



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

A report on

Pengwern College

Date of inspection: February 2022

by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Pengwern College

Cambian Pengwern College is an independent specialist college situated in a rural location in Rhuddlan, north Wales. Since March 2019, the college has been owned by CareTech Holdings PLC.

The college is registered to provide education for up to 60 learners aged 16 to 25 years with moderate to profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical difficulties and autistic spectrum condition. Nearly all have a learning and skills plan or education, health and care plan.

There are currently 46 learners attending the college. The majority of learners are funded by the Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales; a minority are placed by local authorities in England. Around half have residential placements and around half attend as day learners.

Since the last monitoring visit in July 2019, there have been changes in the senior management team at the college. There have been several principals with the current post holder taking up position, initially on an interim basis in July 2021, and substantially from January 2022. The assistant principal was appointed in September 2021 and has worked at the college since September 2017.

The principal oversees all aspects of the college, including the educational, residential and estates management. The assistant principal has responsibility for the day-to-day running of education provision and is supported by a team of around 12 tutors and 25 learning support workers (LSWs). These staff support learners who attend the college on a day basis. Further staff from the care homes attached to the college support residential learners in their lessons. A clinical team provides speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and nursing care to support learners at the college.

The curriculum provides opportunities for learners to develop their skills within one of two pathways: exploring work and exploring independence. Each learner has an individual learning programme with access to accredited courses, work-related learning, independent life skills and enrichment activities.

The last core inspection of the college was in October 2014. The college's last monitoring visit was in July 2019.

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

Main findings

Strengths

Many learners participate well in lessons. They understand and follow routines appropriately and work positively with their peers to complete tasks independently or as part of a group. For example, they collaborate enthusiastically to perform the Pengwern College song in a music session, or to check the health of guinea pigs in their animal care session. They make valuable progress in developing their confidence and independence across a worthwhile range of learning experiences.

The college provides a calm, supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the wellbeing of its learners effectively. Tutors plan engaging and meaningful activities, which they adapt carefully to meet the wide range of needs within the classroom and across the college. For example, they deploy specialist equipment to enable all learners to participate as independently as possible to complete common tasks.

The assistant principal has provided resilient and stable leadership during a time of great challenge and successive changes in the overall leadership of the college to maintain the safety of learners and staff at the college. The education team as a whole has shown high levels of commitment to adapt their practice thoughtfully and flexibly to best meet the needs of learners throughout this period.

Areas for development

Over the last four years, there have been four changes to the position of principal at the college. These changes, together with the challenge of managing the college during the pandemic, have had a negative impact on the strategic leadership of the college. Self-evaluation and quality assurance processes lack rigour and do not inform the college's priorities for improvement well enough.

Learning support staff provide attentive and caring support. They know the needs of their learners well and build positive working relationships with them. However, there is too much variability in the quality of support they provide to meet learners' educational needs.

Teaching staff make effective use of symbols and visual resources to support learners in their learning. However the consistent use of signing across the site is underdeveloped.

The college's rural location and spacious grounds provide many beneficial opportunities for learners to develop their wellbeing and independence, as well as their team-work and work-related skills. Areas such as the animal care, horticulture and pottery enable learners to develop these skills in purposeful contexts. However, a few classrooms are not large or resourced well enough to meet the complex needs of all learners. In addition, a few buildings around the college have become tired and do not provide an attractive learning environment.

Recommendations

The college should:

- R1 Ensure that quality assurance and self-evaluation processes are robust and inform clearly the college's improvement priorities
- R2 Improve the quality and consistency of the support provided by learning support workers
- R3 Ensure the consistent use of signing across the college
- R4 Improve the quality of the learning environment across the site

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Ensure that the college's policies include appropriate reference to Welsh Government legislation and guidance

Overall, leaders have made sufficient changes to policies to ensure that they appropriately reference Welsh Government legislation and guidance. However, policies remain corporate in nature, generic to the parent organisation, and do not refer to the specific context of the college and its learners

R2. Embed and further develop the new arrangements for supporting and challenging the leadership team for education

The parent organisation has implemented suitable processes to provide support and challenge for the leadership team for education at the college. The regional lead for education visits regularly to monitor the provision and to help identify areas for improvement, and she oversees the college's compliance with a wide range of governance functions. She has a secure understanding of the strengths of the college, the challenges it faces, and its priorities for development, and ensures that these are communicated effectively to the senior lead for education within the parent company.

There are termly governance meetings to review the work of whole college, including the contributions made by the care, clinical, estates, and funding and placement teams. These meetings provide suitable opportunities for senior managers from the parent organisation to question the education team and identify suitable actions where appropriate. Senior leaders within the college benefit from worthwhile training events and meetings with colleagues in similar settings across the company to develop and share their practice.

Within the college, senior leaders meet regularly. Following the appointment of the new principal, the formal meetings structure and quality improvement cycle has been reviewed and is in the first stages of implementation. It is too early to assess the impact of these developments or the quality of challenge provided at these meetings.

R3. Increase consistency in recording and make better use of monitoring and quality assurance information for improvement planning at all levels

The college collects a wide range of information and data to track learners' progress in learning and wellbeing, including data on accreditation outcomes, the achievement of personal targets, attendance and behaviour. It has strengthened the consistency of target setting in learners' individual learning plans through the involvement of clinical staff, including the speech and language and occupational therapists. Teaching staff use the college's management information system to enable all staff to have ready access to learners' targets and to facilitate the recording of progress across the curriculum.

However, systems to monitor how well teaching staff record the progress learners make against their targets are underdeveloped. In addition, quality assurance activities such as lesson observations have been suspended during the period of the pandemic. As a result, leaders lack robust first-hand evidence on the impact of teaching on learning, the consistent use of communication strategies and the quality of learning support across the college to inform self-evaluation processes and prioritise areas for improvement reliably.

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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