



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

A report on

Coleg Plas Dwbl

Date of inspection: February 2022

by

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

About Coleg Plas Dwbl

Coleg Plas Dwbl, which is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust Group, opened in September 2011. It is a residential and day independent specialist college for young people with a range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and social and emotional behavioural difficulties.

The college is situated on a farm at the base of the Preseli mountains in Pembrokeshire. The land consists of pasture, woodland and extensive gardens for horticulture. There are currently 11 learners aged 16 to 25 years attending the college. Of these, nine learners have residential placements, and two attend as day learners. Many learners are placed by Welsh local authorities with a few placed by local authorities in England. The majority of learners live in the college's residential houses situated in local villages.

The college bases its educational philosophy on the founding principles of the philosopher and scientist Rudolph Steiner. It offers a practical skills therapeutic education curriculum, which gives learners the opportunity to learn through real-life activities. These activities include a wide range of practical sessions in the workshop, the forge, the farm and the kitchen.

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has appointed a new principal and re-organised its leadership team. The leadership team is supported by eight tutors, around 20 support staff, a counsellor, and a speech and language therapist.

The last full inspection of the college was in May 2015. The college's last monitoring visit was in October 2019.

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

Main findings

Strengths

The college offers worthwhile opportunities for learners to develop their practical skills and independence through purposeful tasks in a range of realistic contexts. For example, in the forge learners make coat hooks and door handles, on the farm they collect eggs, and in the garden they grow food to be used in the college kitchen and residential homes. Tutors manage risks associated with the workplace carefully and learners develop a strong understanding of relevant health and safety considerations.

Since their appointment in summer 2021, the principal and assistant principal have undertaken a comprehensive review of the college's provision. They have taken appropriate action in a number of important areas to improve the provision at the college. This includes actions to address areas of safeguarding and to improve the safety and wellbeing of learners. For example, they have reviewed the college's arrangements for the initial assessment of learners to ensure that placements are suitable.

The new senior leadership team has a clear sense of the college's strengths and areas for development. They are developing a shared vision for the future of the college. However, many initiatives are at an early stage of implementation, and it is too soon to evaluate their impact.

Areas for development

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has experienced a period of significant disruption to the management and strategic leadership of the college. This includes a period of time without a principal and when oversight of the college was provided by external staff from Ruskin Mill Trust. This hiatus, together with the challenges provided over the period of the pandemic, has limited or undone much of the progress the college made against previous recommendations left on recent monitoring visits. Overall, the oversight, support and challenge provided by Ruskin Mill Trust during this period failed to maintain acceptable standards of provision in important areas of learning and learners' wellbeing.

Tutors plan worthwhile tasks and activities for learners. These tasks help to develop learners' understanding of the processes associated with particular work or learning areas. However, tutors' planning does not address sufficiently the wider range of skills that learners need to support their progress, including literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Tutors do not plan well enough for the progressive development of these skills.

The college is in the process of reviewing its systems for recording and evidencing progress against learners' individual targets. It has begun to implement systems to ensure that tutors' planning includes targets in the session that relate to learners' long and medium-term goals. However, this work is at a very early stage. In addition, tutors' feedback does not identify clearly enough the progress learners make in sessions and what they need to do to improve their work.

Since the last visit, the college has reviewed its provision to meet the therapeutic and specialist needs of learners. Ruskin Mill Trust has provided nursing support when this has been required to advise on individual learners' medical and self-care needs. However, the specialist provision the college itself makes to support learners' complex needs is underdeveloped. As a result, many learners continue to rely on support provided by clinical teams within their placing authority and local health board to provide ongoing guidance to meet their specialist needs even after they have joined the college. In addition, the use of behaviour support plans and communication strategies is at a very early stage.

Formal processes to evaluate and quality assure the work of the college are at an early stage of development. They do not link well enough to strategic improvement planning. Self-evaluation processes do not involve a wide enough range of stakeholders.

Recommendations

- R1 Ruskin Mill Trust to implement robust quality assurance systems to support and challenge the new leadership team at the college
- R2 Strengthen the planning for and assessment of pupils' wider skills, including literacy, numeracy and ICT, across the curriculum
- R3 Ensure that learners have appropriate access to relevant specialist support to meet their learning and wellbeing needs, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and behavioural support
- R4 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning processes and ensure that these draw on a relevant range of first-hand evidence and stakeholder engagement activities

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1 Ensure that improvement planning takes account of the college's evaluation of its strengths and key areas to develop

Since their appointment, the principal and assistant principal have identified a wide range of priorities for improvement based on their assessment of standards of learners' safety, learning and wellbeing. They have begun to implement relevant actions to address the most important areas for improvement.

Formal planning documents to capture the most important areas of development for the college are still at an early stage. The college development plan sets out general priorities that correspond to each aspect of the college's work. It includes more detailed targets for improvement that broadly reflect the comprehensive review of provision undertaken by leaders.

In many cases, priorities included in the plan take suitable account of areas for development identified in the college's self-evaluation report. In a few cases, important areas for development identified in the college's self-evaluation are not identified in the plan. Overall, targets for improvement do not identify precisely enough what needs to be improved or focus clearly enough on the link between improving teaching and improving outcomes for learners. In many cases, the time frame allocated to achieve actions is too short. In addition, the plan does not refer to the level of cost and other resources required to achieve the action. As a result, the college development plan is of limited effectiveness as an improvement tool.

In addition to the college development plan, a service improvement plan outlines key areas for improvement across the organisation as a whole, including the residential settings. However, the service improvement plan does not make sufficient reference to priorities set out in the college development plan. Overall, processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning are not co-ordinated well enough

R2 Implement behaviour support strategies for all learners who require them to maximise progress and wellbeing in sessions

Since the last visit the college has made beneficial changes to its admission processes to ensure the suitability of learners' placements. As a result, the number of incidences of challenging behaviour and physical interventions has reduced significantly, and the atmosphere in sessions and around the college is calm.

Leaders have begun to develop behaviour support plans that detail the strategies and support needed to promote good behaviour. This initiative is at an early stage, and the quality and format of these plans are too variable. Furthermore, there are no systems in place to ensure that all staff are using behaviour support strategies appropriately and consistently.

A few learners display behaviours related to non-engagement and non-attendance. The systems and processes for monitoring the progress of this group of learners are new in place and it is too soon to evaluate their impact

Copies of the report

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

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