

Loppington House Further Education Unit

Inspection report

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Loppington House is privately owned and situated in a rural area of North Shropshire. It was bought by Active Care Partnerships Ltd, a specialist division of Southern Cross Health Care, at the end of October 2007. Active Care have 44 other sites, mainly for adults with learning difficulties. Loppington opened in 1983 as a further education unit for learners between 16 and 25 years of age. Since 1986, long term residential facilities have been provided in the grounds of Loppington House and in local villages. All of the long term residents have been learners in the education facility. From 2004, the education centre has offered places to learners between the ages of 19 and 25 years. There are 12 learners funded by the LSC, nine of whom are male and one who attends on a daily basis. There is one learner of ethnic minority heritage.
2. The full-time further education (FE) curriculum includes gardening, life skills, arts and crafts, and a projects department. The college has a new extensive range of facilities in Ellesmere and links with a local further education college. The curriculum provides opportunities to develop skills in independent living, accessing the community, enterprise activities and leisure activities, including horse riding and swimming, and a range of practical activities to develop skills, including confidence, concentration, fine and gross motor skills. Learners' literacy, numeracy and communication skills are developed throughout the curriculum. The college was last inspected in March 2007 and found to be inadequate overall. The mission for Loppington House is to 'provide a supportive environment that creates opportunities for learning and personal development. This enables our students to engage in further learning, employment and to actively contribute to the community'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Satisfactory: contributory grade 3</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

3. Learners' achievement and the quality of their work across the curriculum are satisfactory. Achievement is adequately recognised and celebrated. Opportunities to accredit achievement through a range of national awards have increased. Learners are successful in developing and extending their personal, social and communication skills. The rigour of target setting has improved but remains inconsistent. The college has yet to fully embed the principles of recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA).
4. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The use of realistic environments and work related learning has improved significantly since the last inspection. There is good focus in most lessons on the development of communication skills but insufficient use is made of information and communication technology (ICT). Assessment processes are comprehensive. Schemes of work are more rigorous but lesson planning is overly complex and activities are not always suitably matched to the individual. Behaviour management is not consistent.
5. The college provides a satisfactory range of programmes to meet the individual needs and interests of learners. Programmes are focused and designed with a strong emphasis on communication skills. Work experience placements are used effectively to develop and reinforce work skills. Links with a range of other external providers are insufficient. Educational and social inclusion are satisfactory. The college has a single equalities policy and disabilities action plan to ensure legislative compliance. However, the monitoring of the actions taken is at an early stage of development and impact assessments have not yet been established.
6. Advice, support and guidance for learners are satisfactory. Specialist support is particularly good, especially speech and language therapy and independent advocacy. Personal support is effective. Transition planning is satisfactory; however, formal transition plans are yet to be developed. High quality individualised risk assessments are in place for work experience placements but other risk assessments for learners lack rigour and their links with behaviour plans are unclear.
7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new parent company and college managers have developed a culture of continuous improvement with high levels of commitment from staff at all levels. Coherent self-assessment processes lead to a broadly accurate report. Staff development opportunities are good. Teaching and residential accommodation is not fit for purpose and there is insufficient specialist staff expertise for teaching learners with complex needs. The college has not set key performance indicators that enable provision to be evaluated year on year. Financial management is sound and the college provides satisfactory value for money.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. The college demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. Inspectors found the self-assessment arrangements to be satisfactory overall. The recent purchase of the provision by Active Care Partnerships Ltd has brought about significant changes and investments. College managers have embraced change and corporate systems are being rapidly adopted across the organisation to replace existing systems. These provide a realistic framework for improvement. Plans are well advanced to significantly improve the teaching and residential accommodation. Continuing professional development opportunities are good; there are more clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities, and high expectations have been set for all aspects of the provision. Although initial indications for success are very positive, not all actions to bring about improvements have had sufficient time to make full impact and other actions have not yet been fully evaluated. The college does not have performance indicators that enable provision to be evaluated year on year.

