



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

A report on the specialist college provision of

Aspris College North Wales

**TY Dewi Santi
Rhosdu Road
Wrexham
LL11 0ZX**

Date of inspection: June 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Aspris College North Wales

Name of provider	Aspris College North Wales
Proprietor	
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of provider	Independent special college
Residential provision?	No
Number of learners on roll	39
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2016
Start date of inspection	01/06/2016
<p>Aspris College North Wales is an independent specialist college. It is administered by Aspris Children's Services and is part of the portfolio of the Waterland group, a private equity investment company. The college offers day placements for young adults aged 16 to 25 with autism and associated conditions. There are currently 40 learners at the college. Most learners come to the college from the local area. All learners have a learning and skills plan or an education, health and care plan (EHCP).</p> <p>The college is managed by the principal, and in her absence the vice principal. They are supported by a curriculum and quality lead, two tutors, therapists, a transition manager and learning support workers.</p> <p>The college's last inspection was in June 2016.</p>	

Overview

Aspris College North Wales is a caring community where learners feel safe and listened to. The college is developing a culture where staff support their learners to live productive and independent lives as active members of their community.

Most learners are settled and enjoy their life at college. They show respect and engage politely with one another, staff and visitors. Many learners have positive attitudes to learning and persevere with their learning activities. This is particularly the case when they are engaged in practical and multi-sensory activities such as gardening and cookery.

Over time, many learners make appropriate progress across a range of skills that suitably support their learning and personal development. They make suitable progress against their individual targets and starting points in relation to their needs and abilities. This worthwhile progress helps them to develop successfully during their time at the college and in their future lives. However, a minority of learners do not attend regularly. This impacts on the progress they make.

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and enriched with valuable opportunities for learners to access beneficial activities within the local community. The college provides a valuable range of opportunities for learners to develop their independence and work-related skills by undertaking relevant external work-related experience. For example, learners benefit from placements at dog kennels, within factories or at the local museum. This is a strength of the college.

Overall, the quality of teaching is too variable at the college. Where teaching and learning is effective, staff plan well-paced lessons that have engaging practical and multi-sensory activities with a clear purpose. In lessons where teaching is less effective, activities lack variety and challenge, and activities are not well matched to the age and additional learning needs of learners.

There have been changes at all levels of leadership since the time of the college's most recent monitoring visit. During this period of instability there has been increased staff turnover and an interruption to quality assurance and improvement planning processes. Since their appointment in September 2022, new leaders have brought stability to the college. The principal quickly identified new college priorities and responded swiftly to areas for development.

The college does not consistently provide an attractive and well-resourced learning environment for learners. The college has recognised that the facilities available are too restricted for the needs and number of learners currently on roll at the college.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the consistency and quality of teaching
- R2 Strengthen self-evaluation processes to ensure that they focus on the quality of teaching and progress in learning
- R3 Improve the learning environment and resources to ensure that they meet the range of needs of learners at the college

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions 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/carers at the college.

Main findings

Learning

Over time, many learners make appropriate progress across a range of skills that suitably support their learning and personal development. They make suitable progress against their individual targets and starting points in relation to their needs and abilities. This worthwhile progress helps them to develop successfully during their time at the college and in their future lives. However, a minority of learners do not attend regularly and this impacts on the progress they make.

The majority of learners show suitable recall of prior learning and apply this knowledge to new contexts appropriately. For example, they recall aspects of a visit to Chester and use this information effectively to plan for a history project or to create an attractive collage of the visit.

Many learners develop their communication skills successfully. They listen suitably to staff and follow instructions willingly. They communicate and express their understanding effectively with their tutors and peers using their preferred communication methods such as signing and symbols. During their time at the college, the majority of learners develop confidence in speaking and expressing themselves effectively. For example, they use technical language and subject relevant vocabulary with fluency. They use these skills effectively in a range of situations, such as presenting information about the experience of evacuees during the Second World War or discussing their roles and responsibilities on the college council.

