

Bridge 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.

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. Bridge College is an independent specialist day college. It provides for students with severe and complex learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and autistic spectrum conditions. It is based on one site in Stockport and makes use of a range of community facilities to enhance the curriculum. There are 75 students. The majority are aged 19-23 and are recruited from special schools within the Greater Manchester area. One fifth of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
2. The college mission is to create a learning environment that is inclusive and where young people make a successful transition to adulthood by making

good progress in their self-esteem, skills for life and independence. Individual learner programmes are delivered within two departments. The Department of Foundation Studies provides an entry level course and a Step Up programme for students with autistic spectrum conditions. The Department of Pre-Foundation Studies offers courses for students at pre-entry level and a sensory course for students with complex needs. Activities within the curriculum include citizenship, cooking, workskills, sports, information and communication technology, creative and expressive arts and skills for life.

3. Bridge College became a Makaton Centre of Excellence in 2001. The college's specialist resources include a hydrotherapy pool, physiotherapy suite and fitness area. The college employs 97 staff. It has its own team of paramedical staff, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses and access to the 'Together Trust' educational psychology service.
4. The college works under the auspices of the charity 'Together Trust'. A board of governors is responsible to the Trust for the strategic direction of the college. The governing body includes members of the Trust as well as parents, staff and representatives from education, business and the community. The principal took up post in the summer of 2006 and the deputy principal in November 2006.

Summary of grades awarded

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Effectiveness of provision | Good: Grade 2 |
| Capacity to improve | Good: Grade 2 |
| Achievement and standards | Good: Grade 2 |
| Quality of provision | Good: Grade 2 |
| Leadership and management | Good: Grade 2 |
| <i>Equality of opportunity</i> | <i>Good: Contributory grade</i> |

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. Bridge is a good college. Students achieve well and make good progress against their starting points. They successfully develop skills to manage their behaviour and interact with other people. Students enjoy coming to college and contribute well in lessons and other activities. Achievement is well celebrated. Students with a target of gaining employment develop satisfactory work-related skills.
6. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning have improved significantly since the last inspection and are good. The majority of lessons are well planned and delivered. Lessons focus on practical activities that help students to understand and develop their skills. Learning support workers are skilful at enabling students to take part in learning. There is satisfactory use of individual learning plans to set targets, against which progress is measured. Programmes and activities successfully meet the needs and interests of students. A substantial overhaul of the curriculum and the way it is delivered is proving effective. Arrangements for work placements are improving but the college recognises the need to further develop its links with employers. Guidance and support for students and social and educational inclusion are both good. The college successfully recruits students with a wide range of needs and from diverse backgrounds. It is very effective in helping students to settle into college. Students have access to good levels of high quality specialist support and therapies.
7. Leadership and management are good. The college places a strong emphasis on quality improvement. This is supported by a range of effective strategies that are well focused on teaching and learning and students' achievement. A lot of useful data is collected, for example, on student progress, but this is not yet used systematically to inform future planning. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Governance is satisfactory. Accommodation has improved since the last inspection but some aspects continue to be inadequate.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

8. The college has good capacity to improve. The self-assessment process is thorough and realistic. College judgements matched well with inspection findings. There is a strong emphasis on quality improvement throughout the whole college. Change is managed effectively and there is good staff support for senior managers. The college has demonstrated its ability to bring about improvement in a number of significant areas.

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

9. The college has made good progress in addressing the issues raised at the last inspection. Almost all key issues have improved well. Significant changes have been made to the management and content of the curriculum and this is now good. New senior managers are providing the college with a clear vision and mission. Students have opportunities that are appropriate to their individual needs and interests. Initial assessment of students with visual impairment or language needs is much improved. Recording of students' progress is more effective. The role of support workers is clearly identified in lesson plans and their expertise is used effectively. Governors have recently undertaken a self-assessment of their functions and a training plan is in place. Improvements have been made to resources. However, some aspects of accommodation remain poor.

Key strengths

- good student progress
- good teaching and learning
- very good specialist support
- effective inclusion strategies
- strong leadership and drive at all levels to ensure continuous improvement.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- links with employers
- the quality of accommodation
- the use of management information to inform planning.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

10. Student achievement is good. Students make good progress against their starting points when they join the college and achieve many of their targets. They enjoy coming to college. Personal development is good. Students successfully develop the ability to manage their own behaviour and to work with other people. Students generally acquire significantly improved levels of independence during their time at college. However, a few students have the potential to do even more for themselves, or to achieve greater independence in a shorter timeframe.
11. Students contribute well in lessons and in other activities inside college and within the wider community. They produce good standards of work and there is regular celebration of their achievement. In 2006/07 students won a national award for their work leading to the student council joining the National Union of Students. Some have gained recognition for their work as volunteers. Artwork produced by the students was displayed at a large retail park in the area. The college self-assessment report provides a clear and accurate picture of the many and diverse achievements of the students.
12. Students who have a target to enter employment after leaving college are developing satisfactory work-related skills. A small number of students benefit from external work placements, for example, in retail. The planning of work placements has improved this year to ensure they are tailored to individual need. Students on these placements are building up confidence and vocational skills.
13. Where it is appropriate, students are gaining vocational and other external accreditation, such as City and Guilds and English Speaking Board qualifications. Students are well prepared for the next phase of their lives. Over half of the students who left Bridge College in 2006/07 progressed to a course at a local further education college.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

