

# Arden College

Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 131935

Name of lead inspector: Susan Preece HMI

Last day of inspection: 22 April 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: 40 Derby Road  
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## Information about the provider

1. Arden College is one of three independent, specialist, residential further education (FE) colleges owned by Craegmoor Healthcare Limited (Craegmoor). The college is based in Southport and provides education for 64 learners, aged 16 to 25, all of whom have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are 38 residential and 26 day learners; over half are male. The main teaching accommodation is located on one site in the town centre. Arden College also runs a café, hairdressing salon and a horticulture department and makes substantial use of its residential homes and the local community for teaching and learning. Residential learners are accommodated within two miles of the main college.
2. The college offers national awards in catering, horticulture, conservation, hairdressing and preparing for employment, as well as a range of other nationally accredited qualifications. Programmes, from milestones and pre-entry levels to level 1, are offered in social and life skills, sport and recreation, drama, independent living skills and information communication technology (ICT). The primary goal of Arden College is to help people lead independent and fulfilled lives and the mission is to enable young people to develop the confidence and skills they need for the next stage in their life.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	64 full-time learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

## Overall effectiveness

- The college's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, as is its capacity to improve. Learners make good progress and achieve well. They make good gains in communication which support their independence and in vocational subjects pass rates are high. Learners particularly enjoy and succeed in the practical opportunities provided for them through vocational programmes and work experience. Arden College is successful in preparing the learners for employment. Improvements have been made but more needs to be done to remove the variable performance across curriculum areas in order to bring all lessons up to the standard of the best and to increase learners' access to technology. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall.
- Safeguarding is good and is given high priority. Speech and language support continues to be outstanding and enables learners to participate in all areas of college life. Leadership and management are inadequate. Whilst self-assessment is mainly accurate, quality improvement planning lacks precision and is not systematic nor has it been sufficiently effective in improving teaching and learning; the use of data to bring about improvement remains underdeveloped. Clear strategic objectives have yet to be set and prioritised. Although improvements have been made, the parent company has been slow in responding to the needs of the college and in providing a clear strategic direction and rigorous monitoring of the college's improvement strategy.

## Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good and there is no variation between groups. In vocational subjects pass rates are high. Progression routes are good; many learners go onto employment, FE and independent living. In 2009, 37% of the leavers gained employment as a result of their college work experience placement.
- Work-experience opportunities are very effective in developing learners' confidence, independent travel and employability skills. Learners find the practical opportunities in catering, hairdressing and horticulture highly motivating and rewarding. They enjoy working in these environments and develop good levels of vocational and personal skills.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Speech and language support continues to be outstanding and enables learners to participate in all areas of college life. High quality and accessible risk-assessments are used effectively to enable learners to take increasing responsibility for themselves. Behaviour management is effective.
- The curriculum has been successfully reviewed and offers clear learning pathways. Staff are preparing effectively for changes in foundation learning. Learners are particularly proud of their achievements through Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Partnerships with local providers are satisfactory overall and those with local employers are good.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are good. Arden College has created a culture where staff and learners are strongly aware of safety. Reporting of complaints and incidents is thorough and appropriate action is taken. The promotion of equality and diversity, including in lessons, is satisfactory.
- Engagement with learners is good. Both the college and Craegmoor have a strong track record of responsiveness to learners. Speech and language therapy interventions are highly successful in enabling learners to contribute their views and ideas and influence decision-making groups within the college.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Effective learning is more evident in vocational and practical lessons where learners are playing a more active role in the planned activities. The attention given in most lessons to improving learners' social communication skills is particularly effective. Recording of progress in many lessons has an undue focus on activities rather than on achievement.
- Planning for learning is less effective when tasks are insufficiently matched to individual learners' level of ability. In less successful lessons, the pace of teaching is too slow, activities are not sufficiently challenging or age appropriate and there is an over emphasis on completing worksheets. Technology is not sufficiently used in lessons to promote learning. Tutorial time at the beginning of the day is not well planned; too much valuable time is wasted.
- Leadership and management are inadequate. The new principal has brought a renewed energy, ambition and direction to the college but the rate of progress in some key areas has been slow. The use of data to bring about improvement

remains underdeveloped; quality improvement processes lack coherence and have not been sufficiently effective in improving teaching and learning. Clear strategic targets and objectives have yet to be set and prioritised.

