



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Priory College South Wales
Pontypool Campus
Coleg Gwent
Blaendare Road
Pontypool
Torfaen
NP4 5YE**

Date of inspection: January 2017

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

Priory College South Wales is an independent specialist college, situated within the Pontypool campus of Coleg Gwent, the further education institution (FEI) serving south-east Wales. Priory College South Wales was established in 2010 and is administered by Priory Education Services, which is part of the wider Priory Group.

The college offers day placements for young adults aged 16 to 25 with Asperger Syndrome, autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and associated conditions. There are currently 24 learners at the college. Most learners come to the college from the local area.

Around a quarter of learners access education 'in-house', exclusively at the college, and follow pre-entry to level 2 courses, including independent living skills. The other learners follow full-time courses at Coleg Gwent from a range of programmes from entry level through to level 3. All learners, irrespective of their main place of study, receive both in-class and additional support by Priory College staff.

There have been significant changes to the leadership and management of the college, following the recent departure of the vice principal and principal. There are currently interim arrangements in place, while a restructure takes place. At the time of inspection, a business manager and interim executive principal were managing the college.

This is the first full inspection of the college.

Summary

The provider's current performance	Good
The provider's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Current performance at Priory College South Wales is good because:

- Nearly all learners engage well in their learning and make good progress
- Nearly all learners achieve a successful transition to their chosen destination
- The college provides a calm and supportive environment, which helps learners to develop their confidence and self-esteem
- Staff work very well with learners to recognise their emotions and manage their behaviour
- Partnership with the further education institution is extremely effective

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement at Priory College South Wales are good because:

- The senior leadership team have a clear vision for the future
- Senior leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of the strengths of the college and areas that require review or development
- There is strong and effective leadership for the daily running of the college
- Staff development is a high priority

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that all individual learner plan targets are specific to learners' needs
- R2 Review the in-house curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners
- R3 Improve self-assessment processes and ensure that they inform the college improvement plan
- R4 Develop the role of learning support staff within the college to use their skills and expertise more effectively

What happens next?

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current quality development plan to show what action the college intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents at the college.

Estyn will monitor progress against the recommendations at the next annual monitoring inspection.

Estyn will invite the college to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

When they start at the college, many of the learners have missed periods of education and lack confidence in their abilities. However, during their time at the college, nearly all learn develop effective strategies to cope with their difficulties and make good progress.

It is not possible to compare the college's performance with national averages, as there is no benchmark data available. Learners' attainment and achievement are judged on an individual basis.

Nearly all learners engage well in their learning. They listen attentively to questions and develop their speaking skills in line with their individual needs. Many learners overcome their initial anxiety and gain in confidence when answering questions. These learners express their opinions readily. A few develop strategies to help them stand up in front of a class and give presentations. A few take part in class discussions, although for many learners this is a significant challenge.

Many learners develop their thinking skills well. For example, in cookery classes they consider the best way to cook eggs for a healthy option or decide the most appropriate method of food storage.

Most learners understand and use subject specific vocabulary appropriately, for example when talking about digital art and animation. A majority of learners are able to extract information from texts and answer questions correctly. They write for a range of purposes, for example writing a letter to a local business and producing a college newsletter. A minority develop their extended writing skills well. However, at times, they rely too much on copying information from the internet rather than producing their own work.

Learners generally use accurate spelling and punctuation, especially when they focus well on their work. A few make corrections as they redraft their work, particularly when they use information and communication technology (ICT) to produce a final version. A few develop useful strategies to check their spelling, for example by using a dictionary, a word book or a mobile device.

Many learners improve their numeracy skills well and apply these to a range of contexts. For example, they calculate the cost of their shopping and use bus timetables to calculate arrival and departure times.

Nearly all learners use ICT confidently to research, redraft their work and produce information leaflets and posters.

Around a quarter of learners take part in voluntary work with local charities. For example, they help out in a shop and animal rescue centre. This helps them develop

important skills that they will need in future life. A few learners gain an understanding of the world of work through work experience placements with local businesses and charities.

Over the past two years, all learners have left with one or more qualifications. The learners attending full-time courses in the FEI, who are supported by Priory College staff, achieve a range of qualifications including the Welsh Baccalaureate and BTECs in creative media, art and design and ICT. Nearly all learners achieve a successful transition to their chosen destination.

Over the past two years, around half the leavers remained in education, while a few went into employment. A few other learners went on to do voluntary work and a few moved into supported living.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all learners attend college regularly. For a few learners who did not engage well in education prior to starting at the college, this is an important achievement. Nearly all learners are prompt to sessions, settle quickly to task and engage well.

On entry to the college, most of the learners experience high anxiety. Over time, and with support, they learn to deal with their anxieties and gain confidence. All learners feel safe in college and feel that the college deals well with bullying. They know whom to turn to if they have a problem.

Most learners have a clear understanding of internet safety and know how to keep themselves safe on-line. They understand the importance of not talking to strangers or using their real name in chat rooms.

