



Derwen College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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133173

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Derwen College
Type of college:	Independent, specialist, residential
Principal:	David Kendall
Address of college:	Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 3JA
Telephone number:	01691 661234
Fax number:	01691 670714
Chair of governors:	Irene Gull
Unique reference number:	133173
Name of lead inspector:	Joyce Deere, ALI
Dates of inspection:	9 - 12 May 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Derwen College is a specialist independent residential college, situated in the village of Gobowen, two miles from Oswestry. The college currently provides for 241 learners from across the country. Of these 39 are from Wales and funded by Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) and 202 are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college community consists of learners with a wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties. Of these, 10% are of minority ethnic heritage and 53% are male. The great majority, 181, are aged over 19 years.
2. The college has a curriculum framework, based on four strands, which link closely to the themes outlined in Every Child Matters and Youth Matters, and through which literacy and numeracy are delivered. For the purposes of self-assessment the curriculum is divided into two broad areas: vocational and pre-vocational studies and the extended curriculum, which includes all aspects of independent living and social skills. The emphasis in the vocational and pre-vocational curriculum is on practical activities in realistic settings and learners are involved in the running of the college restaurant and garden centre, both open to the public.
3. The college's mission is 'to promote, through inclusive learning, the vocational, educational, personal and social development of young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities'.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management
 - specialist provision in: social and life skills and vocational studies.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Curriculum areas

Social and life skills	Good: grade 2
Vocational studies	Good: grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

5. The achievement levels and the quality of learners' work are outstanding. Standards have been maintained over time and are rising. Learners make very good progress in a range of national awards and especially in communication and personal skills. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds do even better. The setting of clear and challenging targets has significantly improved since the last inspection. The college makes very effective use of both achievement and destination data. The RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) initiative is well established. Recording learning across the vocational departments is inconsistent.
6. Teaching and learning are good. The use of practical activities in realistic settings is stimulating, and engages learners. The resources are of high quality. Initial and baseline assessment are comprehensive, with significant specialist contribution. Good planning, linked to the individual learning plans, specialist therapeutic interventions and skilful use of questioning are common features of the good teaching and learning. Occasionally, staff do not demonstrate sufficient respect for learners' adult status.
7. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The college is strongly committed to equality and diversity and staff are trained in its promotion. The number of learners of minority ethnic heritage is higher than is usually found in residential provision, and achievement data shows that they perform well. The exceptionally wide range of practically-based courses and the flexible residential arrangements take full account of the very diverse needs of learners. Comprehensive procedures are in place to promote the safety, wellbeing and protection of individual learners. College buildings are all accessible to wheelchair users, and the college makes reasonable adjustments to ensure accessibility. The college is fully compliant with equalities legislation.
8. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. The specialist multi-disciplinary teams make a significant contribution to learners' ability to communicate more effectively and to access the curriculum. Specialist multi-disciplinary support is outstanding. The induction programme is good and learners are very well prepared for transition, although the careers resources are underdeveloped. Behaviour management strategies are highly effective.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college has successfully remedied previous weaknesses. Students thrive in a safe, integrated adult working community and achieve very well. Very good teamwork and open communications enables staff to work effectively in support of learners. Professional development underpins the strong drive for continuous improvement in every aspect of college life. The development plan is rigorous.

Quality assurance is outstanding. Equality and diversity are promoted, and data is monitored effectively. Financial management and value for money are outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

10. The college shows an outstanding capacity to improve further. Quality assurance is comprehensive and the staff development programme is excellent. The self-assessment process is good and the report is largely accurate, although the college undervalues some of its strengths and omits some weaknesses. A major building project has just been completed successfully. The curriculum is modified in response to learners' needs and prospects. Key middle and senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. The college has made good progress in addressing the key issues from the last inspection. Learners' achievements and progression have improved. The vocational curriculum area is considerably stronger. Planning of the timetable, and arrangements to meet individual learner needs are more systematic. There is an excellent new resource centre. Management roles and authorities have been reviewed and there is now a far greater degree of shared responsibility.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- outstanding achievements
- outstanding practical contexts for learning
- highly stimulating curriculum
- outstanding multi-disciplinary specialist support for learners
- excellent staff development and training programme
- good use of data to bring about improvements
- strong and effective leadership.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the documentation for individual risk assessments
- accommodation for retail and performing arts.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