- The college has experienced a prolonged period of management turbulence and significant changes. Although improved since the last inspection, the parent company has yet to develop robust arrangements with clear well-monitored targets which provide sufficient challenge to raise the standard of the college's performance.
- Arrangements for monitoring the quality of provision at all levels are not adequate. The quality assurance cycle includes recently developed key performance indicators but these are not sufficiently focused on improving teaching and learning. Targets in the quality improvement plan, and in some cases timescales, are insufficiently precise or systematic for managers to be able to measure the extent of any progress.
- The self-assessment report is mainly accurate but underestimates the impact of the frequent changes of leadership and does not identify that strategic planning is weak and that lesson observation processes lack rigour; too many lessons are over graded. Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) learner contracts are not adequately monitored.

### What does Arden College need to do to improve further?

- Develop strategic and quality improvement planning processes that include coherent and clearly prioritised targets and objectives which are accurately identified, rigorously monitored and effectively communicated to all staff.
- Make sure that the parent company plays a more active role in supporting and monitoring the college's improvement strategy and in developing appropriate arrangements to ensure that the momentum started by the new managers continues to drive the college forward.
- Accelerate the pace of quality improvement by ensuring that all managers have the skills to identify and tackle swiftly areas of underperformance. Improve the use of management information data in order to devise more effective indicators of the college's performance and to inform self-assessment.
- Develop a more rigorous approach to ensure that teachers use a range of strategies in lessons, including differentiated approaches, improved challenge and increased pace. Improve the use, availability and accessibility of ICT for staff and learners.
- Strengthen the rigour and criteria for the observation of teaching and learning so that the observers focus more effectively on learning in order to bring all lessons up to the standard of the best in the college. Improve the active promotion of equality and diversity in lessons.
- Develop and extend partnerships with the local education providers to maximise learning opportunities.

- Make better use of tutorial time at the beginning of the day when learners arrive at college so that they do not waste valuable time. Improve the quality of tutorials so that they are effectively planned to match learners' needs.

### Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

#### What learners like:

- learning to be more independent
- being able to discuss targets
- the staff and making friends
- the vocational areas
- work experience
- learning more about information technology
- the Duke of Edinburgh Award
- feeling safe and knowing who to talk to
- being able to change things in college and the residences.

#### What learners would like to see improved:

- the college building so that it looks smarter
- the length of those lessons which are too long
- the chance to go out on more trips
- the cleaning of the college buses.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

5. The recently appointed principal and management team have brought about a degree of stability, following a prolonged period of turbulence in the leadership and management of the college. They are fully committed to bringing about improvement. Lines of accountability are clearer and the strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained. Critical oversight by the parent company is developing but the rate of progress has been slow. Whilst formal strategic planning is limited, the college managers are aware of what they need to do to improve. Outcomes for learners remain good; they continue to make good progress in achieving external qualifications, employability and communication skills. Specialist speech and language interventions continue to be outstanding. Most areas for improvement from the last inspection are now satisfactory. Self-assessment is fairly accurate and a culture of self-criticism is developing. Despite these improvements, key aspects of provision, such as strategic planning, quality improvement processes and use of data, are underdeveloped. Nevertheless, adequate progress is being made in establishing a secure path for improvements that is starting to benefit learners.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

6. Outcomes for learners are good and there is no variation between groups. The wide range of nationally accredited qualifications on offer matches learner need. In vocational subjects, pass rates are high and levels of achievement have improved over the last three years. Horticultural achievement has improved from 32% in 2008 to 80% in 2009. Destination data are collected but are not effectively linked back to the primary goals of learners or analysed sufficiently to bring about further improvement within the provision.
7. The process for the recognition and recording of progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA) is effective and learners make good gains in personal, social and communication skills. Their ability to interact appropriately and meaningfully with others improves over time. Learners are successful in achieving their core targets. The quality of target setting has significantly improved following staff training. Learners talk confidently about their targets and are clear about how to achieve them.
8. Learners have excellent opportunities to learn employability skills. Progression routes are good; many learners go onto employment, FE and independent living. In 2009, 25% of the leavers gained employment as a result of their college work-experience placements. Learners' economic development is good. Confidence and independence skills are developed through a wide variety of activities and learners are able to make a positive contribution to society.