The majority of learners take up appropriate opportunities for physical activities offered by the college, such as walking, gym fitness and golf. Most learners are able to identify healthy options, plan meals accordingly and explain why these options are healthy.

Most learners develop their social skills well. They socialise with their peers at breaktimes and are courteous to each other and staff. They develop skills to help them to interact with people they do not know well and this enables them to access a variety of learning experiences effectively. They develop confidence in using the full range of facilities at the FEI, including the learning resource centre and restaurant.

Nearly all learners make a valuable contribution to the decision making process through learner questionnaires and the student council. One learner represents his peers confidently as a class representative in the FEI.

All learners develop useful independence skills. They learn important life skills such as travelling on a bus, interacting with the public and buying items in shops and cafés.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Adequate

All learners benefit from a well-balanced programme of learning experiences, including accredited academic and vocational courses and independent living skills sessions and personal therapies delivered by Priory College. Independent living skills sessions enable learners to develop important skills such as handling money, using public transport and ordering food independently. Where necessary, timetables are modified to help motivate a very few in-house learners who are finding it hard to engage. However, the accredited courses delivered by the college for these learners do not link well enough to their future destinations.

The college provides an appropriate range of opportunities for learners to enjoy a range of sporting activities, for example gym, walks, badminton and golf. Weekly activity clubs offer a range of craft activities, for example glass painting and nail art. These enable learners to develop new skills while socialising with their peers.

The college provides useful opportunities for learners to develop their social skills and knowledge of the world of work through volunteering at local charity shops and an animal rescue centre. Learners have opportunities to fund raise by selling items at the college fête and taking part in a sponsored walk. A homelessness project gives them an awareness of how they can help others through collecting toiletries and food.

Within the in-house provision, literacy, numeracy and ICT are incorporated into topic work. This enables learners to develop their skills in a meaningful and interesting way within these sessions. However, planning for the co-ordination of skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. Although there are opportunities for learners to practise their skills during activities such as shopping and cooking, overall opportunities to develop these skills in a range of relevant contexts are limited. In-house learners have individual literacy, numeracy and ICT targets. A few of these are specific and link well to the learners' assessed needs. However, many relate to the completion of course units and do not address learners' individual needs well enough.

Teaching: Good

Tutors and learning support workers (LSWs) have a clear understanding of the learners' needs. They provide frequent praise and encouragement and develop a relationship of trust with the learners. As a result, all learners gain in confidence and make progress in their engagement and learning.

Tutors plan their lessons carefully. They plan their teaching around topics that are relevant to the learners' interests and this helps to maintain their interest and motivation. They make effective use of ICT in their lessons to encourage learners to develop a wide range of research and presentation skills.

Where teaching is most effective, varied activities and resources maintain learners' interest over an extended period of time. Tutors and LSWs give very clear

instructions and explanations and allow learners time to think before answering questions. However, in a minority of lessons, LSWs do too much for the learners. This prevents learners from developing their independence skills.

The college carries out useful baseline assessments in literacy, numeracy, communication and ICT and tracks the progress of individuals and groups of learners regularly. Recently, managers have introduced a rating system, which indicates when targets have been achieved. This enables them to monitor the progress of learners more easily.

Staff provide helpful verbal feedback to learners during lessons and other activities. Learners are also involved in assessing their own progress through regular discussion with staff. However, written feedback in lessons does not show learners clearly enough what they need to do to improve their work.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The care, support and guidance of learners are good and have a positive impact on the standards and wellbeing of learners. All staff understand the individual needs of the learners well. They provide continual support and encouragement, and this helps learners to manage their anxieties and become more confident.

The college has effective processes for identifying learners' additional learning needs and for putting support strategies in place to meet these needs. The speech and language therapist and ASD lead have input into valuable new student transition packs. These packs provide helpful support strategies for use by staff. The strategies are reviewed regularly by tutors, LSWs, the speech and language therapists and the learners to make sure they are relevant and effective in supporting the learner.

The college works very well with learners to help them recognise their own emotions and learn strategies to manage their own behaviour. Learners are able to describe their emotions and identify different strategies to help them overcome their difficulties.

The personal and social education curriculum covers an appropriate range of topics to help learners stay safe. These include sex and relationships education, anti-bullying and internet safety.

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

The college has a positive and inclusive ethos that promotes equality and diversity effectively. This ethos is supported well by a range of appropriate policies. All learners have equal access to the curriculum.

The college provides a calm and supportive environment, which enables learners to grow in confidence and self-esteem. Classrooms are spacious and decorated thoughtfully to provide a suitable learning environment where learners can concentrate on their studies.

The college provides a suitable range of vocational and social areas including a large kitchen and common room. These areas enable learners to develop very important social skills. The college undertakes a sensory audit on a termly basis to ensure that the environment meets the needs of current learners.

