



Arden College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
July 2006

Provider reference
131935

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Arden College
Type of college:	Independent specialist residential
Principal:	Christopher Mayho
Address of college:	40 Derby Road Southport PR9 0TZ
Telephone number:	01704 534433
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Unique reference number:	131935
Name of lead inspector:	Kathleen Smith, HMI
Dates of inspection:	22-25 May 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Arden College, based in Southport, is an independent, residential specialist college that provides further education for learners aged 16-25 years of age who have learning difficulties and/or social, behavioural or emotional difficulties including: Down's syndrome; autistic spectrum disorder; epilepsy; speech and communication difficulties; severe learning difficulties; and a range of conditions such as Fragile X, Tourettes and Williams syndrome. The college is owned by Craegmoor Healthcare Company Limited, under the auspices of Speciality Care (Rest Homes) Ltd. The main teaching accommodation is on one site, and the college makes substantial use of the residential homes for teaching. Learners are all accommodated within two miles of the college. Many travel independently. There are 47 residential and 29 day learners; 51 are male, 25 female. Of these, 6 learners are from ethnic minority backgrounds.
2. The primary aim of the college is 'to provide our learners with an inclusive quality educational and social care provision that enables them to achieve their full potential and supports their social, behavioural and emotional development.'
3. The college has adopted the Essential Skills Award across the college. It also offers national vocational qualification (NVQ) accreditation in catering, horticulture and hairdressing. Programmes are also offered in social and life skills, sport and recreation, history, drama and independent living. The Skills for Life curriculum area includes information and communication technology (ICT), literacy, numeracy and communication skills, which are embedded into most programmes. At least half of the learners have work experience placements within real working environments, which include Café Arden, owned and run by the college. Emphasis is placed on the use of community facilities and amenities in the learners' personal and social skills development.

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 skills.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: grade 3
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: grade 3

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 skills	Good: grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

5. Achievements are good. Learners develop good work related skills and achieve a variety of awards including vocational qualifications. Learners make good progress in the development of communication skills and make significant gains in their self-esteem and confidence. Retention rates are good and many learners are successful in securing appropriate further education, supported employment and more independent living arrangements on leaving the college. Attendance and punctuality rates are good but not sufficiently captured or analysed to bring about improvements. Progress over time is not sufficiently recognised or recorded in relation to independent living skills. Learners demonstrate good awareness of health and safety.
6. Most lessons are good or better. Lesson planning is successfully matched to individual learner needs. Initial assessment provides useful information on which to base learners' individual learning plans (ILP) which contain relevant and appropriate short term targets for them to achieve. Longer term targets do not always provide an accurate measure to enable long term progress to be accurately assessed.
7. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. The curriculum provides a good range of activities for learners but further improvements are required to broaden the vocational options available through the development of links with local general further education (FE) providers. Learners benefit from the good range of work experience opportunities provided and extensive use of the community to promote work related and social and life skills. The curriculum has improved to ensure the needs of learners with communication difficulties are met.
8. Support and guidance for learners are good. Specialist multi-disciplinary teams make a significant contribution to assessment and promote learners' ability to communicate more effectively, to develop emotional and physical good health and wellbeing, and to access the curriculum. Behaviour management approaches are mostly effective and sensitive to the needs of learners. There is inconsistent implementation of the guidance relating to behaviour management and insufficient specialist support for learners with dyspraxia and dyslexia. A wide range of learner information is provided in a variety of formats. The induction programme is thorough and learners are prepared well for transition.
9. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Senior managers set a clear vision based on a thorough knowledge of learners' needs. Although operational management is good there is inadequate strategic oversight of the educational provision by the parent company. Self-assessment lacks rigour; there is no overall, regularly monitored, coherent plan which brings together

all the actions necessary to effectively promote a culture of continuous improvement. However, quality assurance processes are comprehensive and are having a positive impact on learners' achievements. The college employs a rigorous approach to safeguarding and the health and safety of learners. Compliance with equalities legislation is inadequate. Teaching accommodation is insufficient. The college provides satisfactory value for money in meeting the individual needs of learners. However, the parent company has not put into place financial procedures to support planning for future developments and improvements to provision.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: grade 3

10. The college has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. The quality assurance cycle is detailed and comprehensive and managers are improving it in the light of experience. The college is aware of many of its areas for development, but its self-assessment report lacks rigour, and is insufficiently evaluative. Operational management is good and the college has increased the role of middle managers. Staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to the learners. Resources are satisfactory overall but teaching accommodation is limited. Financial procedures and the monitoring of quality of the college's educational provision by the parent company are inadequate.