9. Learners say that they feel safe and can describe how to stay safe in vocational areas as well as in other situations. The student council and 'Your Voice' meetings contribute to health and safety awareness and regularly raise concerns with the facilities and maintenance teams to bring about improvement. Accessible policies such as bullying and harassment are given to learners to aid understanding and are presented verbally in induction. These are reinforced in the residences via wall displays and in discussion with key workers. Learners know who to talk to if they are worried about abuse, discrimination, bullying or harassment. They are confident that personal issues would be dealt with immediately. Attendance is good but punctuality is insufficiently monitored to bring about improvement.

## The quality of provision

Grade 3

10. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers know their learners well and provide encouragement and praise appropriately. Effective learning is more evident in vocational and practical lessons where learners are playing a more active role in the planned activities. Work experience arrangements are very good in developing learners' skills and confidence. The focus given in most lessons on improving learners' social communication skills is particularly effective. The good relationships between staff and learners is based on mutual respect and enables them to become more involved in their own learning. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified or are in the process of becoming so. Initial assessment is adequate and informs individual learning plans effectively but the recording of progress in many lessons has an undue focus on activities rather than achievement. Formal arrangements for assessment and verification are satisfactory.
11. In weaker lessons, small group size has a negative impact on the development of learners' communication and peer interaction. Planning for learning is less effective when tasks are insufficiently matched to individual learners' level of ability. In less successful lessons, the pace of teaching is too slow, activities are not sufficiently challenging or age appropriate and there is an over emphasis on completing worksheets. Self-assessment has accurately identified that the role of learning support assistants in lessons is not made sufficiently clear.
12. Technology is not used sufficiently to promote learning outside ICT classes but plans are in place to bring about improvements. Assistive technology, such as signs and symbols, is used well to improve learners' communication skills significantly. Too few teachers use lessons effectively to promote learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues. The start of the college day is not planned effectively, resulting in missed opportunities for learning.
13. The college is good at meeting the needs and interests of its learners. Learners find the practical opportunities provided by the Arden Café and hairdressing salon motivating and rewarding. Learners enjoy working in these environments and develop good levels of vocational and personal skills. Some learners volunteer for extra duties at the weekends. Work experience opportunities are very effective in developing learners' confidence, independent



travel and employability skills. The number and range of work experience placements have increased. Over three quarters of the learner population have access to work placements. Arden College is successful in preparing learners for employment.

14. The curriculum has been effectively reviewed and offers clear learning pathways, whilst maintaining the flexibility to respond to learners' changing needs and interests. The development of functional and communication skills is well embedded across the curriculum. Tutorial time at the the beginning of the day when learners arrive at college is not well planned; too much valuable time is wasted. The college organises a good variety of enrichment activities. Learners particularly enjoy their achievement through Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The specific needs of female learners are well considered.
15. Partnerships with local providers are satisfactory overall and those with local employers are good. Links with the local authorities are not yet established. Recently the Merseyside NHS has been able to provide valuable sexual awareness training for both staff and learners. Links with local education and training providers are underdeveloped. For example, although there have been links in the past, currently no learners are gaining access to general FE provision locally.
16. Care, guidance and support are good. Learners receive levels of care appropriate to their individual need. Speech and language support continues to be outstanding and enables learners to participate in all areas of college life. High quality and accessible risk-assessments are used effectively to enable learners to take increasing responsibility for themselves. Behaviour management is effective; staff successfully use diversion techniques to de-escalate situations. Support for learners with specific learning difficulties is adequately provided through the functional skills lessons. Careers education, advice and guidance are good and transition arrangements are effective. Tutorials are satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

Grade 4

17. Leadership and management are inadequate. The principal has been in post for one year and he has brought renewed energy, ambition and direction to the college but the rate of progress in some key areas has not been sufficient. Arden College has experienced a prolonged period of management turbulence; there have been four principals in the past three years and significant changes with Craegmoor managers with responsibility for the educational provision. However, the recently appointed college management team is fully committed to bringing about improvement. Lines of accountability are clearer and the strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained. The college is aware of the need to accelerate the pace of quality improvement by ensuring that all managers have the skills to identify and tackle swiftly areas of underperformance.