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

9. The college has made satisfactory progress to address the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Although improved, the quality of target setting remains inconsistent and too many targets are imprecise. Work experience programmes have been significantly developed and learners now have good opportunities to develop work-related skills. The college is effectively gathering and using learners' views to inform developments. The arrangements for transition are now satisfactory. The self-assessment process is more coherent, includes contributions from staff at all levels and broadly identifies key areas for improvement as noted by inspectors. There is increased rigour in quality assurance arrangements and overall planning for improvement, but many of these developments are recent and there has been insufficient time to fully judge the long term impact of all actions. The monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity is now satisfactory.

Key strengths

- good development of confidence and communication skills
- good use of signs and symbols
- sound development of work-related skills
- effective speech and language therapy and independent advocacy support
- good framework for improvement established by parent company.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the rigour and coherence of RARPA processes
- the opportunities to develop skills for independent living
- the suitability of teaching and residential accommodation

- the setting of clear and rigorous performance indicators
- the proportion of specialist staff with expertise for teaching learners with complex needs.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. Learners' achievement and the quality of their work across the curriculum are satisfactory. During their time at college, learners are successful in developing and extending their communication skills. They make significant gains in their self-confidence and social skills and these are promoted well through the curriculum, such as projects in the community and art and crafts. However, there are not sufficient opportunities for learners to gain independent daily living skills such as meal preparation. Learners enjoy their successes. One learner now has the confidence to attend a local general FE college to access a basic cookery course.
11. Most learners demonstrate a satisfactory awareness of health and safety and improve their behaviour over time. Learners now have significant opportunities to develop work-related skills. Learners acquire appropriate skills that adequately prepare them for moving on from the college; for example, learners prepare the morning break and in addition to cleaning duties they serve drinks and snacks. Plans are at an advanced stage to move the college retail shop to larger premises in Ellesmere.
12. Assessment processes are comprehensive. Initial, diagnostic and baseline assessments accurately inform planning. Individual learning plans are adequate and now identify, wherever possible, the learners' long term goals after leaving college. Although well integrated into lesson plans, too many individual learning targets are imprecise, or adequately identify clear learning outcomes. Small steps of learning are not always accurately identified. The college has yet to fully embed the principles of RARPA. The college acknowledges these weaknesses in the self-assessment report and has plans to bring about improvements.
13. Successes are adequately recognised and celebrated through displays and at college events. These opportunities are highly valued by learners; they enjoy their experience at college and most work with enthusiasm and confidence. There has been increased access to a range of national awards. Destination data are not sufficiently analysed or used to inform future planning. Attendance is well recorded but punctuality is not effectively monitored or sufficiently promoted.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. The college accurately judged the quality of its teaching and learning to be satisfactory and acknowledged weaknesses which were also found by inspectors. The use of realistic learning environments, such as the recently established work experience programmes, have improved significantly and this approach is helping to extend the learners' experience. There is good focus in most lessons on the development of communication skills. Insufficient use is made of ICT but where it is used regularly it successfully promotes learners' motivation and understanding. Healthy eating and the importance of safety are

promoted well within most lessons. The college has further embedded literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. An improved curriculum framework has been developed and schemes of work are better planned but lesson planning is overly complex. Recording of learning is not always evaluative or includes what the individual needs to learn next. Although staff expertise is improving, there is an insufficient proportion of staff with specialist expertise in teaching people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

15. Inspectors agree with the college that in the best lessons, teachers plan thoroughly, support learning with a good range of resources and provide varied learning activities which effectively engage and motivate learners. These lessons include the good deployment of support staff who assist learners in an unobtrusive, timely and effective way. In the less successful lessons, activities are not always suitably matched to the individual and there is undue focus on the completion of a task rather than on relevant and meaningful learning outcomes. Behaviour management is not consistent and in some instances there are no clear strategies to deal with behavioural issues as they arise. In poorer lessons, teachers do not employ a sufficiently varied range of teaching strategies or use language that is age appropriate. The college is aware of these concerns and they are being addressed through action planning, supervision and increased opportunities for professional development.
16. The college has a satisfactory approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners and this judgement is in accordance with the self-assessment report. A satisfactory range of curriculum activities are in place to respond to the learners' work-related aspirations and involve practical tasks. Increased opportunities for work experience placements are used well to reinforce transferable work skills. Learners now have a much greater influence on the content of their individual programme. A learner council has recently been established and more use is being made of learners' views. Opportunities to gain national awards have improved and are now satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy are adequately embedded in the curriculum. The enrichment programme provides a satisfactory range of choices with planned activities such as music, gym and horse riding, and good opportunities for learners to pursue their own interests. They are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the wider community such as becoming involved in local village projects and national fundraising events.
17. Educational and social inclusion are now satisfactory. Themed activity weeks are planned for each term to reinforce and develop awareness of different cultures and equality. The recently established equality and diversity committee includes representation from learners. Satisfactory use is made of the facilities in local villages and towns during the learners social and leisure time. Opportunities for the development of more independent living skills, such as cooking, are limited. Links with a range of other external providers are underdeveloped and progression routes at the end of their programme are insufficient.
18. Support and guidance are satisfactory. Specialist support is particularly good in the case of speech and language therapy interventions to develop learners'