14. Inspection findings confirm the college assessment that the quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The majority of lessons are well planned and delivered. They focus well on individual needs and use an appropriate range of methods and resources. There is good use of communication strategies and aids to ensure students can access learning and a high rate of student participation in lessons.
15. Lessons focus on practical activities which allow students to develop their understanding and skills in ways that are meaningful to them. There is good training for learning support workers who help students in lessons and around college generally. They work well together as a team and with

- tutors. For example, within the sensory course, staff work together very effectively on music and drama projects with students from three different groups. Teaching and learning for students with autistic spectrum conditions have improved since the last inspection and are satisfactory. The college is planning further sharing of good practice in this area of work.
16. There is regular assessment of students' progress. Some individual learning plans contain too wide a range of targets but staff work with students to identify core and priority targets, against which progress is measured.
 17. In a minority of teaching and learning, there are weaknesses. These include trying to cover too much in a lesson or using resources that are not well matched to the learner. In these lessons, there is too much prompting from staff who do not give students sufficient time to respond or for the student to learn from their mistakes. Inadequacies in accommodation sometimes impact on learning, for example, noise from one group hampers the work of other students where rooms are shared.
 18. Programmes and activities successfully meet the needs of learners. Changes to the curriculum in the last year are having a positive impact upon addressing the needs, interests and aspirations of students. Effective baseline assessments inform the development of individual learner programmes. Students are placed into four course groups, sub-divided into year groups. This ensures good staff knowledge of students and how to address their needs. The curriculum incorporates regular sessions on citizenship, which includes effective work on matters such as sexual education and healthy living. There is a strong emphasis on health and safety within the curriculum. Citizenship days also allow time for students to take part in community based activities.
 19. The enrichment programme is good, making a significant contribution to students' enjoyment and achievement. The range of opportunities includes access to a well planned residential experience. Opportunities for work experience are satisfactory. Students have work experience matched to choice and ability, and some now have a full day on placement. The college recognises it needs to develop further its links with employers and other external organisations. A current priority is to make links with employers in the students' home area.
 20. Guidance and support for students are good. Specialist support is very good. Well qualified therapists and medical support staff provide high quality professional expertise that helps students learn. Support for students with visual impairment has improved since the last inspection. All assessments since September 2007 define level of vision, support and equipment required. Tutors and support staff work well together to promote personal development and ensure needs are met. Occasionally support staff do too much for the student, rather than encouraging further independence. There is good provision of specialist equipment, including communication aids and adaptive equipment for access to computers. There are good transition arrangements. Students undertake visits in their second year to explore

options for destinations and establish contacts for when they leave the college.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Good: Contributory grade 2

21. Leadership and management are good. Managers, staff, governors and trustees have a strong commitment to the college's vision and mission to provide high quality education. The senior team works closely with staff to identify areas for development. Leaders and managers set a clear direction based on a good understanding of students' needs. Recent organisational changes have given greater clarity to staff roles and are providing good opportunities for all staff to take on additional responsibilities and develop new skills. Managers have been effective in building a strong, learner-focused curriculum.
22. Communication between senior managers and staff is good. A series of regular meetings enables good practice and developments to be shared across the college. The student council provides good opportunities for learners to propose changes and improvements. Students are actively involved in the recruitment of new staff. Links with parents and carers are good.
23. The college places a strong emphasis on quality improvement that is supported by effective quality initiatives. A robust system of lesson observation has significantly improved the quality of teaching and learning. Observation outcomes are used well to inform appraisals and staff development.
24. The self-assessment process is thorough and rigorous. The college has a good understanding of what it does well and where there are areas for further improvement. Staff understand the self-assessment process and its role in bringing about continuous improvement. The strategic plan identifies key priorities for the college. However, the use of management information data to inform planning is underdeveloped. The college recognises this and plans are in place to make more effective use of data.
25. Resources to support learning are generally good. Staff qualifications, experience and expertise match the needs of students well. Induction of new staff and continuing professional development for all staff are good. Staff have clear targets to work towards and training needs are addressed effectively. Accommodation has been improved since the last inspection. However, some aspects remain inadequate. For example, the hall is used for a number of purposes and students undertaking different activities are timetabled in the hall at the same time.
26. Monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity are good. Promotion of equality and diversity is effectively integrated into the students' curriculum. Men's and women's groups provide learners with opportunities that meet

their cultural and gender needs. The college has satisfactorily addressed its requirements under equality and diversity legislation. It has the required policies and action plans for ensuring racial equality and preventing disability discrimination. Arrangements for safeguarding students, including appropriate recruitment procedures and training for staff in child protection, are good. Staff and governors receive training and updating on relevant legislation. The college monitors staff recruitment with respect to diversity and this information is regularly reported to the governors.

27. Governance is satisfactory. Governors support the college well. Formal and informal communication takes place regularly with the principal, staff and learners. Students contribute to the decision-making process through the student council, questionnaires and annual reviews. Governors' monitoring of the quality of the provision is satisfactory; they have recently been allocated specific roles to help them carry out this task. Governors receive appropriate information on budgets and overall college performance. Financial management is good. The college provides good value for money.