18. Although improvements have been introduced, the parent company has been slow in responding to the needs of the college; clear strategic targets and objectives have yet to be set and prioritised and Craegmoor does not provide sufficient challenge to raise the standard of the college's performance. Arden College managers complete detailed monthly audits of the provision for the parent company but these audits are not adequately focused on the key functions of a specialist FE college.
19. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of provision at all levels lack coherence. The quality assurance cycle includes recently developed key performance indicators which are appropriate for performance management but are not sufficiently focused on improving teaching and learning. Improvement planning has not been effective in removing the variable performance across curriculum areas in order to bring all lessons up to the standard of the best. Targets in the quality improvement plan, and in some cases timescales, are not precise or systematic enough to enable managers to measure the extent of any progress. The college recognises that the continued absence of a central management information system has impeded its ability to analyse the range of data and to produce frequent and accessible reports. Where data are collected, they are not always analysed in sufficient depth to be meaningful or to inform improvement planning effectively.
20. The self-assessment report is mainly accurate but underestimates the impact of the frequent changes of leadership and does not identify that strategic planning is underdeveloped and that lesson observation processes lack rigour; too many lessons are over graded. YPLA learner contracts are not adequately monitored. Opportunities for continuing professional development are satisfactory. Although a performance management system is now being implemented, the college managers who appraise staff have yet to receive adequate training for this role.
21. Operational management is adequate overall but the unstructured parts of the college day are not consistently well managed. Too much time is wasted at the start of the day and timetable constraints result in learners missing out on valuable learning opportunities in realistic settings, such as those offered by working in Arden Café during busy periods. Staff have responded well to the national 'Learning for Living and Work' strategy and are effectively preparing for changes in foundation learning.
22. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. Arden College has clear policies and rigorous checks for safeguarding its learners. A culture has been successfully created where staff and learners are strongly aware of safety. Reporting of complaints and incidents is thorough and appropriate action is taken. Staff are effectively trained in safeguarding and are clear about their responsibilities. The promotion of learner safety throughout the curriculum is good. Craegmoor is preparing well to implement fully the Independent Safeguarding Authority Vetting and Barring requirements in 2010.

23. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. An appropriate single equality scheme is in place but not all targets in the implementation plan are precise or meaningful. The monitoring and impact of actions taken to date have been limited. Learner achievement data are not rigorously monitored to help identify patterns of persistent under or overperformance over time. The few incidents of bullying, harassment or racist behaviour are tackled swiftly and effectively. There are high levels of respect between staff and learners. Staff are adequately informed about equality and diversity issues through their induction programme and on-going training opportunities. Whilst high quality displays around the college celebrate a range of cultural themes, the promotion of equality and diversity within lessons is uneven. Although some buildings are at the end of their useful life, the college has made reasonable adjustments to ensure that accommodation is accessible for all learners.
24. Engagement with learners is good. Both the college and Craegmoor have a strong track record of responsiveness to their learners. Speech and language therapy interventions are highly successful in enabling learners to contribute their views and ideas and influence decision-making bodies. Feedback and suggestions from learners, either through the 'Your Voice' groups or on an individual basis, are taken seriously and, wherever possible, the college responds swiftly.
25. Financial management is satisfactory, as is the deployment of resources to directly benefit the learners' experience. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

## Information about the inspection

26. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the YPLA, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
27. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires that learners and employers had recently completed at the request of the college. They also observed learning lessons, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the programme areas the college offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Arden College**

Learning types: FE full – courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners	64	64
Full-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2	
Quality of provision	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	4	4
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	4	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	4	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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