The positioning of the college allows for a smooth transition into the FEI. All learners have beneficial opportunities to use the facilities of the FEI, including the library and canteen.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

Leaders and managers at all levels of the college promote a very caring and welcoming ethos. This has a very positive impact on the morale at the college and provides learners with a secure environment where they feel valued.

The senior leadership team have a vision for the future of the college that plans aptly for the sustainability of the provision and the changing needs of the learners. The senior team are clear in the outcomes and provision they expect. They set an appropriate strategic direction with a focus on the needs of the learners, and provide strong leadership for the daily running of the college. Senior leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of the strengths of the college and the areas that require review or development.

Staff at all levels of the college have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities. There are well-established arrangements for performance management. Observations of teachers and learning support workers are an established practice and these result in relevant feedback and targets for development.

Communication at the college is generally effective. There is a planned schedule for meetings at all levels and these have an appropriate focus on the learners' progress and wellbeing. Where minutes are used to record meetings, these are well presented with clear actions.

College leaders are beginning to use data well to display learner achievements in an easy to read format. The college is able to demonstrate learner outcomes, learner retention and learner destinations appropriately. However, the use of data to inform improvement planning is only at an early stage of development.

The college has a range of policies that are largely effective in supporting its work and provision. Most policies are reviewed at appropriate intervals. However, a very few policies are not sufficiently clear in their content or not specific enough to the context of Priory College South Wales.

The company director of education and the college governance quality improvement lead are well informed about the work of the college and provide appropriate actions and challenge. They visit the college on a regular basis and take an active interest in learners and staff.

Improving quality: Adequate

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development at the college. Over the last few years, in general, the college has improved the quality of its self-assessment report. It is now concise, has clear references to aspects of data and provides an overview of the work of the college. However, in a few parts the report is overly positive and not sufficiently evaluative. In particular, it does not identify areas for improvement that can be used to inform the college improvement plan.

Senior leaders have used their personal knowledge of the provision to develop the college improvement plan. The plan has relevant and appropriate targets that have been considered well. Actions for improvement are clear, success criteria is appropriate and each action has a realistic achievement date and nominates a responsible person.

The college has established secure practices to seek the opinions of all stakeholders. They use a wide range of relevant questionnaires to establish the views of learners. These are learner friendly and in accessible formats. In addition, the college collects the views of staff at the college and teachers at the FEI. Outcomes of the questionnaires are collated efficiently for ease of reference. However, the college does not use this information to assess its strengths and areas for development or to inform the college improvement plan.

The college does not have robust enough arrangements for reviewing and analysing the effectiveness of the work of the college. Planning for course reviews and evaluation of provision as part of the self-assessment process is underdeveloped. Although staff have an awareness of the self-assessment report, they do not have sufficient opportunity to make a contribution to the process.

The college has been slow to address the recommendations from the annual monitoring visits in 2014 and 2015. Many of the recommendations are still outstanding.

Partnership working: Excellent

The college has an extremely strong partnership with the local FEI, with a very clear understanding and culture of collaboration between the partners. They have highly effective planning arrangements for working together to ensure that there are relevant and appropriate opportunities for learners to be successful in completing their courses.

Communication between the partners is frequent and effective. The Priory College business manager meets monthly with the FEI institution learning support manager to discuss issues and track learner needs and progress. This robust joint approach to meeting learner needs has resulted in Priory College learning support workers supporting learners very well under the supervision of the FEI teachers. College staff provide the FEI with useful advice and guidance, as requested, to help them support their own learners.

The college has an effective partnership with Careers Wales. This allows the college to offer learners a smooth transition from their previous providers. The partnership provides learners with useful opportunities for careers advice and guidance.

Partnerships with parents and carers are well established. There are regular reviews of learners' progress and wellbeing, and clear procedures for contacting parents between the formal reviews to address any issues that occur. Overall, parents are kept well-informed.

The college has developed appropriate partnerships to provide learners with access to work-related experience in voluntary, retail and commercial settings.

Resource management: Good

The college manages its resources well. Learning resources are up-to-date and relevant to the learners. There is a suitable range of technology and resources to provide a modern learning environment and to deliver the curriculum effectively.

The college business manager demonstrates a very sound understanding of the college budget and maintains an appropriate control on college spending to make sure the college can meet its obligations to learners. There is a very clear line of accountability to the education director and governance.

The college deploys learning support workers effectively to meet the needs of the learners on courses within the FEI. However, deployment of support staff to the in-house provision at the college is not consistently appropriate. This means that a few staff are under-utilised and the college is not always able to make best use of expertise and experience.

Staff development is a high priority at the college and all staff have a range of opportunities to attend courses and take qualifications. Staff development is tracked and recorded carefully and records state very clearly when update training is due.

The college provides value for money for its learners.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

The number of responses received was fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Responses to parent questionnaires

The number of responses received was fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Caroline Rees	Reporting Inspector
Gill Sims	Team Inspector
Lynne Ninnis	Peer Inspector
Kath Lawler	Nominee