

Arden College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

18–20 June 2019

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Provision for learners with high needs Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Good	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers continue to foster strong partnerships with employers and the local community, resulting in high-quality external work placements and community activities that help students to develop effective work-related and social skills.
- All staff promote a culture of inclusion, respect and tolerance in which students enjoy their learning and feel safe.
- The standard of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Leaders and managers implement effective strategies to ensure continued improvement to teaching practices.
- Leaders and managers place high importance on the development of students' English and mathematical skills so that students can apply these skills correctly in real-life situations.
- Teachers gather accurate information about what students know and can do before they arrive at the college. This helps them to plan programmes and activities that are personalised and help most students to make good progress.
- Staff use effective communication strategies across all levels of learning to ensure that students understand fully what they need to do to make good progress.
- Staff support students with complex behavioural needs effectively to help them to recognise their anxieties and to develop strategies to manage their own behaviour successfully.
- The vast majority of students complete their courses successfully and progress to positive and sustainable next stages of their education, training and independence. Many achieve accredited qualifications that will be of benefit to them in the future.
- The discovery learning curriculum does not help students to develop greater independence and life skills appropriate to their age, needs, abilities and ambitions.
- Targets for many students are insufficiently challenging and do not help them to achieve the full potential of which they are capable.
- Students do not benefit from regular impartial careers information, advice and guidance to inform them of all the choices available to them when they leave the college and to raise their long-term ambitions.
- Managers' data does not provide them with clear and accurate information about students' achievement of accredited and non-accredited learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Arden College is located in Southport, Merseyside, and caters for both day and residential students. It was established approximately 30 years ago and provides specialist education and support for young people aged between 16 and 25 who have a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including autism spectrum condition. It is now owned by Priory Education and Children's Services (Priory), a private limited company that was incorporated in 2007 and provides education and services for young people in need of specialist support.
- Students are recruited mainly from north-west local authorities. Currently, 33 students attend the college. Of the 33 students, four are residential and the remainder attend daily. The vast majority of students are White British. The main teaching accommodation is in the town centre. The college has its own café, hairdressing salon and horticulture department.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of the discovery learning curriculum so that it helps the growing number of students with severe and complex needs to develop greater independence and life skills appropriate to their age, abilities and ambitions.
- Ensure that teachers set clear and individualised targets that link to students' individual education, health and care (EHC) plans, are sufficiently challenging, and help them to make even better progress from their starting points.
- Ensure that students benefit from regular impartial careers information, advice and guidance that help them to understand what choices are available to them when they leave the college, and to raise their long-term ambitions.
- Improve the quality and accuracy of data recording and monitoring systems to ensure that published data and college data are comparable and provide a clear oversight of students' achievements on both accredited and non-accredited learning programmes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, managers and Priory governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Since the previous inspection, they have improved the quality of the self-assessment report, which is now accurate and evaluative. However, the development plan does not evaluate the effectiveness of quality improvement actions sufficiently. A very small number of weaknesses identified at the previous inspection remain.
- Leaders and managers monitor the performance of staff closely through regular appraisal meetings, lesson observations and supervision activities. Through lesson observations, they check that classroom assistants ensure that students receive the appropriate level of support for their needs. Action plans following lesson observations are used in supervision reviews to help teachers and classroom assistants to improve their practice. As a result, leaders and managers have maintained the good standard of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection.
- Leaders and managers continue to foster highly effective partnership arrangements with employers and community organisations. These relationships provide good-quality placements and activities for students to extend their learning successfully outside the classroom. Partners are an integral part of college life. For example, they attend college events, present certificates and give wide-ranging support to students.
- Leaders and managers place a high priority on the development of students' English, mathematical and communication skills. Teachers integrate students' development of English and mathematics skilfully and seamlessly across most learning activities. Since the previous inspection, leaders have introduced an effective communication strategy that enables students to develop the communication skills that help them to learn. For example, most students understand what is said to them and can express their choices and ideas.
- Staff promote equality and celebrate diversity effectively across the provision. They promote a culture of inclusion, respect and tolerance in which students with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities enjoy their learning and feel safe. Students feel confident to express their likes and dislikes. Staff make appropriate adjustments to ensure that all students' needs are met, including dietary and cultural requirements.
- Leaders and managers use high-needs funding effectively to support students across their learning programmes. Students receive the support and resources they need to help them make good progress. Leaders and Priory governors have ambitious plans to refurbish the current college building to meet the needs of its students better. While architects' plans were available during the inspection, the start date of this work, although imminent, was unknown.
- The quality of the discovery learning curriculum still requires further improvement. While leaders and managers have reviewed the curriculum extensively since the previous inspection, further development is required to ensure that this curriculum is age appropriate and helps students to develop greater independence and life skills appropriate to their needs, abilities and ambitions.

