

Inspection of Cambian Dilston College

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 June 2025

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	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Cambian Dilston College is an independent specialist college in Northumberland that provides day and residential placements of up to 52 weeks a year for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including autism spectrum disorder and other high needs. The college is part of the Cambian Group, which specialises in providing education for children and young people with SEND nationally. Many students at the college have complex and challenging needs and behaviours. Students attend lessons in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, animal care, art, music, catering, bakery and horticulture. At the time of the inspection, there were 17 students, all of whom were aged 16 to 25.

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

Students benefit from a supportive and respectful culture that enables them to thrive and progress to the next stage of their lives. Staff foster a sense of belonging, inclusivity and respect. Students enjoy their time at the college and value the support that staff provide to help them overcome their barriers to learning. Students develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem during their time at the college.

Students develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to enrich their lives. Many students progress to positive destinations in line with the targets in their education, health and care (EHC) plan and their long-term goals. Students are ambitious to move into paid employment, voluntary work and supported accommodation, and they access community activities and meaningful social care activities.

Students benefit from work placements that are purposeful and aligned to their long-term aspirations. Teachers carefully select work placements that incrementally build the social and communication skills that students need to be effective in the workplace. For example, students who are ambitious to work in a kitchen or restaurant begin by working in the onsite café, learning the skills and attributes needed to be successful in the trade. They then move to an external placement in the catering industry where they develop their skills further and work with unfamiliar adults in new surroundings.

Leaders and staff are ambitious for their students. Leaders have taken appropriate action to improve the aspects of the provision that they deem not to meet their high expectations. Teachers skilfully plan their curriculum to develop students' understanding of a wide range of topics, such as the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and the importance of self-care. Teachers and teaching assistants provide age-appropriate activities that supports students in the next stage of their lives.

Students feel safe in college and in the community due to the high number of staff who provide effective support. They know who to report concerns to and are confident that staff will deal with these appropriately. Teachers successfully help students to understand how to keep themselves safe when completing activities in the community. Students develop a good understanding of the potential risks of speaking to strangers.

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

Leaders have a clear intent for their provision. They provide education and training for students with SEND, many of whom have very few other options for their education and where previous education placements have broken down. Staff are committed to ensuring that their students achieve the qualifications or independent living skills that they need to access their next steps, while developing the mindset and behaviours to make an effective transition.

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have taken effective and decisive action to improve the quality of education. They carefully considered the actions needed and rapidly implemented effective strategies that are sustainable, remaining mindful that they retain the ethos and purpose of a college that meets the needs of students aged 16 and above. This includes the introduction of new staff roles, investment in staff training and resources and closer monitoring and the use of information to understand areas of underperformance.

Leaders and staff work well with a range of relevant stakeholders to ensure that their provision is accessible and responsive. Leaders have developed their facilities to provide flexible spaces that can be used for a variety of functions such as a sensory space, a learning environment or a workshop. They quickly respond to meet the requirements of their current and incoming students. Key stakeholders, including local authorities, social workers, parents and carers, praise the college for their approach in meeting the individual needs of students with SEND.

Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods well to help students learn and remember information and skills. For example, they demonstrate tasks in practical sessions, use role play to help students prepare for job interviews and use strategies that gradually reduce the level of support for students and encourage them to become more independent. Teachers reinforce information and ask students to repeat tasks, which helps students to develop the essential and transferable skills they will need to be successful.

Most teachers use a wide range of effective assessment methods to check students' understanding. For example, they observe students completing tasks such as mowing the lawn, feeding the animals and weighing baking ingredients. Most teachers ask appropriate questions to check what students know and can do. However, in a very few instances, teachers do not allow students sufficient time to process the question asked before intervening.

Most teachers and teaching assistants work well with students to allow them to complete tasks independently or with as little support as possible. This helps students to develop greater independence in their everyday lives. However, in a few instances, staff intervene too early to help students carry out tasks when students are capable of completing the tasks themselves.

Staff provide a broad range of opportunities for students to explore their interests and talents. Students participate in enrichment activities throughout their time at the college, such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards, entrepreneurship projects, first aid and football. During entrepreneurship sessions, students create items to sell at local craft fairs, including wooden clocks, mugs and t-shirts. Students are proud of their accomplishments and take pride in selling their products.

Staff provide helpful information to students, and their parents/carers, to help them plan their next steps. They discuss potential progression opportunities in sessions and complete profiles for students which identify their long-term aspirations and steps to take to get there. The transition officer works expertly alongside external

careers representatives and relevant agencies who meet with students and their parents/carers to discuss and plan transition.

Leaders understand their responsibilities in relation to each student's EHC plan. They ensure that students have access to high-quality learning by, for example, providing specialist support from staff or additional resources. This enables students to make steady progress towards the identified outcomes on their EHC plan.

Governors are highly committed to their roles. They have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the college. Governors work very closely with senior leaders to ensure that there is appropriate oversight and challenge. They carefully explore proposals presented by the senior team, such as changes in curriculum pathways and development of resources and facilities. They embody the ethos of high aspirations at the college, which focuses on meeting the needs of students.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Use effective assessment consistently to check students' understanding.
- Ensure that teaching staff consistently provide an appropriate level of support for students and do not oversupport them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131868
Address	Dilston Hall Corbridge Northumberland NE45 5RJ
Contact number	01434 632692
Website	https://www.cambiagroup.com/specialist-education/our-colleges/cambian-dilston-college/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Marie Flatman
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 January 2023
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

Jacque Brown

His Majesty's Inspector

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