

Inspection of Strathmore College

Inspection dates:

22–24 October 2019

Overall effectiveness**Good**

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Information about this provider

- Strathmore College is an independent specialist college located in Stoke-on-Trent. At the time of inspection, 35 learners were on programme. Most learners are aged 19 to 25, with nine aged 16 to 18. The college provides education for learners who have mild to severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The college has a number of learners with autistic spectrum disorder. The vast majority of learners have communication, speech and language difficulties. An increasing number of learners who have previously not been in education, employment or training enrol at the college. The college is part of the Priory Group.

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

Learners benefit from a very calm and inclusive learning environment. Learners feel safe and respected as individuals. Tutors place learners' educational and support needs and interests at the centre of their curriculum design.

Learners enjoy their time at college. Staff provide extensive support for learners who have been out of education to improve their motivation, manage their behaviour and improve their attendance. Learners quickly increase the amount of time they spend at college. As a result, learners' attendance has significantly improved, and is now high.

Most learners benefit from a well-planned curriculum. Tutors and staff carefully plan activities outside of the college to improve learners' health and well-being. Learners develop the skills and knowledge they need to make friends, become independent and access the world of work.

Learners who attend work placements quickly develop the skills and knowledge they need at work. They enjoy the recognition they gain from making a valuable contribution in the workplace. An increasing proportion of learners move on into voluntary or paid work when they complete their programme.

Learners receive extensive support throughout their time at college. Highly qualified therapy staff carefully plan support for learners. Learners quickly improve their self-esteem, confidence and resilience. Learners aged 19 to 25 achieve well on their courses.

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

Leaders, governors and staff have high expectations for learners. Leaders and managers carefully plan curriculum pathways to improve learners' skills and knowledge, and to ensure they achieve their long-term goals. Leaders have developed extensive employer partnerships to provide meaningful work-related training for learners. As a result, most learners make expected or exceptional progress during their time at college.

Strong leadership and governance have led to rapid improvements since the previous inspection. Managers have undertaken a detailed analysis of learners' outcomes and the skills of tutors. They provide staff with extensive training and support. As a result, most learners benefit from high-quality education, training and support.

Most tutors and staff are highly skilled in identifying the gaps in learners' skills and knowledge at the start of their programme. They use their subject expertise well to plan step-by-step learning activities. Therapy staff undertake detailed assessments for learners who have complex and behavioural needs.

These staff successfully work with tutors to ensure that learners can access learning activities. Learners quickly improve their skills in communicating their feelings to others and managing their own behaviour. As a result, learners manage their anxiety levels well. They become calm and respectful of other learners and staff.

Tutors and job coaches are skilful in planning learners' skills development in practical sessions and in the workplace. Job coaches successfully break down challenging work tasks for learners on placements and internships. Learners working in warehousing quickly develop their skills and become effective in their job roles. Job coaches swiftly reduce support for learners once they are competent at work. As a result, employers extend learners' working hours. Learners become independent and valued members of the workforce.

Tutors and staff work closely with parents and carers to share the approaches they use to improve learners' skills and knowledge. Tutors have developed the curriculum to enable most learners to develop their independent living skills. Learners are able to use money to shop, budget, and can cook basic meals. Tutors share the skills which learners have acquired with carers in residential settings. Staff support learners to continue to improve their skills outside of college. As a result, the majority of learners begin to use the skills they have learned at home.

Staff have developed a comprehensive curriculum to ensure that learners know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They develop learners' understanding of how to work in teams and make friends. They support learners to build friendships and positive relationships. Staff sensitively work with learners to improve their understanding of sexual health and consent in relationships. As a result, learners develop positive relationships with others in preparation for adulthood.

Staff provide learners with well-planned guidance and support to enable young people and their families to plan for their next steps. Learners have good access to skilled and experienced careers advisers. Managers closely monitor the destinations of learners. They plan the curriculum to support learners to develop the skills they will require in adulthood. An increasing number of learners move on into supported living and work when they complete their course.

Tutors and staff extensively use resources with symbols to support the written word for learners. Managers and staff have developed resources to improve learners' understanding of college policies. However, tutors do not plan well enough the use of symbols used in these resources. As a result, learners do not improve their understanding of these key messages.

A small minority of tutors do not use assessment well enough to identify what learners know as a result of their teaching. Too often, tutors focus on the completion of an activity, and not on the new skills and knowledge which learners have developed. They do not use the information from assessment well enough to plan learners' next steps in sessions, and to ensure that learners can do more. As a result, a small minority of learners make slower progress than their peers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff know their learners well. Staff, including the designated safeguarding lead, are well trained and experienced. Staff have a good understanding of how to identify and report their concerns and maintain comprehensive records.

Staff work well with external partners to develop their understanding of the risks posed for the most vulnerable learners. They manage learners' risk assessments well. Learners have a good understanding of health and safety at work. Most learners have a good understanding of the risks posed from radicalisation and extremism, and how to keep themselves safe. As a result, learners feel safe in college and the workplace.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Managers should ensure that all tutors use assessment of learners' skills and knowledge to inform the effectiveness of their teaching and subsequently their planning for teaching and training.
- Managers should ensure that tutors select the symbols for use in resources to enable learners to improve their understanding of key messages.

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.priorychildrensservices.co.uk/find-a-location/strathmore-college-stoke-on-trent
Principal/CEO	Kate Ward
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	5–6 June and 13–14 June 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality lead, teaching, learning and assessment, 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 observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Andrea Dill-Russell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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