

# Strathmore College

## 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](http://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](http://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. In 1987 Strathmore House, in Stoke-on-Trent, was purchased to provide residential training and education for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The trading name was Strathmore Associates, a privately owned company. Jasmine, a florist's shop, was purchased in 1995 to provide realistic work experience through catering and floristry outlets. In January 2001 the company was divided into two limited companies - Strathmore College Limited and Strathmore Care Services Limited. In July 2003, both companies were acquired by Craegmoor Healthcare Limited. The college is one of three colleges owned by the group.
2. Strathmore's mission is: 'Enable individuals to become as independent as possible through careful assessment of need, providing appropriate support in accordance with individual strengths, preferences and choices. It provides quality life experiences and opportunities to enhance personal development, whilst offering care and security in a supportive environment'. All teaching is practically-based and makes extensive use of floristry and catering retail outlets, which are based at Jasmine in Newcastle-under-Lyme and other business sites in the vicinity. Additional vocational opportunities have been developed through the opening of a business unit and an arrangement to run the local Salvation Army community shop. Accreditation is available in partnership with another Craegmoor college through City & Guilds, National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) skills for working life/horticulture entry level 2. Learners' literacy, numeracy and communication skills are developed throughout the curriculum.
3. The college also makes substantial use of its two large residential homes for the training of independence skills. These homes are situated in different parts of the Stoke-on-Trent area. There are 46 learners, of whom 30 are residential and 16 are day learners; 10 of the residential learners and six of the day learners are female and two learners are of minority ethnic heritage. The college recruits regionally and nationally.
4. Learning is planned around individual learning needs and implemented through practical and meaningful activities. The college places a strong emphasis on enabling all learners to access the community and make a positive contribution to these communities. The college's self-assessment includes that learners develop skills to progress into work through a gradual development of practical, social and cooperative teamwork skills, building confidence and maturity and accompanied with the development of life skills.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory : Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory : Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good : Grade 2
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

5. Strathmore is a satisfactory college. The achievement levels and the quality of learners' work are satisfactory and improving. They make good gains in personal and vocational skills, achieve well in practical settings and successfully learn to manage their own behaviour. Many objectives are too general and inhibit learners' understanding of what they are expected to achieve. The literacy and numeracy strategy is not yet fully implemented and some learners' literacy and numeracy skills are underdeveloped. The analysis of data to demonstrate trends in achievement over time is insufficient.
6. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Trainers make effective use of the practical vocational settings to promote communication and develop problem-solving skills and other work-related skills. Pre-entry assessments are comprehensive. Individual learning plans, support plans and care plans are insufficiently linked. In a minority of lessons, activities do not match individual learners' needs. Target setting and the monitoring of learners' progress is underdeveloped.
7. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. The very good range of community-based vocational options provides successful pathways to employment opportunities. Detailed and comprehensive individual learning plans are used well as a basis for developing programmes. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. There is a good range of enrichment activities. Procedures to promote health and safety are generally effective.
8. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. The college places a strong focus on providing high quality personal, residential and vocational support for all learners. Transition arrangements both on entry and on leaving the college are comprehensive and effective. The good involvement of a range of external agencies for specialist support makes a significant contribution to learners' ability to access the curriculum and make progress, especially in their behaviour. The needs of day learners are prioritised and well met. Resources for careers education and guidance are limited and tutorial processes are underdeveloped.
9. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A culture of continuous improvement is well established. Strategic planning and monitoring have improved. Operational management and staff development opportunities are good. The self-assessment process is largely accurate though some strengths are over-estimated. The college makes good use of community partnership links. Overall quality improvement systems are insufficiently coherent and rigorous. The strategy for the implementation of literacy and numeracy is underdeveloped and the proportion of staff with specialist expertise in teaching learners with complex needs is insufficient. Overall, the college meets its responsibilities with relevant equalities legislation.

## Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college shows good capacity to improve. The self-assessment report is largely accurate. There is a strong emphasis on quality improvement throughout the college, although recently introduced systems demonstrate insufficient coherence and rigour. Craegmoor have recently appointed an area manager with an appropriate specialist further education background to enhance monitoring and support the development of the college. Recent changes to college management structures and procedures are beginning to demonstrate improvements in areas such as curriculum and vocationally-based learning.

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

11. The college has made satisfactory progress to address the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Strategic leadership and management from the parent company has improved significantly. The curriculum is now regularly reviewed and outcomes effectively inform development plans. Although the promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory the college has accurately identified this as an area for further improvement. The adequacy of staff qualifications for literacy, numeracy and communication has not been adequately addressed.

