

Short inspection of Strathmore College

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 March 2025

Outcome

Strathmore College continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Strathmore College is a college for young people aged 16 to 25 who face significant barriers to education and training, including autism and other special educational needs and/or disabilities. The college provides academic and vocational training at its education centre in Stoke-on-Trent. The college is part of Aspris Children's Services Ltd (formally Priory Education Services Ltd).

At the time of the inspection, there were 54 learners enrolled at the college, all of whom had an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Learners have individualised programmes based on their primary need and follow one of three strands. The communication strand focusses on preparing for adulthood through the development of independence skills. The well-being strand supports learners to develop social and resilience skills. The employment strand develops learners' employability skills by participating in work experience, including supported internships. There were 19 learners on the communication strand, 24 on the well-being strand and 11 on the employment strand. Based on their individual interests and aspirations, some learners study more than one strand.

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

Learners enjoy studying at Strathmore College. They have the opportunity to study a range of subjects while developing their confidence and independent living skills. Learners study towards formal qualifications, such as in hospitality and catering, and participate in non-qualification activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Learners eagerly engage with local organisations to become active citizens and contribute to their community. For example, they have enthusiastically worked with a local engineering company, and in partnership designed, created and built a large public sculpture representing the diversity of Stoke-on-Trent. Learners actively raise money for charity and take part in enterprise projects, including making and selling festive gift cards.

Learners feel safe at college and appreciate the support they receive. They access therapeutic services appropriate to their needs, to help them understand and regulate their own behaviours.

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

Leaders have designed personalised curriculums based on learners' EHC plans and the outcomes of assessments of what learners know and can do when they start. Staff carefully focus on individual learners' needs and use this information effectively to enable learners to study a wide range of appropriate subjects and qualifications including GCSEs and A levels. Some learners also complete work-related certification, including Construction Skills Certification Scheme cards, which enables them to work on construction sites.

Leaders have recruited experienced teachers and external tutors to teach specialist subjects, such as art, music, and science. Teachers expertly demonstrate the skills and understanding they need to work with learners with high needs. As a result, learners rapidly acquire the new skills and knowledge they need to achieve their qualifications and progress to further study, paid or voluntary work or independent living.

Teachers carefully set increasingly complex targets to allow learners to extend and develop their knowledge and skills. For example, they encourage learners to use emotional words when writing poetry which expands their use of language, and the use of computer software to convert their sketches into digital art. However, in a few cases, learners cannot recall their targets or explain how the activities they are completing link to the skills and behaviours that they need for the future.

Staff support learners well, including working with qualified therapists to overcome their social anxieties and mental health difficulties. As a result, learners who found it extremely difficult to participate in social activities before they started college are now confident using public transport and shopping. However, on a few occasions, learning support assistants (LSAs) and teachers are too quick to speak for learners and do not allow them to express their thoughts and ideas independently.

Learners develop English and mathematics skills well. Teachers and LSAs help learners to understand technical language linked to their subjects. For example, in music, they use technical language such as iteration when writing lyrics. In their Duke of Edinburgh's Award studies, learners use grid references and mathematical calculations to plan routes and measure distances.

Leaders have improved the quality of careers advice and guidance. They have developed an ambitious employment strategy and employed two staff members to ensure all learners have individualised career goals and participate in work experiences and work-related activities. However, in a few cases, current work experiences are not ambitious for the learners, based on their career aspirations.

Leaders have faced considerable change over the past two years, including introducing new senior leaders and management structures. They have skilfully adapted the curriculum to meet the changing needs of new learners, many of whom have been out of education for some time. Managers have started to form connections with other education providers and healthcare professionals to enhance their ability to meet the diverse support needs of future learners.

Governors support managers well and are aware of their statutory duties. Through the college improvement plan, they hold leaders accountable for the strategic development and quality of the curriculum. Governors acknowledge that they need to strengthen and broaden their governance, particularly with regard to expertise in the further education and skills sector.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all learners recognise the skills, knowledge and behaviours they are learning and how they relate to their targets.
- Ensure that all staff members give learners time to answer questions independently and develop their own thoughts.
- Extend links with employers to broaden work experiences.
- Strengthen and widen governance expertise to offer support to leaders particularly with regard to the further education and skills sector.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132021
Address	Unit 7, The Imex Technology Park Bellringer Road Trentham Lakes South Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8LJ
Contact number	01782 647380
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Kate Ward
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	22 to 24 October 2019

Information about this inspection

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

The inspection team was assisted by the 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

Steve Kelly, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sharon Dowling

His Majesty's Inspector

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