12. The achievement levels and the quality of learners' work are outstanding. Standards have been maintained over time and they are rising. Success rates are very high in most curriculum areas. Learners make very good progress in a range of national awards and especially in communication and personal skills. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds do even better. The setting of clear and challenging targets has significantly improved since the last inspection.
13. Learners gain a wide range of appropriate qualifications from pre-entry level to level 2. Many also gain additional awards. One learner, who on entry to the college lacked confidence and was easily distracted, has recently completed an NVQ level 1 in Food and Drink Service. This learner is now able to confidently serve customers in the college's on-site restaurant and at a local fast food outlet. Another learner, with very limited verbal communication, has successfully used good skills in Makaton sign language to participate in a communication group and gain a national award.
14. Very good use is made of the outcomes of achievement and destination data to inform curriculum planning and development. Good opportunities are created for learners to progress between levels of courses. The RARPA staged framework is well applied and effectively used so that the college can have confidence in the processes and outcomes for softer skills' achievement. However, there is a lack of consistency in recording learning across the vocational departments and this is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.
15. Every opportunity is taken to encourage learners and to celebrate their successes. Within the new resource centre students regularly update the electronic notice board with a range of students' achievement prominently displayed. Achievements are also well recognised and celebrated through tutorials, displays of learners' work and termly achievement celebration events. Learners enjoy their work and are very proud of their achievements. Learners with challenging behaviours make very significant gains in managing and controlling their conduct and learn how to behave appropriately in a variety of settings and activities. The college is very successful in raising the self-esteem and confidence of learners. Those with more complex communication difficulties learn to make choices through the successful use of pictures, symbols and Makaton signing.
16. The practical nature of much of the curriculum increases learners' motivation, enjoyment and understanding of a healthy and safe lifestyle. Learners are closely involved with their immediate and local community and are helped to make a positive contribution. Retention is good. Attendance has improved as expected in residential provision and is now 98%. Learners are punctual. These issues are well monitored and swift action is taken when needed.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

17. Teaching and learning are good. The practical nature of the contexts for learning, the resources and the specialist interventions are key features in motivating learners and encouraging and enabling learning. Learners can immediately recognise the tangible outcomes they have achieved in the activities they undertake. The best lesson planning is closely linked to individual learning plans, and learners receive constant feedback on their progress. Skilful use of questioning encourages learners to participate. In less effective lessons, learners do not always have sufficient support to gain the most from the activities they undertake. Occasionally, teachers do not give sufficient recognition to learners' adult status, by using language or activities that are not appropriate. Initial and baseline assessment are comprehensive and recording of learning has improved.
18. The extent to which the programmes meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college accurately identifies in the self-assessment report that the very wide range of vocational options, which are practically-based in realistic settings are particularly appropriate for learners with learning difficulties. The extended curriculum, which includes personal development and independent living skills, prepares learners very well for the next stage of their lives, as do the transition lessons included in the timetable in the final year. Where appropriate, learners can attend classes in local further education (FE) colleges. Full advantage is taken of the residential aspects of the provision, and learners benefit from the leisure opportunities available at weekends and evenings, as well as a range of trips to places such as theme parks and football matches. Learners engage well with the local community, both by going out into the local towns, or by interaction with members of the public who come into the college. This includes those who visit the college to buy goods from the garden centre, or to dine in the public restaurant on the site. Provision for literacy and numeracy is satisfactorily embedded into the curriculum. The amount of time that individual learners spend on external work experience is insufficient.
19. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding. The college accurately judges its range and quality of specialist therapies, medical provision and learner support as being very good. The specialist multi-disciplinary teams make an outstanding contribution to learners' ability to communicate more effectively, to develop emotional and physical good health and wellbeing, and to access the curriculum. The induction programme is good and a comprehensive range of information, available in various formats, effectively prepares learners for their time at college. Counsellors and personal tutors rigorously promote learners' self-advocacy and decision-making skills. Personal tutors regularly monitor the effectiveness of individual learning programmes. There is limited availability of learner support for some practical activities. Care plans are satisfactory. Learners are very well supported by highly effective behaviour management strategies. Transition reviews are rigorous. Good routes for learner progression to targeted destinations are clearly identified. The

careers library and a range of suitable resources are yet to be fully developed. Liaison with families, social services, Connexions advisers and Careers Wales is good and helps to keep transition planning prioritised.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

20. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers have taken the college forward with clear vision and strategic purpose. They continue to nurture the integrated adult working environment that provides students with their core ethos. Within this setting students thrive and make outstanding progress. All the key weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been in large part remedied. Roles and duties have been reviewed and clarified, and the capabilities of middle managers to contribute to the college's improvement have been effectively released by astute delegation of powers and responsibilities. Communications throughout the college are transparent, and are particularly effective between different departments and disciplines.
21. Quality assurance processes are comprehensive and rigorous. The self-assessment report is fully informed by all departments and services, and the college development plan is particularly well-focused and helpful. A systematic programme of observing and evaluating teachers has improved learning and disseminates good teaching practice. Teachers identified as needing it are offered substantial support and training.
22. Some 90% of teachers are already qualified to teach, and the rest are undergoing training. In some lessons, more learning support staff are needed for specific activities. Students contribute to the decision-making process through the student council and regular questionnaires.
23. Staff are given excellent opportunities for personal and professional development, and the take-up is high. The programme is well coordinated to meet the college's development priorities. The college highly values the extension of its staff's understanding and skills in areas such as literacy and numeracy and race equality, and almost all staff, including care and ancillary workers, are undertaking training in basic skills in order to promote their integrated reinforcement.
24. The college now has a very successful track record of managing capital development projects. New accommodation has been made available for students with higher personal support needs and a new learning resource centre has been built. Accommodation is generally very good and some is outstanding; current premises for retail and performing arts are inadequate. The college has well-researched plans to improve these areas.
25. The college's commitment to equality and diversity is outstanding. Positive images of race, gender, and disability are imaginatively promoted. Cultural diversity is specifically explored and celebrated in catering and hospitality and in

creative arts. The college has ensured that its ratio of students from minority ethnic heritage is higher than in the local community, which both enriches the diversity of the college's own community and promotes better levels of awareness in the locality and to visitors. The performance of these students is analysed and monitored, although specific actions have yet to be identified. The college fully meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

26. The college policies comply with safeguarding requirements. Managers strike a fine balance between safeguarding vulnerable students and exposing them to controlled levels of risk as part of their preparation for more independent living. However, individual learner risk assessments are poorly documented.
27. The college has very good links with local schools, colleges, employers and partner agencies. Governors are highly committed and well informed. They diligently monitor the college's performance and support it wholeheartedly. Financial management is exemplary. Support needs identified on the learner schedules are well-monitored. The college represents outstanding value for money.

Curriculum area inspections

Social and life skills

Good: grade 2

Context

28. The college provides a social and life skills curriculum which develops independent living, personal development, assessment and basic skills. All learners attend these programmes.

STRENGTHS

- outstanding communication and personal development
- good lesson planning
- very good range of programmes
- outstanding multi-disciplinary support
- good collaboration between teams.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- limited availability of learning support for some activities
- inadequate teaching accommodation in performing arts
- insufficiently documented risk assessments.

Achievements and standards

29. Achievements are good. Learners make outstanding progress in the development of communication skills and personal development. They use the local community to practise the life skills taught in college. A significant number of learners meet their goal of progressing to supported or independent living. Learners enjoy their lessons. They are engaged effectively and achieve gains in confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of provision

30. Inspectors found the college's assessment of teaching and learning to be broadly accurate. Much is good, although areas for improvement remain. Lessons are well planned and link directly to individual learning plans. A good range of teaching and assessment techniques are used. For example, in one lesson learners were inspirational in the performance of their own script. Learners receive regular encouragement and feedback about their work in lessons. Where sufficient learning support staff are used in classes, excellent team work is apparent. In less successful classes teachers use over complex language, or adopt a tone or activity not always appropriate to adults. Teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory, although the extent to which it is fully embedded is variable.

