

Short inspection of Arden College

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 January 2025

Outcome

Arden College continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Arden College is a specialist college for young people aged 16 to 25 years with complex barriers to learning, including autism and learning disabilities. The provision is based across two sites. The college is part of Aspris Children's Services Ltd (formally Priory Education Services Ltd). The college has experienced significant change over the previous four years, with a new senior leadership team, management structure and a new site. It has become a designated autism college.

At the time of the inspection, there were 52 students enrolled at the college. Students follow one of four phases. Phase 1 focuses on developing students' independence, phase 2 on students becoming active citizens, phase 3 on supporting students to gain employment and phase 4 on students aiming for further or higher education. There were 13 students on phase 1, 16 students on phase 2, 10 students on phase 3 and 13 students on phase 4. Eight students were residential students.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students enjoy attending the college. They learn in an environment where staff care about and nurture them. This helps them to deal with often significant traumatic experiences that prevented them from attending school. Students develop positive relationships with staff and see them as adults they can trust. All staff know and understand their students very well.

Students develop routines in safe and personalised spaces through which they build their resilience, confidence and tolerance of others. They receive effective support and make good use of the resources available to them, including the college's therapy dog, sensory rooms and movement breaks. These help them to manage their emotions in sessions and to participate fully in routine events such as annual reviews.

Tutors are well qualified and have extensive experience working with students with complex needs. They use these skills effectively to create fun learning activities that encourage students to participate in learning and remember what they have learned.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders, managers and tutors have a clear purpose for the pathways they provide. Staff create curriculums bespoke to individual students' needs and focus on learners' intended destinations. Most learners achieve goals they did not think possible such as living independently and gaining paid employment.

Tutors accurately assess what students can and cannot do when they enrol at the college. They create person-centred plans in which they record clear targets to help students to succeed. Tutors know what factors trigger students' negative behaviours, as well as their likes and dislikes. This helps tutors to adapt their teaching strategies and amend what they teach so students engage fully in learning.

Tutors ensure that they plan what they teach in an order that helps students build on their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. In phase 3, mathematics tutors use images and ideas that are familiar to students, such as dividing cake and pizza into slices to teach them about fractions. Once students understand concepts such as half and quarter, teachers move on to teach decimals.

Tutors and classroom assistants use a wide range of effective assessment methods to check students' understanding. They allow students sufficient time to process questions and do not intervene too quickly. Phase 1 students use their communication aids effectively in lessons to answer questions and demonstrate their ability to make choices.

Tutors and specialist therapists work closely together to help students participate in learning. Therapists help tutors to set appropriate communication targets. They provide staff with the strategies and skills they need to help students to achieve them. Staff help students communicate in a variety of different ways so that all students can express themselves and share their views and opinions.

Tutors skilfully tailor learning activities to help students develop their English and mathematical skills. This prepares students for their next steps such as shopping within a budget or completing job application forms accurately. However, using cartoon animals, such as cats and teddy bears, in a few phase 1 mathematics worksheets does not reflect the curriculum goal of preparing students for adulthood.

Students develop important skills that they need in their adult lives. They learn to manage money, engage in physical exercise to keep healthy, make informed choices and advocate for themselves. Students who follow accredited courses, such as in English, mathematics, digital and employability skills, achieve them very well.

Students are well prepared for their next steps. They receive effective careers advice and guidance that matches their needs and future goals. Careers staff have built strong relationships in the community with employers and work placement providers, who offer appropriate opportunities for students to explore job roles in

sectors that interest them. A few phase 1 students benefit from carrying out internal work placements where they learn how to follow instructions correctly and the importance of personal hygiene.

Leaders monitor the quality of their provision frequently. They have rectified the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, in a minority of lesson observations, managers do not identify teaching practices that need to be improved. Instead, they recognise the strengths expected of teachers such as having a good knowledge of students' needs and intended learning.

Leaders in the parent organisation have introduced a new approach to the governance of the college. At the time of the inspection, it was too soon to judge its effectiveness. While a few board members provide highly effective and frequent operational support to senior college leaders and staff, it is unclear who currently provides strategic leadership and how they hold college leaders accountable for their actions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Use age-appropriate images that reflect the purpose of the phase 1 curriculum.
- Focus quality improvement activities and action plans on the impact they have on improving the quality of education.
- Clarify the governance function for the college and identify who has the strategic oversight of its vision and strategy and how they hold leaders to account.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131935
Address	41 Church Road Banks Southport Merseyside PR9 8ET
Contact number	01704534433
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk/ardencollege
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Siobhan Partington
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 June 2019
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Arden College was judged to be good in June 2019.

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jacque Brown	His Majesty's Inspector

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