During their time at the college, learners practise and consolidate their literacy skills at a level that is generally appropriate to their needs and abilities. For example, learners develop suitable reading skills to access a range of texts. They skim and

scan texts and can locate information effectively. Many learners benefit from weekly visits to a local library. They enjoy reading a range of genres, which are closely linked to learners' interests such as horror stories or Roald Dahl books.

The majority of learners develop their writing skills progressively. They write short sentences about themselves in a CV and a minority write extended pieces of writing, which are structured effectively. For example, they write to the college principal commenting on the issues of equality and diversity at the college.

Over time, many learners make secure progress in developing their numeracy skills in line with their ability. They have a competent grasp of basic numeracy techniques including identifying single numbers and times of the day. In addition, they make effective use of these skills across the curriculum to support their learning. For example, they weigh ingredients during cookery lessons, calculate expenditure and profit in a college bake sale and estimate household bills. These skills prepare learners well for the next steps in their lives.

Many learners improve their physical skills suitably. For example, learners enjoy using a local outdoor gym, riding bikes, and playing tennis. These worthwhile opportunities improve learners' physical fitness levels, co-ordination skills and confidence.

Many learners develop their creative skills well through a range of activities across the curriculum. For example, they enjoy playing percussion instruments in accompaniment to familiar songs and create attractive models of hot air balloons.

Where appropriate, many learners use and consolidate their digital skills suitably to support their learning. For example, they use the internet to research for information and create power points for presentations. However, learners' digital skills are not developed progressively.

Many learners develop worthwhile vocational and independent living skills during their time at the college. Learners tend to the college garden, prepare healthy meals and where appropriate manage their own expenditure. Around half of learners benefit from valuable work experience within the community. These experiences prepare learners well for the next stage in their lives.

Over the last three years, many learners have achieved units of accreditation in a range of qualifications that relate suitably to their individual needs, interests and abilities. This includes the accreditation of essential skills for work and life, developing personal confidence and self-awareness and independent living skills.

Over the last three years, most learners who have left the college have progressed to suitably planned destinations that reflect their needs and abilities well, including supported work placements, community-based activities, or other education placements.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most learners feel happy, safe, and settled and enjoy their life at college. They show respect and engage politely with one another, staff and visitors.

During their time at the college, most learners form positive working relationships with staff who understand their needs well. Learners know who to talk to if they feel worried or unsafe. This impacts positively on their well-being, and means that they engage happily and confidently in college life.

Most learners develop effective social skills in lessons, and during break and lunch times. For example, they learn to listen carefully, follow instructions, take turns and co-operate respectfully with staff and each other. When given the opportunity, they work and socialise together successfully in small groups and enjoy the company of others.

Many learners have positive attitudes to learning and persevere with their learning activities. This is particularly the case when they are engaged in practical and multi-sensory activities such as gardening, cookery, and craft activities. They show interest and enthusiasm for their learning. For example, they speak avidly about the designs of their model hot air balloons.

With beneficial support from staff, learners manage their emotions effectively and behave well in lessons and around the college, arrive on time to lessons and settle quickly to activities.

Many pupils develop their independence skills well over time at the college. Where appropriate they navigate independently between the college sites and travel to college independently using public transport.

Learners are confident that their views are respected and listened to by staff at the college. A minority of learners develop their leadership skills well, for example by becoming college council representatives. In these roles, learners play an important part in sharing ideas and making decisions that impact positively on their college life. For example, they make suggestions for the end of year leaving ceremony and suggest activities for charity fundraising activities. In this way they begin to develop as ethical citizens.

Teaching and learning experiences

The strong professional working relationships between staff and learners at the college are a notable feature that supports learning effectively. Tutors, learning support workers and the therapeutic team work together effectively to support learners with sensitivity and develop valuable working relationships based on respect and trust. Most staff develop a strong understanding of their learners and respond to their emotional and behavioural needs well.