31. The needs and interests of learners are very successfully met. Personal tutors know their learners well, and are very good at responding to the need for any programme changes. Early identification of future destinations enables staff and learners to prepare well for transition. Learners are enabled to practise independence skills and personal development in relevant situations, and they make a positive contribution to the local community both within and outside college.
32. Outstanding specialist multi-disciplinary support enables learners to take an active part in a wide range of activities, and staff work very effectively with learners in lessons. There is excellent support for learners with behaviour that challenges. Learners are enabled to deal with difficult issues, develop self-control, work with others, and remain on task. Learners show sensitivity and respect for others. They learn to take more responsibility for themselves, and develop a very good approach to adulthood. There is limited availability of learning support staff for some activities, particularly in the independent living skills curriculum. Links between the care plan and the independent living skills are not always clear.

Leadership and management

33. Leadership and management are good. Staff are well supported. The collaboration between teams is good. Risk assessments for individual learners are not clearly documented. Equality of opportunity is positively promoted through personal development in the extended curriculum. Positive images of diversity are displayed around the college, and a culture of respect is inbuilt. Staff are well qualified and experienced and there is good access to specialist professional training. Much of the accommodation is very good, but accommodation for performing arts is inadequate. Quality assurance arrangements are thorough. The self-assessment report was largely accurate in its identification of strengths, but it did not identify two of the key weaknesses.

Vocational studies

Good: grade 2

Context

34. All learners take vocational studies as part of their programme. The college provides courses in catering, creative arts, horticulture, hospitality and housekeeping, office and business skills, practical skills and retail. Accreditation is offered from pre-entry to level 2. Work-based training is available on site.

STRENGTHS

- very good achievement of vocational qualifications on most courses
- very good progression
- exceptionally wide range of curriculum opportunities
- outstanding resources for learning
- very good staff training and qualifications.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient external work experience
- insufficiently detailed recording of risk assessments
- inadequate accommodation for retail.

Achievement and standards

35. Achievement of full and part qualifications in catering, creative arts, hospitality and housekeeping is very good. Students make good progress within lessons and produce work of high quality. Progression on leaving college is very good. Half of all students move into some form of voluntary, supported or open employment. Almost half study for additional qualifications at their local college of further education. Attendance and punctuality are good. Students enjoy their time at Derwen greatly, and think highly of the college.

Quality of provision

36. Teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection and are mostly good. Practical activities interest and involve learners, and they develop their skills well. Reading, writing and calculation are satisfactorily integrated into many lessons, although some opportunities for development are still missed. The use of computers in teaching and learning has increased substantially. Digital cameras are often used effectively to capture learners' achievements. Baseline assessment is detailed and comprehensive. Recording of learners' progress during lessons is regularly undertaken, but it is not consistent across departments. Although target setting generally has improved, on some occasions targets for individual students are not easy to understand or discussed effectively at the start of lessons.

37. The range of curriculum opportunities is exceptionally wide. Real working situations in catering, the garden centre and the public restaurant provide students with internal work experience in the college. On site work-based training is extensive and includes joinery, car valeting, building maintenance, planting and arboriculture. External work experience placements rarely consist of more than half a day a week for a term, and are not always sufficiently linked to learners' main programmes.
38. Support for students from specialist staff is good, but students with physical needs do not always have sufficient individual support with practical tasks. Tutorial arrangements and termly reviews are effective.

Leadership and management

39. Leadership and management are good. The college has outstanding resources for much of its provision. A new resource centre provides excellent facilities for learners to practise their ICT skills. However, the college recognises in the self-assessment report that the retail area is inadequate. Creative arts accommodation is flexible but sometimes noisy, which distracts learners. Teaching staff are well qualified and have very good access to continuous professional development. Recording of risk assessments is insufficiently detailed. The individual assessments, including those for work experience placements, do not give a clear enough picture of specific hazards and how to minimise risks. Staff have had good training on awareness of equality and diversity and, in catering and performing arts, specific projects have been developed to promote understanding of diversity. Quality assurance processes are good. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the strengths of the provision but does not identify all of the key weaknesses.