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

11. The college has made good progress to address the key areas for improvement stated in the last inspection. The provision for literacy and numeracy is now satisfactory. The overall setting and use of targets has been improved as has the development of the curriculum framework and procedures to monitor and assess learners' progress. A range of multi-disciplinary specialists make valuable contributions to learner programmes. Quality assurance procedures have improved in relation to lesson observations and a more robust baseline assessment process is in place. The college has made insufficient progress in strategic planning and in meeting its contractual obligations with regard to equality and diversity issues. The self-assessment report lacks rigour and does not adequately identify all areas for improvement which were identified by inspectors. Preparation for transition is now good.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good achievements of work related skills
- very effective development of communication skills
- good attention to health and safety
- activities successfully matched to individual learners' needs
- good use of realistic and appropriate learning environments
- extensive work experience opportunities

- very good specialist support.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the recording of independent living skills development
- inadequate assessment for specific learning difficulties
- limited vocational opportunities
- inconsistent use of support staff
- strategic oversight and management of parent company
- compliance with equalities legislation
- insufficient rigour in self-assessment and planning for improvements.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

12. The college's self-assessment report accurately identifies learners' achievements as a key strength. There are no differences between the achievements of different groups of learners. Learners demonstrate high standards of work in vocational areas. They gain a variety of entry level and level 1 qualifications and make significant improvements in relation to curriculum and Skills for Life targets. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills improve through their successful integration into subject areas.
13. Work related skills are successfully developed in realistic working environments and vocational programmes. Learners demonstrate a good awareness of health and safety issues. They make very good gains in their social skills, self-esteem and confidence through work experience and in the regular use of community facilities and extended curriculum opportunities. Communication needs of learners are clearly identified and learners' social communication skills improve significantly. Learners demonstrate high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment and succeed through their enthusiasm and application to tasks. However, learners' progress in terms of independent living skills are not sufficiently recognised or recorded to give an accurate picture of how these have developed over time.
14. Destination outcomes for many learners are good. Many progress onto further education and more independent living arrangements. A few are able to gain supported employment. Retention rates have improved since the last inspection and are in line with other independent specialist colleges. Attendance and punctuality are good; however, overall data are not collated or analysed to inform future improvements.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

15. Inspectors agree with the self-assessment report that lesson planning is thorough and successfully matched to individual learner needs. Initial assessment outcomes are used effectively to inform the setting of short term targets contained within lesson plans. Some good examples of support in lessons were seen and good communication was observed between teachers and classroom assistants. However, in some cases, classroom assistants are not used effectively. This is apparent when they are placed in lessons at short notice where they have insufficient knowledge of their role or where they lack important information about learners. Quality assurance of teaching and learning is good and clearly identifies areas for improvement. Team teaching has been effective in the promotion of learning and in the sharing of good practice. Health and safety issues are promoted well within lessons.

16. Good use is made of assessment information that is gathered before learners attend the college, and during the first six weeks of the learners' programme, to clearly identify levels of ability in relation to literacy, numeracy, communication and essential skills. Target setting for the achievement of essential skills and literacy, numeracy and communications has improved. However, long term and medium term targets are too vague and do not provide sufficient clarity to enable longer term progress to be measured accurately.
17. The curriculum provides a good range of activities matched to individual learners' needs. Work experience provision for learners has significantly improved since the last inspection. Learners benefit from the extensive work experience opportunities on offer. Suitable working environments are found and very good support is provided to ensure learners maintain their placements. The college does not identify within its self-assessment report, as an area for improvement, the limited vocational options available to learners or the under developed links with local general FE colleges. Transition programmes are well established and learners are effectively prepared for the next stage in their lives.
18. Literacy and numeracy provision has improved since the last inspection and continues to develop. The curriculum has been reviewed and broadened to take into account the needs of learners with more profound communication difficulties. Extensive use is made by learners of community facilities and amenities in the planning of enrichment activities and in the development of independent living skills. Good links are made with local groups and learners participate well in the life of the community. Communications are good between the college and residences to ensure learning is effectively reinforced across the extended curriculum.
19. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. The promotion of equality, diversity and respect for individuals effectively underpins all college activities. Learners participate fully in the college's cultural life and the celebration of festivals. The student forum is effective in gathering and highlighting the views of learners which are then used to influence their college experience.
20. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment report judgement that there are good and varied support arrangements in place, including specialist support services and guidance. The specialist multi-disciplinary teams make a significant contribution to initial and ongoing assessment information and learner programmes. Therapists' contributions are highly valued; they work successfully across the college and residential homes, develop learners' ability to communicate more effectively, encourage emotional and physical good health and wellbeing, and access the curriculum. The promotion of a total communication environment is excellent and is very well supported by the skilled speech and language therapists. There is a clear focus on extending a

range of communication strategies and most staff are skilled in using these methods.