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and enriched with valuable opportunities for learners to become active citizens within the local community. For example, most learners make regular visits to the local authority well-being hub where they use the sensory room, and undertake cooking activities and crochet lessons. The college supplements its curriculum offer with a range of beneficial

external speakers and opportunities for learners to access worthwhile community-based activities, for example trips to local cities, the public library, and the gym. As a result, learners develop as valuable members of their local community.

The college provides a purposeful range of opportunities for learners to develop their independence and work-related skills by undertaking relevant external work-related experience. For example, learners benefit from placements at dog kennels, within factories or at the local museum. This is a strength of the college.

Overall, the quality of teaching is too variable. Where teaching and learning are effective, staff plan well-paced lessons that have engaging practical and multi-sensory activities with a clear purpose, for example shopping in the local community for ingredients to prepare meals in the college kitchen. In these lessons, tutors use extended questioning well to elicit further information from learners and to enhance their thinking skills. In lessons where teaching is less effective, activities lack variety and challenge. In addition, activities are not well matched to the age and additional learning needs of learners. As a result, learners do not consistently make the progress they are capable of in relation to their needs and future destinations.

Planning is not consistently adapted well enough to meet the broad range of needs at the college and is too often driven by the requirements of accreditation. Where this is the case, learning activities focus on the completion of written worksheets with missed opportunities to undertake valuable practical activities to acquire the skills learners will need in their future lives.

In most lessons, staff provide learners with positive and beneficial verbal feedback to celebrate their achievements and explain next steps in learning. However, written feedback does not always provide learners with sufficiently clear guidance to move learning forward.

Leaders have recently implemented strengthened systems for tracking of learners' progress. These allow staff to effectively monitor progress against accreditation outcomes and skills on an individual basis. In addition, learners regularly contribute to valuable review processes to assess progress in learning. However, tutors do not use this information consistently to inform future planning.

Overall, the college's provision for developing social skills, independence and independent living skills is effective. For example, where appropriate, a majority of learners are well supported to develop relevant skills in using public transport independently and confidently. Overall, planning for the progressive development of learners' numeracy, literacy and digital skills is underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

Aspris College North Wales is a caring community where learners feel safe and listened to. The college has developed an inclusive ethos based on tolerance and respect.

Leaders keep detailed records of all information about each learner. This information is used to identify concerns, review learner well-being, plan interventions and share with external agencies when required. This is a strength of their work.

The college uses a range of assessment information to carefully plan approaches to learner support. For example, transition information and therapeutic assessments inform risk assessments and behaviour plans. Staff use these plans well to ensure a consistent approach to meeting learners' emotional and additional learning needs.

Since the time of the most recent monitoring visit, the college has strengthened approaches to meeting the communication needs of all learners. These needs are captured in individual learner plans and staff are developing important skills and knowledge in this area. For example, through weekly 'British sign language blasts', staff and learners work together to improve their use of signing.

The recently strengthened therapeutic offer supports staff's understanding of learners' individual needs well. Further, beneficial interventions and lessons in this area support learner well-being and communication skills effectively, for example group sessions with the college counsellor and occupational therapist to develop self-management skills.

The college has recently strengthened transition processes when learners join and leave the college. Newly established arrangements support learners to build their confidence when joining the college, for example through college visits and taster days. Further, these processes support learners well as they transition out of college, for example into mainstream college, employment, and the next steps in their lives.

The college is developing a range of valuable partnership links to support the needs of learners well. For example, links with local businesses support the broad work experience offer for learners as well as opportunities for learners to progress to employment. Beneficial links with a local college support a minority of learners to transition successfully onto mainstream college courses, such as performing arts and public services. College staff collaborate effectively to help learners transition smoothly, for example through a steady reduction of one-to-one support to increase independence and confidence in a new setting.

