

Inspection of Freeman College

Inspection dates:

6 to 8 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Freeman College is an independent specialist college based in the city centre of Sheffield, with an additional site in a rural location. It provides residential and day education for young people with complex needs. Students study on programmes that use practical activities and therapies, and include subjects such as English and mathematics, metal and wood crafts, horticulture, and cooking. Leaders provide programmes to help young people to overcome barriers to learning, develop practical skills and return to their communities with greater independence. At the time of the inspection, there were 48 students with high needs, most of whom were aged 19 or over.

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

Leaders have effectively implemented the use of Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE) as the key model for their curriculum delivery. They use a range of craft-based tasks as a vehicle to support students to overcome their barriers to education and prepare them for adulthood. Practical workshops enable students to develop their skills for independence, communication, focus and tolerance. These workshops include jewellery making, spoon forging, baking, horticulture, animal management and blacksmithing.

Students benefit from bespoke and personalised support which best meets their needs as an individual. Support for students is well managed and effectively coordinated. Students have access to a range of services to support them in their learning and to develop their independent skills. These include speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and a counsellor, all of whom are directly employed by the college and are based on site for an allocated time each week.

Students benefit from a newly designed personal and social development curriculum. Teachers and support workers promote the personal development of students under three key themes, which are health and well-being, citizenship and community, and careers and employability. They effectively adapt the programme based on the individual needs of their students and make it age-appropriate and contextually relevant. Teachers and support workers provide effective group sessions and meet with students on a one-to-one basis.

Students recognise the progress that they make during their time at the college. They develop a sense of pride in the high-quality crafts that they produce and identify the crucial skills that they develop. Students have the opportunity to enter their finished work into competitions and display it in local galleries. They value these opportunities, are proud of their work and gain a sense of achievement.

Students are supported well to develop their confidence and independence during their time at the college. They demonstrate determination and resilience, and most confidently use public transport to travel to the provider. As a result of the skills that they have acquired through PSTE, students develop their self-esteem, are more motivated and feel confident to work towards qualifications such as GCSE English.

Staff provide useful careers and transition information to help students make decisions and plan their next steps. They organise for external representatives to visit the college to speak to students about various jobs and careers. Newly implemented careers fairs take place throughout the year, with employers, agencies and providers such as Sheffield College, Project Choice, Autism Plus and Kit Locker attending. An external careers guidance organisation provides impartial careers advice to students.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear vision and purpose for their provision. They are ambitious in their intent to provide education that leads students, many of whom have experienced severe trauma in their childhood or a previously difficult educational experience, into employment or independent living. They provide a multifunctional environment across two sites that exposes students to both a city-centre location and a rural location.

Teachers carefully plan and deliver the curriculum in a logical order. They skilfully design tasks for students which build in complexity. For example, in spoon forging, students initially learn about health and safety in the workshop and working on the stakes, hammering the metal so that it spreads to the bowl end of the spoon. They then move on to using fire to complete annealing, which heats up metal, resets the molecular structure and softens the metal. Once completed, they smooth and refine the metal. Through this carefully structured curriculum, learners quickly and successfully develop important skills and attributes such as communication, teamwork, patience and determination.

Teachers successfully use a range of strategies to help students learn more and remember more. This often includes repeating information and breaking information down into small chunks. Teachers provide a positive learning environment and are calm, caring, and nurturing towards their students. They use the information that they have about a student, including initial assessments and education, health and care plan (EHCP) outcomes, to plan lessons and ensure that students make progress from their starting points.

Teachers use assessment frequently and effectively to test recall and knowledge of subjects. They use a range of questioning techniques well to confirm students' understanding and encourage deeper thinking. Teachers use a lot of praise and reassurance to support students and develop their communication skills and, as a result, most students are confident to talk about their work.

Teachers accurately identify students' starting points in English and mathematics, and provide students with individualised lessons to build their knowledge and confidence. They use the information that they have about their students to focus on areas of difficulty and support their students to understand new concepts. Teachers support students well to prepare for examinations in these subjects. Students working towards a GCSE English qualification benefit from effective one-to-one tuition and make good progress.

Students benefit from well-planned and meaningful work experience placements which reflect their long-term aspirations and personal interests. Through these placements, they develop key employability skills such as meeting deadlines, being on time and following instructions, as well as improving their communication skills. Students improve their confidence and self-esteem and develop their resilience, enabling them to move onto more complex and challenging placements, often involving travel.

Leaders and managers employ teachers and support workers who are well qualified and experienced. Teachers new to teaching are supported well to gain relevant qualifications and develop their skills. New teachers have access to a mentor who supports them with their teaching and are given sufficient time to complete their studies, where necessary. Teachers who have professional experience and hold teaching qualifications have access to ongoing training and development that includes legislation updates and covers topics such as safeguarding, behaviour management and the craft of teaching.

Staff provide students with a high level of care and support, which enables students to make strong progress towards their EHCP outcomes. Staff know their students extremely well and can talk eloquently about their journey and the hurdles that they have overcome. Both residential and education staff set sensible targets, which are reviewed on a termly basis. However, staff do not use this information well enough to monitor and record the progress of students.

Leaders rightly recognise that, in a few cases, attendance is lower than their target. They are fully aware of the reasons for this, which is often linked to students' poor mental health. In most cases, students' current attendance at the college is higher than it was at their previous learning establishment. Staff implement a range of effective strategies to support students to improve their attendance.

Governance is effective, with multiple layers of accountability to ensure effective support, challenge and scrutiny, both at an operational and strategic level. The board of trustees and executive team include members who have high levels of expertise and who ensure that the quality of education and safeguarding are prioritised. Board members carefully scrutinise the reports and data that they receive to provide effective support and professional challenge to leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Continue to focus on improving attendance.
- Fully implement the recently introduced personal development curriculum.
- Ensure that students' progress is carefully recorded so that all staff are aware of what each student needs to do next.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132002
Address	Sterling Works 88 Arundel Street Sheffield S1 2NG
Contact number	0114 2525940
Website	https://rmt.org/freeman
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Angie Iversen
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	17–19 September 2019
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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Sarah Seaman, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Hayley Lomas	His Majesty's Inspector
Jacque Brown	His Majesty's Inspector

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