



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

A report on

Beechwood College

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Beechwood College

Beechwood College is an independent specialist college and care home, situated in Sully in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is owned by Beechwood Court Ltd, which is part of Iris Care Group under the ownership of Ancala partners.

The college offers day and residential placements to learners aged 16 years and over who have learning disabilities and who may have needs associated with autistic spectrum conditions.

The principal leads a team of lecturers and learning support assistants and has responsibility for the provision and delivery of all education programmes. The college's strategic leadership team includes the principal, assistant principal, the general manager, the care homes' service lead and the clinical lead.

There are currently 55 learners on the roll of the college, of whom 42 are young men and 13 are young women. Of these, 18 learners are funded directly by Welsh Government, and 37 learners are funded by social services and health authorities from a wide range of local authorities across England and Wales.

The college's last core inspection was in March 2023.

Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 77 inspection.

Main findings

Strengths

The college provides a flexible curriculum, which matches the interests and future needs of learners well. The curriculum has recently been strengthened in response to learner feedback to include photography and engineering.

During their time at college, many learners make secure progress towards their individual targets. Learner progress in independence, physical and thinking skills are a notable strength. For example, when constructing transformer toys from 3D-printed components, learners select and use a variety of tools effectively, and give highly effective evaluations of the production process using accurate technical vocabulary.

Tutors plan engaging sessions, which are well-matched to the needs, interests and next steps of learners. In the most effective sessions, learners work at an appropriate pace and mirror the enthusiasm of their tutor.

The college's approach to developing independent living skills is effective. Over time, learners learn how to use public transport, budget and cook simple meals.

Nearly all learners behave well in sessions and around the college in line with their needs and abilities. Over time, they develop important skills to self-regulate, for example asking for a movement break when they feel overwhelmed. In sessions observed during this visit, most learners returned swiftly to their work when using these strategies.

Leaders have established a committed staff team. Staff develop positive relationships with learners based on a strong understanding of their emotional needs and interests.

Areas for development

The college has reviewed the staffing levels of each individual learner to ensure that they are able to work as independently as possible. However, in a few sessions the quality of learning support is too variable.

Many recent positive changes are newly implemented. It is too early to fully evaluate the impact of all initiatives on the learning and well-being of learners.

Recommendations

The college should:

- R1 Clarify the roles and responsibilities of classroom support staff to maximise their impact on learners' progress
- R2 Embed the newly established quality assurance processes and evaluate the impact on learning and well-being

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Respond to the issues raised in the well-being letter

Since the time of the core inspection, leaders have responded suitably to the issues raised in the well-being letter.

College policies now provide clear guidance to staff on how to report concerns internally and externally. These procedures are well understood by the staff team who are confident in how to report and escalate any issues. In addition, the college has strengthened its approach to safer recruitment with the appointment of a member of staff who oversees all overseas checks for new staff.

R2. Improve attendance

Since the time of the core inspection, leaders have made a number of beneficial changes at the college to improve learner attendance. For example, they have strengthened their approach to the evaluation of this information and how it is shared with the wider education, clinical and residential teams.

In addition, leaders use this linked up working to develop an individualised approach to improving the attendance of those learners who struggle to attend. Further, there have been changes to timetabling arrangements at a college-wide level to support improved engagement.

Many of these changes are newly established and leaders have identified that although there have been improvements in the attendance of learners at the college, this is an ongoing area for improvement.

R3. Ensure that tracking systems provide leaders with a clear picture of the progress learners make over time

The college has made good progress against this recommendation. Leaders are beginning to embed a strategic approach to reviewing tracking systems and now use this information to evaluate the impact on learner progress over time.

Tutors track individual learner progress and review short and long-term targets through the individual learner plan (ILP). These plans identify worthwhile targets to support learners making progress in a range of skills.

Leaders at the college use this information to support tutors to plan a wide range of valuable opportunities. This information is shared by all staff, including staff from within the residential homes and clinical staff. As a result, the college improves the support learners receive, and plans activities to meet their targets. However, it is too early to evaluate the long-term impact of this.

R4. Strengthen the strategic approach to planning for PSHE

The college has strengthened its strategic planning for PSHE and now has a clear vision for delivery. In partnership with other staff, the newly appointed curriculum lead

has developed a detailed and appropriate strategic plan for the college including delivery, resourcing and tracking. They have mapped a suitable set of learning outcomes and experiences against the college's curriculum, identifying both existing strong practice and desired improvements.

In parallel, the curriculum lead has prioritised the delivery of targeted professional learning for staff regarding PSHE delivery. These plans, however, are in the very early stages of implementation and their effectiveness in improving outcomes for learners cannot yet be evaluated.

R5. Strengthen the quality of strategic leadership and procedures for improvement planning

Leaders have established a range of valuable new systems to strengthen the college's approach to improvement planning. They have restructured staffing at the college and introduced new roles, including lead practitioners and a vocational manager. As a result, staff are developing a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities across the college.

Links with the senior leadership team of the parent organisation have been strengthened. For example, directors and the responsible individual for the college complete suitable learning walks as part of their regular visits. As a result, leaders benefit from appropriate support and challenge.

In addition, leaders now develop helpful local policies to guide the work of the college. Further, links with the residential team have been strengthened. Much of this work is newly established and it is too soon to fully evaluate its impact.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (<https://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

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

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