21. Behaviour management approaches are mostly effective and sensitive to the needs of learners. Group sessions and individual counselling are successfully used to enable learners to manage their own behaviour. Collaboration between staff groups and therapy teams is good. However, there is inconsistent practice with regard to implementing the guidance relating to behaviour management.
22. Key workers and educational tutors provide effective individual support for learners through tutorials and regular informal contact. The quality of in-class support is variable and there is insufficient specialist support for learners with dyspraxia and dyslexia. A wide range of learner information is provided in a variety of formats. The learners' induction programme is thorough and successfully matched to individual need. Learners are prepared well for transition. Planning for the next stage in their lives starts early in their programme and includes significant levels of contact with local agencies and Connexions. Communication with parents and carers is good.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: grade 3

23. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior managers set a clear vision based on a thorough knowledge of learners' needs. Management changes, such as the introduction of curriculum co-ordinators and the academic board have provided increased monitoring and development of the curriculum. Leadership and management of curriculum areas are good overall.
24. The quality assurance cycle is detailed and covers most aspects of the work of the college; managers are improving it in the light of experience. An extensive programme of formal and informal lesson observations has successfully driven up the standards of teaching and learning since the last inspection. Self-assessment processes are satisfactory overall. They are comprehensive and managers know most areas of provision that are in need of further improvement. However, the self-assessment report is not sufficiently evaluative. There is no overall, regularly monitored, coherent plan which brings together all the actions required to effectively promote a culture of continuous improvement. The quality assurance of programmes delivered by other providers for Arden learners is inadequate. Management information systems, although developing, remain in need of further development. The self-assessment report accurately identifies this as an area for improvement in order to provide coherent and timely information with which to track and measure the college's overall performance. A wide range of learner achievement information and data is maintained but there is insufficient rigorous analysis of this information to set measurable targets to bring about further improvement.

25. The celebration of cultural events and activities is regularly planned and reinforced by the multi racial staff teams. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted and discrimination swiftly tackled. The college has responded to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 RR(A)A with the development of appropriate policies, procedures and action plans but it is not fully compliant with all equality legislation. Managers do not effectively monitor these actions; not all staff have had training in SENDA and RR(A)A and there is limited evaluation of how the equality and diversity policies impact on the curriculum. Safeguarding procedures are comprehensive and rigorous and very good attention is given to the health and safety of learners. Robust risk assessments for both individual learners and activities are well established.
26. Professional development is good with ample opportunities for staff to extend their skills and share best practice. Good links have been established with a wide range of community agencies but curricular links with other FE educational providers are limited. Efficient and effective use is made of specialist resources both in the college and in the community but there is limited teaching space on the main college site.
27. The college managers and the parent company, Craegmoor Healthcare, are fully aware of the inadequate strategic oversight of the educational provision. Overall, the college provides satisfactory value for money. Adequate resources are available to ensure learners' needs are met; however, financial procedures and the lack of devolved budgets do not allow senior managers to plan effectively to ensure continuous improvements to provision are implemented in a timely manner.

Curriculum area inspections

Vocational skills

Good: grade 2

Context

28. The college offers vocational courses in catering, horticulture, hairdressing, and Skills for Life programmes which include literacy, numeracy, communications and information and learning technology (ILT). Learners undertake vocational options as appropriate; many study in more than one vocational area. Most learners undertake units towards NVQ 1 as well as, or instead of, national proficiency training certificates (NPTC) in horticulture. Skills for Life programmes involve discrete lessons in literacy, numeracy, communications and ILT skills. These skills are also integrated in all curriculum areas as well as essential skills targets.

Strengths

- good development of work related skills
- very good tracking and monitoring of progress
- good standard of teaching and learning
- wide range of work experience opportunities.

Areas for Improvement

- inadequate assessment of specific learning difficulties
- limited links to extend vocational options
- inconsistent use of support staff.