## Key strengths

- good gains in personal and vocational skills
- very good range of practical activities in realistic community settings
- good range of enrichment activities
- good support for learners
- very good behavioural support
- good operational management.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- the rigour of setting objectives for learners
- the systems and quality of tutorials
- the proportion of teaching staff with specialist expertise and qualifications
- the strategy for the implementation of literacy and numeracy
- the uneven application of the quality improvement processes.

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

12. Learners' achievement and the quality of their work are satisfactory and improving. Learners make good gains in personal and vocational skills, achieve well in practical settings and many make significant improvements in managing their behaviour. The learners also gain good social interaction skills which are effectively put into practice in the vocational settings available to the learners. This may include a learner taking a telephone order for a 'take-away', lunchtime meals to a local retail outlet, or taking an order from a member of the public visiting the college's café. The practical nature of much of the curriculum increases learners' enjoyment and participation.
13. Learners on vocational courses make good progress in achieving work-related skills, problem-solving skills and increased levels of responsibility. They extend these skills through the range of challenging work placements towards the attainment of their long term goals. However, the college confirms that many objectives are too general and inhibit learners' understanding of what they are expected to achieve. Self-assessment identified that the system for tracking overall progress requires further development.
14. Learners at all levels make good progress in developing independence through use of community facilities and developing useful skills in travelling on local public transport. Social and living skills are successfully developed through essential practical activities in their houses. Where appropriate, some learners further develop their literacy and numeracy skills by attending accreditation courses at local colleges. The literacy and numeracy strategy is not yet fully implemented. The college acknowledges that this has limited the opportunities for learners to progress in non-accredited literacy and numeracy skills.
15. Learners achieve accreditation well in practical courses such as NVQ level 1 in distribution operations, NPTC horticulture and ground maintenance, basic food hygiene certificate and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. One learner achieved a Youth Enterprise Gold Award recently and two learners showed outstanding achievement by representing the United Kingdom in the World Special Olympics; one gained two silver medals. Of the 16 learners who left in 2007, eight moved into supported living and 11 went into a work placement, compared with four of each destination out of nine leavers in the previous year. However, the analysis of trends over time is not used systematically to inform curriculum content for future learners.
16. The recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) framework is effectively applied throughout the college. Improved recording of achievement in daily living skills adds to effective recording of achievement in vocational, leisure activities and community-based work and enrichment activities. However, the college recognises the need to further develop its systems for analysing the data. Whilst many objectives are still insufficiently specific to effectively measure achievement, the college has made changes to



bring about improved understanding by learners of what they are expected to achieve.

17. Achievement is celebrated successfully across the college; for example, there is an annual event at which all learners receive recognition for all achievement. Attendance and retention are good and as expected in a specialist college. They are well monitored.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

18. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The pre-entry assessments are comprehensive with good multi-disciplinary contributions. The six week baseline assessment provides a sound basis for developing the individual learning plan from which lesson plans are devised. However, the quality of lesson plans is variable. Too many lesson plans are overly complex and rely on experienced and well established members of staff to successfully prioritise the objectives with the learner. In a minority of lessons, activities do not match the learners' needs. The number of objectives and the language used make them difficult for learners to understand. The self-assessment has identified the need to improve objective setting, make the language more accessible and to develop the monitoring of progress. The individual learning plan, support plan and care plan are insufficiently linked.
19. Trainers make effective use of the practical vocational settings to promote communication, problem-solving skills and other work-related skills. Many learners develop effective routines to guide them in tasks, reducing reliance on the trainer. Practical skills and underpinning knowledge are developed well. In the most effective lessons skilful use of open-ended questioning encourages learners to participate and develop their own learning. Learners are given sufficient time to respond to questions about their routines, are given the opportunity to find their own solutions to problems and encouraged to explore the next steps in learning and completion of a task. In less successful lessons, the trainers are over-directive, do not allow sufficient time for learners to respond to questions and miss opportunities for learning. Opportunities to develop literacy or numeracy skills are often included in lessons but many staff working with the learners have insufficient knowledge to successfully address barriers to learning especially in numeracy. Support plans are used effectively to guide staff in positive approaches to improving learners' behaviour.
20. Recent changes to the teaching of daily living skills has led to improved and increased recording of progress but this development is very recent and so it is not possible to fully evaluate the impact. Changes in the structure and application of the individual learning plan has led the college to recognise the need for further improvement in the capturing, recording and analysing of learning in all areas. The college is now assisting learners to make a more meaningful contribution to their own formal reviews.

21. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. Learners participate in a wide variety of activities, work experience and travel training which extends their community involvement and independence. There is a very good range of vocational options and external work placements for learners often developed in response to learners' interests and providing successful pathways for employment opportunities. The range has been enhanced by the addition of further vocational areas, such as the community-based retail and catering outlets and a small-scale manufacturing unit. Procedures to promote environmental health and safety are effective. Learners are actively involved in the Youth Enterprise Scheme.
22. Detailed and comprehensive individual learning plans are used well to develop learners' programmes. There is an increased emphasis on objectives linked to wider key skills which are being addressed well in lessons. However, the excessive number of objectives for each learner inhibits their ability to understand their learning plan. A strong emphasis on sport within the curriculum is used effectively to engage some learners who lack confidence to be part of the vocational curriculum. This also contributes well to learners developing healthy lifestyles. There is a good range of enrichment activities. The strategy for fully embedding literacy and numeracy is underdeveloped.
23. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. The college is responsive to individual learners' requirements in curriculum content and structure by developing individualised programmes. The wide range of practical, realistic, community placements is used to provide further individualised environments for certain learners.
24. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. The college places a strong focus on providing high quality personal, residential and vocational support for all learners. Induction enables learners to settle well into their programmes. The needs of day learners are prioritised and well met. The college works well with a wide range of external agencies to arrange specialist support to access the curriculum and make progress, especially in their behaviours. These include psychological, independent advocacy and speech and language therapy services. The college has recognised the need to coordinate the therapists better to further promote communication for those learners with complex needs.
25. Behaviour management interventions are very successful in enabling learners to modify and manage their own behaviour and improve their communication skills. A comprehensive learner handbook and range of useful information is available in a variety of formats. The individual needs of day learners are effectively addressed. Whilst learners do have access to tutorials they are not sufficiently formalised, tutorial guidance for staff is limited, and tutorial outcomes are not systematically recorded and monitored. A learner forum and regular house meetings facilitate the promotion of the learner voice. Links with parents are good overall. Whilst environmental risk assessments are generally detailed and graded into risk categories some individual risk assessments do not adequately identify specific hazards. The college works

well with Connexions but resources to support careers guidance are underdeveloped. Arrangements for transition planning into and out of the college are comprehensive and effective.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

*Contributory grade:*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Satisfactory: contributory grade 3*

26. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A culture aimed at raising standards and setting high expectations for learners is evident across all areas of the college. Strategic planning and monitoring have improved. The parent company has recently appointed an area manager with an appropriate specialist further education background to enhance the monitoring and support the development of the provision. Operational management is good. The self-assessment process is comprehensive and largely accurate though some strengths are over-estimated.
27. Strathmore has an appropriate range of policies and procedures which are reviewed regularly. Although quality improvement systems are insufficiently coherent and rigorous and many systems remain at an early stage of development, there are recent improvements in areas, such as curriculum and vocationally-based learning. A range of quality audit systems provide an overview of the performance of the college in key areas, such as finance, health and safety and the care of the learners. However, they do not yet take sufficient account of teaching and learning. Self-assessment has accurately identified that the sharing of good practice across the college as an area for further development.
28. Management information systems are satisfactory but insufficient use is made of summary data to inform planning and set targets for improving achievement. Feedback from parents, carers and a range of stakeholders is formally collected and appropriate action is taken. Communication throughout the college sites is effective. A wide range of staff meetings enables them to contribute their ideas for improving the learners' experience. Curriculum areas are successfully reviewed and well managed. Systems to induct, supervise and appraise staff are effective. The college has recently maintained the Investors in People award. A comprehensive staff development and training programme is in place, but there is an insufficient proportion of teaching staff with specialist expertise and those with additional specialist qualifications to teach learners with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
29. The college takes an active part in local and regional forums. Links with a wide range of other providers are good and include regularly reviewed comprehensive service level agreements. Good professional links have been established with external stakeholders and the local community. The strategy for implementation of literacy and numeracy is underdeveloped.
30. The college has satisfactorily addressed its requirements under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA), the Race Relations

(Amendment) Act 2000 and Equality Act 2006. Whilst Strathmore has a Single Equality Scheme, impact assessments have yet to be conducted across all areas. Comprehensive safeguarding procedures are in place. Analysis of data on learners' achievement in relation to disability, race and gender indicate that there are no differences in outcome between various groups. Financial management is sound. Strathmore provides satisfactory value for money.