The curriculum includes the opportunity for learners to gain qualifications. This supports those who aspire to gain employment or progress on to further study to do so successfully.

Staff provide good support to help learners integrate into the college and to interact effectively with their peers. They work with learners on a one-to-one basis to develop their communication skills. Staff make effective use of 'discovery suites' to develop learners' skills, confidence and re-engagement in education. Staff take time to ensure that learners socialise with their peers. As a result, learners make significant progress in developing their social skills.

Trustees take time to get to know and understand the college's provision. They have high levels of expertise in key areas such as teaching and learning, safeguarding and finance. Trustees meet frequently to discuss the provision and make visits to the different college campuses, where they visit lessons to review the effectiveness of the provision. Trustees receive detailed reports, enabling them to provide effective scrutiny and challenge to college leaders.

Leaders, managers and trustees have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the college. They have made positive progress in developing their curriculum offer and systems since the last inspection. They have grown their provision, opened a new campus, and now use digital technology very effectively, both in lessons and to help with the administration of the college.

Teachers develop learners' English and mathematics skills well. Learners practise these skills in the wider curriculum. For instance, they carry out activities such as measuring ingredients when cooking, taking part in national literacy competitions and using money when travelling in the community. Learners who work towards English and mathematics qualifications achieve well.

Teachers use a wide range of techniques to check learners' understanding, including practical demonstrations, individualised instruction cards and Makaton symbols. Learners can remember what they have learned and confidently demonstrate new skills they have acquired. For example, in performing arts, learners remember complex dance routines and then teach them to other learners in the class. In digital media, learners use detailed storyboards to map out their ideas and produce high-quality stop-motion animations.

Most teachers and support workers actively promote learners' participation in conversation by using prompts, questioning and sign language. This enables less confident learners to express their views in a supportive environment. However, in a few instances, staff do not give learners time to process the questions they have been asked, meaning that learners do not have sufficient opportunity to develop their own ideas and express their views.

Most teachers make good use of individual targets and use feedback well. Teachers set learners individualised targets that relate to session objectives and are clear about what the learner needs to do to improve. As a result of feedback, most learners adjust and improve their work, including correcting spelling and punctuation errors. They can confidently explain the skills they are acquiring. In a few instances, feedback is less effective, as it only describes what task a learner has completed,

meaning learners are unclear on the skills they are developing and what actions they need to do to improve.

Leaders and managers provide staff with useful training to help them develop their teaching skills. As the provision has grown, a large number of staff have been appointed who are very new to teaching and are working towards teaching qualifications. All teaching staff receive training in autism awareness, learning disabilities and Makaton.

Managers use information gathered from visits to lessons to identify gaps in staff's knowledge and to provide bespoke training sessions for them to improve their teaching. For example, managers identified that staff needed to improve how well the learning environment was set up to engage learners more effectively in lessons and how to use speech and language therapies to aid communication. Managers have provided staff with training on these topics and, as a result, staff's improved knowledge has enhanced learners' experience.

Staff provide learners with a range of enrichment activities. They encourage learners to take part in sports competitions, fundraising events, charity baking and discos. However, too few learners actively participate in the range of different activities offered.

Learners enjoy debating a range of topics and have the opportunity to communicate their ideas about improving their experience at the college. This includes discussion at the student union, where learners chair meetings and raise ideas about the environment, including providing better recycling bins at each campus.

Learners receive a range of information about what they might do after college. This includes information about what they can study and what services are available to them, such as adult outreach and local authority services. However, in a few cases, information about careers, advice and guidance, and external work experience opportunities comes too late in the programme. This means that learners and parents are unsure about the realistic career opportunities available to them, including how to access them.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff report safeguarding, medical and behavioural concerns well. They use an electronic system that allows managers at the different campuses to monitor and analyse information. Concerns are followed up swiftly by learning mentors, who escalate these to the very knowledgeable safeguarding team. Members of this team refer concerns to external agencies, when appropriate. Leaders and managers rightly recognise the need to have a designated safeguarding lead on each campus, and they are planning to introduce this.

Staff promote healthy relationships well. They teach learners about this topic in personal, social and health education sessions. Learners have an appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. They understand that they can say no if they feel uncomfortable about anything.

Leaders and managers recruit staff who are appropriate and safe to work with learners. They ensure that Disclosure and Barring Service checks and identification checks are completed before staff start work.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure that support staff allow learners sufficient time to answer questions and process information before intervening.
- Ensure that all learners, where appropriate, have an external work experience opportunity to help them prepare for and experience the world of work.
- Ensure that earlier in their education programme all learners receive careers advice and guidance that helps them to prepare for their next steps successfully.
- Ensure that all learners understand their targets and receive feedback about their progress towards their targets, helping them to understand how they can improve further and celebrate the things they do well.
- Ensure that a higher proportion of learners access and positively engage in all the extra-curricular activities offered.

## **Provider details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131913
<b>Address</b>	Weelsby Campus Weelsby Road Grimsby DN32 9RU
<b>Contact number</b>	01472372301
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.linkage.org.uk">http://www.linkage.org.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Valerie Waby
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6 February 2013
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of lifelong learning and employability, 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

Hayley Lomas, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Ian Frear	His Majesty's Inspector
Steve Kelly	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Simpkins	Ofsted Inspector

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