Achievement and Standards

29. Learners' development of vocational and work related skills are good. Many learners are able to succeed in gaining nationally recognised qualifications. They achieve units and full awards in NVQ level 1 as appropriate in catering, hairdressing and horticulture. In horticulture, those unable to progress onto NVQ qualifications are able to achieve NPTC awards. Learners prepare for the world of work well through the development and achievement of essential skills targets and relevant literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Learning is demonstrably enjoyed in and out of the classroom and extensively celebrated. Learners gain valuable work related and social skills through work experience opportunities within realistic working environments. Learners' attention to health and safety is of a high standard.

Quality of Provision

30. Teaching and learning are good with well planned lessons that meet learners' individual needs and targets. A variety of teaching and learning methods are employed that sustain learners' interest and motivation. Good attention is

given to the development of learners' awareness about health and safety issues such as the appropriate use and care of tools and equipment. Literacy, numeracy and communication skills are successfully integrated within activities in relevant and meaningful ways. However, assessment for specific learning difficulties is inadequate and fails to provide information to ensure appropriate teaching methods and resources are deployed for those learners with specific learning difficulties such as dyspraxia or dyslexia.

31. Learners can choose the vocational areas they wish to undertake within the college and the type of work they wish to experience. The curriculum is designed to allow learners to undertake courses and programmes appropriate to their needs and level of ability. The vocational curriculum offer is limited. However, the college organises and provides a wide range of work experience opportunities including realistic vocational experiences, such as Café Arden, a large and well equipped garden at one of the residences and a working hairdressing salon.
32. Personal support is good. Tutorials are held regularly and give learners the opportunity to raise issues with regard to their progress and timetables. The support role and deployment of classroom assistants is inconsistent.

Leadership and Management

33. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Managers and staff work well together in meeting the needs of individual learners. Staff development opportunities are good and staff qualifications and expertise in literacy and numeracy has improved. Self-assessment is insufficiently evaluative. However, quality assurance of teaching and learning is good and successfully identifies areas for improvement. The deployment of support staff is inconsistent. Accommodation is not appropriate for all learners and although specialist equipment is adequate overall, it is not fully accessible for all off-site activities.

Social and life skills

Good: grade 2

Context

34. The curriculum is offered to all learners within the college. The social and life skills curriculum includes personal, social and health education (PSHE), Duke of Edinburgh Award, communication, sport and recreation, history, music, art, drama, independent living skills and community access. Key elements of the curriculum such as PSHE, independent living skills and communication, are also delivered through the extended curriculum. Literacy and numeracy are integrated within all subjects and activities.

Strengths

- good development of communication skills
- good development of learners' confidence and social skills
- successful use of community facilities
- good personal support and guidance.

Areas for improvement

- underdeveloped recording of independent living skills
- the deployment of support staff.

Achievement and standards:

35. Learners make good progress in communication skills. They learn to speak and behave appropriately in different situations and how to use sign language and augmentative, assistive communication (AAC) effectively. An increasing number of learners are taking and achieving national awards in literacy and numeracy. Learners have a wide range of opportunities to increase their skills through the use of community-based leisure activities. They develop good social and interpersonal skills that prepare them well for adult life. They make good progress in the development of self-esteem and self-confidence. Learners talk confidently and with pride about the progress they have made.

Quality of provision

36. Teaching and learning are good. Pre-entry assessment is used effectively to develop useful short term targets. These targets are used well to plan learning and monitor progress. Most lessons are well structured with carefully planned individualised activities. There are good opportunities for learners to develop their skills through everyday practical activities such as using money and telling the time. Learners are effectively engaged in these activities and enjoy their learning.
37. Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory overall. Good initial assessment provides the college with detailed information used to plan

learners' first term's programme. However, the recording of learners' progress in achieving independent living skills is underdeveloped.

38. All learners have good opportunities to participate in the extended curriculum. Successful use is made of community facilities. Appropriate arrangements are in place to enable day learners to access the extended curriculum. Learners are actively involved in planning and choosing these activities.
39. Support and guidance are good. Thorough induction arrangements are in place to ensure that learners become familiar with the college. Learners value the support provided by their key workers and personal tutors and are confident that they can raise any concerns. All teachers have individual behavioural support plans for learners that are shared with support staff. However, the language is complex for those staff whose first language is not English. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management:

40. Leadership and management of social and life skills are good. Good progress has been made in integrating literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Staff receive good support from curriculum managers. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good. Health and safety are promoted well in teaching and extended curriculum activities. Individual risk assessments for learners are detailed and thorough. Quality assurance is satisfactory. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process, although the resulting report is not specific and fails to identify key areas for improvement. Accommodation and specialist resources are adequate although some rooms are too small. Deployment of support staff is inconsistent.