The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements have improved since the previous inspection and are effective. Governors, who are senior leaders of the parent organisation, provide support networks for senior leaders (for example around safeguarding) and management that help them to share good practice and ask for guidance when necessary. However, governors acknowledge that they need to be more involved in shaping the strategic direction of the college.
- Newly appointed governors have good educational experience and expertise. They have established their governance roles quickly and effectively and work collaboratively with college leaders. Governors visit the college regularly and have a good understanding of the college's purpose and the needs of its students.
- Governors use their expertise and skills effectively to hold college leaders to account for the quality of the provision. College leaders benefit from the quality improvement support provided by the parent organisation. However, governors recognise that the reporting of the evaluation of quality improvement actions is not yet sufficiently developed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, managers and Priory governors ensure that incidents, referrals and concerns are dealt with thoroughly and quickly. Records are detailed and show what actions have been taken to protect students. Staff use a wide range of external agencies to respond swiftly and appropriately to individual safeguarding concerns. Leaders, managers and staff promote a strong culture of feeling safe and being safe in the college. Risk assessments relating to college and learning activities are thorough and pertinent to students' needs. Rigorous health and safety processes are in place to keep students, staff and visitors safe.
- Students learn successfully how to recognise danger and keep themselves safe, including online. The most able students achieve a short qualification in safeguarding. They can explain articulately what situations could cause them harm and how to identify them, for example through a stranger's body language. Staff provide safeguarding information for students with more complex needs using pictures and symbols to aid their understanding. Staff receive regular training and updates on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. All Priory governors have achieved a level 5 qualification in safeguarding.
- Leaders and managers carry out thorough and appropriate safe recruitment checks on all staff. Records are comprehensive and up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. They use further knowledge gained from staff development activities effectively to develop their skills and understanding of the diverse and often complex needs of the students they teach. Teachers tailor most lessons to suit students' individual needs and abilities. They use interesting and varied activities that motivate students to make at least the progress expected of them. At the end of lessons, students complete a summary worksheet that helps them to reflect on

what they have learned in the lesson, where the lesson took place and who they were with. As a result, most students recall their learning successfully.

- Support for students in lessons is effective. Classroom assistants are knowledgeable about the students they support. For example, when students struggle to identify new ideas and become anxious, classroom assistants refer to previous work that they have completed. This helps students to recall previous achievements and generate new ideas that they can incorporate into the new topic. In a small minority of instances, classroom assistants ask for an appropriate change of activity. Classroom assistants use questioning techniques effectively to check how well students understand the tasks that they complete and how they can improve the standard of their work.
- Managers and teachers assess what students know and can do accurately before they start their learning programmes at the college. They use students' EHC plans effectively to identify what students need to achieve for their next steps in education, work and/or independence. As a result, most students are placed on the appropriate course and at the right level for their needs and abilities. Teachers and classroom assistants use this information effectively to ensure that students achieve at least their expected outcomes.
- Students develop effective communication skills. They have confidence in using their skills to make choices, express their opinions, work with each other and socialise. For example, students with autism spectrum condition express that too much questioning causes them anxieties and request confidently that peers and staff refrain from asking too many questions. Other students progress from making simple choices through signing and symbols to engaging with staff in short conversations. The most able students explain how their communication skills have improved since starting at the college and that they now have a good circle of college friends.
- Teachers develop students' English and mathematical skills effectively. They use a wide range of interesting and relevant activities to enable most students to make good progress in these subjects. For example, the most able students write knowledgeably about government spending and identify confidently which aspects of this spending are most important to them, such as health, education, the environment and transport. In practical lessons, students follow both oral and written instructions confidently. For example, they recognise calendar dates and weigh ingredients accurately.
- Teachers do not set students personalised, meaningful and sufficiently challenging targets to help them to make even better progress. Leaders and managers recognise that target-setting needs to improve further, despite a significant number of staff development activities.
- The pace of activities in a few lessons does not match students' needs and abilities. For example, teachers do not give students with more complex needs enough time to process information or to complete tasks. Consequently, the activity moves on too quickly and students become demotivated.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students' behaviour is good. Students work collaboratively and effectively with staff and their peers. They follow instructions carefully, which enables them to cooperate with each other, participate fully in activities and prepare themselves for their next steps. Staff

support students with complex needs very successfully to manage their own behaviour and to minimise challenging situations. They know what causes them to become anxious or what triggers changes in their behaviour. Staff follow behaviour and support plans closely and de-escalate situations skilfully. Students learn to identify what causes them to change their behaviours and can often manage challenging situations independently.