The college has strengthened approaches to tracking and monitoring important well-being information about learners, such as attendance and behaviour. The college collects a range of helpful information and analyses it on an individual learner level to plan for improvements. For example, where learner attendance falls below expectations, staff implement attendance action plans to support learners to overcome barriers and improve their attendance and engagement.

The college provides learners with suitable opportunities to make decisions about their college experience and take on leadership roles. These important roles are supporting learners to improve their communication and self-advocacy skills. For example, learners are developing their own learner profiles to support them to share their needs with education providers or employers.

Staff provide learners with relevant opportunities to learn about how to stay safe and healthy. For example, learners learn how to stay safe online and how to cook basic meals. Where appropriate, this work is supplemented through extra modules on healthy relationships and sexual health or through external speakers. However, schemes of learning in this area are not adapted well enough to meet the needs of all learners.

The college is developing a strong safeguarding culture. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles in keeping learners safe. Leaders respond to safeguarding concerns swiftly and sensitively.

Leadership and management

Aspris College North Wales is developing a culture where staff support their learners to live productive, independent and happy lives. Staff have a shared vision, to support learners to become active members of their community and to remove barriers to learning and communication.

There have been changes at all levels of leadership since the time of the most recent monitoring visit. During this period of instability there has been increased staff turnover, an interruption to quality assurance and improvement planning processes and limited progress against recommendations left on recent monitoring visits. Overall, during this period the college did not maintain acceptable standards of provision in important areas of learning.

Since their appointment in September 2022, new leaders have brought stability to the college. The principal quickly identified new college priorities and responded swiftly to areas for development. Leaders have demonstrated resilience and dedication in securing these improvements and planning for future changes. Much of this work is in the early stages of implementation. In addition, leaders promote a successful culture of safeguarding across the college that is well understood by staff. College self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are newly re-established. Leaders have established suitable arrangements for the staff team to participate in these activities. However, there is not currently a systematic approach to the collection and evaluation of evidence at a whole-college level to support these processes. Further, these activities do not focus strongly enough on teaching and learning.

In many areas, the provision for the curriculum is too driven by accreditation and does not focus closely enough on the skills learners need for their future lives. New leaders are currently reviewing the strategic rationale for the curriculum offer. They are developing the curriculum to include more frequent opportunities for learners to practise skills within practical and real life contexts, for example in providing transport alongside travel training to increase learners' independence, or through close working relationships with a local college to transition learners onto mainstream courses such as construction and horticulture.

Leaders have secured and developed a highly engaged and motivated staff team. They have introduced a range of beneficial initiatives to support staff well-being, including well-being and financial support. Staff value this support and enjoy working at the college.

There are suitable arrangements in place for the performance management of staff. Staff work towards individual targets that generally link well to college priorities and professional learning. However, these processes do not have a consistent focus on teaching and learning

New leaders have a worthwhile focus on professional learning. This has strengthened since the time of the most recent monitoring visit. Staff benefit from access to a wide range of opportunities, including on supporting learners with autistic spectrum condition and trauma. This is supplemented with recent links with other providers within the wider organisation. For example, when reviewing transition processes, leaders visited other settings to develop new approaches. Although workforce development strategies focus closely on meeting the needs of learners, there is a limited focus on teaching and learning.

The work of the college is supported and overseen by the wider Aspris organisation. There have been recent changes to processes and systems that structure this support. Leaders benefit from support in a number of important areas, such as safer recruitment, health and safety and access to professional learning. Currently, this support does not consistently reflect the specific context of the college in Wales and does not have a sufficient focus on teaching and learning. Further, current information sharing systems provided by the wider organisation hinder leaders' ability to evaluate college work and plan for improvements, for example when reviewing compliance in important areas such as training.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and learner questionnaires and consider the views of teaching and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet proprietors, college leaders and individual members of teaching and support staff to evaluate the impact of the college's work
- meet learners to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their college
- visit sessions and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms and in outdoor areas
- look closely at the college's self-evaluation processes
- consider the college's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the college has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of college documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the supervisory body, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

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