communication skills. An independent advocate visits the college regularly and provides high quality support to enable learners to deal more effectively with personal issues such as relationships, preferences and asserting their rights.

19. Transition planning is now satisfactory and the local Connexions service is effective in supporting learners to move onto appropriate placements on leaving the college. Learners are increasingly involved in their reviews. Formal transition plans are yet to be developed in order to provide more robust monitoring of the actions required to ensure timely progression onto further placements. Health and safety issues are addressed adequately. High quality individualised risk assessments are in place for work experience placements. However, other risk assessments for learners are not rigorous, nor are they updated regularly and links with behaviour guidelines lack clarity. Guidance to staff about individuals' behaviour does not clearly describe the strategies to be employed and so incidents are not always managed consistently.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Satisfactory: grade 3

20. Leadership and management are now satisfactory. The recent purchase of Loppington House by Active Care Partnerships Ltd has resulted in significant improvements; directors have provided the necessary management steer and have been successful in establishing clarity of vision and a culture firmly linked to improvement. Corporate systems are being rapidly adopted across the organisation to replace existing systems. Development plans are comprehensive and included within financial planning processes.
21. The college's performance is closely monitored through more coherent quality improvement procedures that have been developed to focus upon the concept of the learner journey. Self-assessment has improved markedly since the last inspection and the outcomes are addressed through comprehensive action and forward planning. This is in marked contrast to the approach identified at the last inspection. However, not all actions to bring about improvements have had sufficient time to make full impact and to become fully embedded within an annual cycle. The college has not yet established performance indicators that enable the provision to be evaluated year on year. Communications are effective in most areas. There are no formal mechanisms in place to gather the views of families or external organisations.
22. Judgements on teaching and learning are effectively informed by lesson observations and regular supervision. However, there is undue focus on teaching, occasionally at the expense of learning. The protocol for monitoring is overly complex and sometimes hinders judgements. Management information systems are improving and beginning to provide useful data on which to plan. The extensive staff development and training programme is bringing about improvements and is highly valued by staff. All teachers have, or are working towards, initial teacher training qualifications but there continues to be an

insufficient proportion of staff expertise in teaching learners with complex needs. The management of curriculum areas is satisfactory.

23. Teaching and learning accommodation is not fit for purpose; some areas remain cramped and shabby and there are too many distractions and interruptions to lessons. The new owners have recognised this weakness and invested in a costly programme of redevelopment of the stable block to provide significantly enhanced classroom and residential facilities; building work is due to commence shortly. There has been a significant investment in a wireless ICT infrastructure and the first wave of equipment is in use, such as the interactive whiteboard. Links with other providers and services are insufficient, although engagement with local employers has increased since the last inspection and provides learners with improved opportunities to practice their work related skills. One learner attends a local general FE college but there is no service level agreement in place to enable Loppington to effectively monitor the quality of learners' experience.
24. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The college meets its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and has adequate policies and procedures for the protection of vulnerable adults. The college has a policy which covers all aspects in relation to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability 2002 Acts (SENDA). However, the monitoring of the actions taken is at an early stage and impact assessments have not yet been established. Staff have received training in equality and diversity and safeguarding. Although the college has analysed a range of data, outcomes are not used to set equality and diversity impact measures, especially in relation to increasing participation of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. Managers regularly review the LSC individual learner schedules to ensure that individuals support needs and programmes are being met. Financial management is sound and a system of developed budgets is now in place. The college provides satisfactory value for money.