- Students benefit from a wide range of high-quality work and community-based activities. Staff plan and review activities with external partners effectively and regularly. Consequently, students increase their vocational and independence skills through challenging, practical activities. For example, students work in libraries, national high-street stores, the botanical gardens and the college's café and hairdressing salon. College staff, employers and staff in community organisations encourage students to work as independently as possible. They value students' work and the contributions they make to their businesses and the community.
- Students learn about safe working practices, teamwork and employability skills effectively. Most students follow industry-standard health and safety practices. However, during the inspection, a very small number of students and support staff did not use the appropriate personal protective equipment in catering activities.
- Attendance and punctuality in lessons are good. In a few instances, where students stop attending lessons, staff work closely and effectively with external agencies to help them to re-engage with their learning programmes.
- Transition into college is well planned and highly individualised. Students benefit from transition meetings at their previous setting with college staff, meetings with their parents or carers and visits to the college. Leaders and managers receive information from students' previous settings that includes therapy needs, support from external agencies, behaviour support and EHC plan assessments. They use this information effectively to plan students' individual learning programmes.
- Arrangements to support students as they prepare to leave the college are coordinated effectively with external agencies. Some students continue to access the college and support once they leave, for example by continuing to play in the rock band. Leaders and managers show great care and consideration when managing arrangements for those students returning home to areas that are a significant distance away from the college. For example, they arrange for staff at the new setting to spend time getting to know the students at the college before the students leave.
- Students benefit from a broad range of enrichment activities. They contribute significantly to community and college events. They prepare goods to sell at events such as 'Party in the Park'. The college rock band performs successfully at community festivals. Students develop their teamwork skills, perseverance and resilience effectively through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.
- Students have a good understanding of how they can maintain a healthy lifestyle. They recognise the value of healthy eating and physical activity. They explore options such as how to promote their physical well-being, for example through swimming. Support for students' emotional well-being is effective and includes detailed support plans that help students to manage their anxieties and behaviours.
- Impartial careers information, advice and guidance are weak. Students do not meet with specialist and qualified careers advisers routinely. Students have regular tutorials in which

they review their progress against their long-term goals. However, these do not provide them with information about all the choices that are available to them after they leave the college.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Students continue to make good progress from their starting points across their learning programmes. This includes in communication, literacy, numeracy, and social, emotional and behavioural aspects. Most students complete their courses successfully. Many achieve accredited qualifications in areas that will be of benefit to them in the future, for example in horticulture, skills for work, catering, and health and safety.
- Students enjoy attending college. Many learn skills that they had not developed previously, such as making friends and learning to interact appropriately in groups. As a result, they improve their personal and social skills.
- Students progress to sustained and positive destinations. In 2017/18, the vast majority of students achieved their expected destinations and a few exceeded expectations, for example a very small minority progressed into supported living arrangements. All of the 12 students who are due to leave the college in July 2019 are on target to progress to their planned destinations.
- Leaders monitor the performance of different groups of students effectively. College data shows that there are no significant achievement gaps between any groups of students. While student numbers are small, leaders are fully aware of why individual students do not achieve fully or make the progress of which they are capable.
- Communication between the residential houses and the college is very well established and is effective. Staff share information appropriately and sensitively, and this actively and successfully promotes the welfare, well-being and achievements of residential students. Key workers from the residential houses support residential students in their lessons and college activities. This is reciprocated with college staff supporting students in their residential houses. As a result, support staff provide good levels of continuity between both settings. They identify and support individual students' needs or issues swiftly and effectively to help them to achieve.
- Published data and college data do not correlate. While the internal recording and monitoring processes are rigorous, internal college recording and monitoring systems require significant development to ensure that achievements for both accredited and non-accredited learning programmes are accurate, clear and comparable with published data.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131935
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16 to 25
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	33
Principal	Mark Musselle
Telephone number	01704 534433
Website	www.priorygroup.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	2	31	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	33							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Not applicable							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners, employers and staff; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the college.

Inspection team

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bernie White	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Young	Ofsted Inspector

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