

Inspection of Swarthmore Education Centre

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November, and 21 and 22
November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Provision for learners with high needs

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Swarthmore Education Centre is an independent specialist college in Leeds. It provides further education and training for students with high needs between the ages of 16 and 25. Students have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including autism and communication needs. The college also provides programmes for students who have not attended education for a long time and who have been referred by the Medical Needs Teaching Service. Many of these students have significant mental health difficulties and severe anxiety. At the time of the inspection, there were 80 students enrolled on programmes from pre-entry level to level 3.

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

Students benefit from a calm learning environment, which staff have worked hard to create. Teachers work alongside support staff to provide effective strategies to enable students to manage their behaviours and overcome anxieties. For example, they use communication boards and therapy toys to help students to settle in the classroom and support them to express their feelings during class discussions. In English lessons, staff support students to take time-out breaks. These help them to overcome their anxieties and to re-engage in lessons.

Students are polite and respectful towards staff, peers and visitors. They form good relationships with staff and develop friendships with their classmates. Students answer questions in lessons; they take turns to answer and do not speak over each other. They also develop the confidence to participate in class activities and group discussions.

Most students have good attendance at college. Those whose attendance is lower often have specific needs, such as significant mental health difficulties and severe anxiety. Staff focus on very gradually improving the attendance of these students. They teach students in their home, provide one-to-one teaching at college and slowly introduce them to the classroom. Staff monitor and track students' attendance rigorously. They know the attendance of each student and the reasons for any non-attendance.

Students feel safe at college due to the support and supervision that staff provide and because the building is secure. Students learn how to cross the road safely and not to accept friend requests on social media from people they do not know. Leaders and managers rightly recognise the need to further develop the understanding of students about the risks of extremism and radicalisation. They have organised for an external provider to work with staff on how to make this information more accessible to students and to increase the confidence of staff to discuss these topics.

Too many teachers do not routinely tailor their teaching to meet the individual abilities of students. Students who are able to work more quickly are not challenged to do this. Too often, teachers ask students to complete the same tasks in lessons, and often these are not sufficiently demanding to build on what students already know. In a few instances, students are given tasks that are too demanding, and teachers do not provide sufficient time for students to process the information that they receive. In these cases, teachers use language that is too complex for students to understand.

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

Leaders, managers and trustees do not have a sufficiently accurate oversight of the quality of education provided to students. They rightly recognise the need to complete more comprehensive quality assurance activities and have planned a

schedule of observations of teaching for this academic year, which they have recently begun to implement. Leaders and managers also recognise the need to develop processes to review the non-accredited provision, which they have begun to implement.

Leaders, managers and trustees do not have sufficient oversight of the progress that students make. While informal discussions take place about individual students, this is not done in a coordinated way to ensure that all students make good progress.

Leaders and managers provide teachers with valuable training to help them understand the barriers to learning that students face. For example, teachers attend training in understanding autism, selective mutism and dyscalculia. However, leaders and managers too often do not link the outcomes of observations of teaching that have been completed to planned training for individual teachers. As a result, teachers do not attend sufficient training to develop further their skills in teaching students with high needs.

Too many staff do not complete initial assessments well enough to identify what students can and cannot do when they start at college, except for English and mathematics. As a result, staff do not know whether the targets that have been set for students in their individual learning plans are appropriate.

Too many teachers do not plan their lessons well enough to enable students to work towards their personal targets, such as being able to engage in conversations with others. In lessons where teachers do this well, students make good progress in developing such skills.

A few teachers do not make good enough use of assessment to check students' understanding. They ask questions to which students do not know the answer and continue to ask students until they begin to guess the answer. This wastes valuable time in lessons. In these instances, students do not make progress quickly enough.

Too many students do not benefit from high-quality and meaningful work experience linked to their long-term aspirations and interests. Too often, students do not attend work experience early enough in their programme. Where students attend work experience, staff do not measure closely enough the progress that they make in developing work-related skills. As a result, students do not develop their understanding of the world of work as well as they could.

Teachers provide a curriculum that enables students to develop the skills that they need to live a more independent life. For example, in cookery lessons, students prepare and cook simple and healthy meals that they can make at home. They identify the ingredients that they need and work out the cost of the meal.

Teachers plan lessons in the community to enable students to develop important skills such as learning to cross the road and to travel by train or bus. Students learn to interact with people they do not know and gain confidence in visiting unfamiliar

places, such as the art gallery in Bradford. They benefit from travel training and learn to travel independently from home to college and on other specific routes.

Most teachers integrate English and mathematics into the curriculum effectively, which enables students to develop or maintain their skills in these subjects. For example, students are supported to calculate the cost of their meal and drink and the change required when ordering food at the farm café, where they complete group work experience. A few students, however, make slow progress towards achieving their English and mathematics qualifications. These students have been at the college for a long time and are not yet studying at the level identified in their individual learning plans.

Staff engage well with parents and carers and keep them updated about the progress of their son, daughter, or ward. In addition to attending parents' and carers' evenings, parents and carers receive regular calls and emails from staff. Parents and carers comment positively on the progress that their son, daughter, or ward has made, such as in being able to hold a conversation with them at home.

Leaders and managers coordinate specialist support effectively. The special educational needs coordinator and the teacher with responsibility for support liaise with therapeutic services, where appropriate, and ensure that information is shared with staff. For example, speech and language therapists provide strategies to help staff to support students with communication difficulties, and the learning disability team provides guidance on behaviour strategies for students. Students also benefit from access to assistive technology, support from teaching assistants, one-to-one teaching and home teaching.

Staff work closely with a range of external partners to provide careers information, including independent careers advice. For example, they work with Scope Family Services and the National Careers Service, which helps students to prepare for interviews. However, a few students do not receive information and advice about their next steps early enough in their programme.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Identify accurate starting points for students and use this information to ensure that students have appropriate targets agreed in their individual learning plans.
- Provide high-quality work experience linked to students' long-term aspirations and interests as soon as students are ready.
- Provide staff with training that supports them to develop the teaching skills they need to teach students with high needs.

- Ensure that leaders, managers and trustees have effective oversight of the quality of the provision and the progress of students.
- Ensure that all students make expected progress towards achieving their English and mathematics qualifications.
- Ensure that teachers check the understanding of students, as well as the progress that they make, effectively.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54714
Address	2-7 Woodhouse Square Leeds LS3 1AD
Contact number	0113 243 2210
Website	Swarthmore.org.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Chris Baillie
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	22 January 2014
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the study programme 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

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