



A report on:

Beechwood College

Date of inspection: April 2014

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2014: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 10/06/2014

Context

Beechwood College is an independent, specialist further education college and care home, situated in Sully in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is owned by Beechwood Court Ltd, which is part of Ludlow Street Healthcare. The college offers day and residential placements to learners aged 16 years of age and over who have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disabilities or acquired brain injury. Many learners also demonstrate challenging behaviour. A few have physical difficulties. Beechwood College opened in September 2004. Its first learners arrived in January 2005.

Overall responsibility for the running of the college lies with the director for education. The head of education leads a team of tutors and learning support assistants and has responsibility for the provision and delivery of all education programmes. The college's senior management team includes the director for education, the care home manager and the clinical lead.

There are currently 61 learners on the roll of the college, of whom 47 are young men and 14 are young women. Learners come to the college from a wide range of local authorities across England and Wales.

The current head of education took up post in December 2013. This is the first full inspection of the college.

Summary

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

Current performance

Performance at Beechwood College is adequate because:

- all learners communicate well, using their preferred method of communication;
- most learners leave the college with at least one relevant qualification;
- most learners engage well in their learning;
- learners generally behave well;
- relationships between staff and learners are very good;
- the college provides very good levels of care; and
- the college makes very effective use of specialist staff to support the needs of the learners.

However:

- a minority of learners do not engage well enough in their learning and do not make enough progress;
- tutors do not consistently provide enough challenge for the more able learners;
- the college does not have effective systems for tracking the small steps of progress made by learners;
- individual learning plan (ILP) targets are not specific and measurable enough; and
- learning experiences do not prepare learners for future life as well as they could.

Prospects for improvement

The college has adequate prospects for improvement because:

- managers provide effective leadership for the day-to-day running of the college;
- there is a very strong emphasis on supporting the emotional and behavioural needs of the learners;
- managers show a clear commitment to staff development;
- the college has a clear vision for improving the learning environment to meet the changing needs of the learners; and
- the college has a track record of addressing recommendations from previous annual monitoring inspections.

However:

- self-assessment and strategic planning do not focus enough on raising learners' standards;

- at a strategic level, managers do not monitor progress against the college improvement plan well enough; and
- the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of the work of the college and to plan strategically is underdeveloped

Recommendations

R1 Improve learners' attendance

R2 Ensure that senior managers provide a clear direction for all staff that focuses on improving learners' outcomes

R3 Use data effectively to track learners' progress and inform planning

R4 Establish a robust quality assurance cycle that has a clear focus on learners' outcomes

R5 Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all learners and provides them with the skills they need when they leave the college

R6 Ensure that all staff provide appropriate challenge for the more able learners, so that they can meet their full potential

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.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

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 learner basis.

The college does not have effective systems in place for recording and tracking learners' progress. As a result, managers are unable to demonstrate or evaluate how much progress learners make over time or whether they make appropriate progress in line with their abilities and needs.

However, all learners communicate well with their tutors and support staff, using their preferred methods of communication. They all listen very carefully to instructions, and respond appropriately with little prompting. Those with more complex communication needs answer questions accurately using a picture exchange communication system or signing. More able learners use subject specific vocabulary. The more confident learners communicate well with other adults, for example visitors to the college. On occasions, for example during college council meetings, a few learners communicate effectively with each other.

All learners practise and develop their reading skills. Less able learners spell out and read individual words effectively. More able learners read stories and answer questions accurately about what they have read. A majority of these learners read out loud confidently and with expression.

All learners practise their writing skills regularly. Nearly all produce work that is accurate and well presented. Less able learners overwrite simple words. More able learners copy sentences accurately, with varying levels of appropriate support. Learners demonstrate sequencing skills, for example when writing about how to prepare a salad. A few learners write short articles for the college newspaper, for example describing a visit they made to the beach. Where able, learners apply the skills they have learned when writing letters to their families. All learners generally use correct spelling. However, in a few lessons, more able learners do not develop their extended writing skills as well as they could because of the too frequent use of worksheets. In a few lessons, learners complete their work with little help. However, too often they work on a one-to-one basis with an adult, and do not develop their independence well enough.

Less able learners develop their numeracy skills appropriately through games and practical activities. More able learners do simple addition and subtraction. They apply the skills they have learned to everyday situations, for example counting their money when they go shopping. A few learners manage their own bank accounts.

Many learners use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively during lessons. They use the internet to research, with varying levels of support.

More able learners use the computer to produce short pieces of work and copy and paste pictures into a document. Residential learners use email to send messages to their families. A very few learners successfully use the internet to order CDs.

A very few more able learners take part in regular work experience at a local farm, a stables and a charity that supports young adults with learning difficulties. However, most learners do not develop their vocational skills well enough.

Over the past two years, there has been an increase in the number and range of qualifications achieved by learners. Most learners leave the college with at least one relevant qualification. Around half of leavers move into supported living.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Most learners have a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and taking regular exercise. They take part in a wide range of off-site activities including football, basketball and indoor climbing.

Most learners feel safe in college. They know whom to go to if they have a problem.

Learners behave well during lessons and around the college. They are polite and courteous towards adults and their peers. They learn to overcome their anxieties successfully and manage their own behaviour appropriately. Most learners enjoy lessons and participate fully. They engage well and stay on task. However, too many learners do not attend college regularly enough. In addition, punctuality to lessons is inconsistent and too many learners leave classes during the session. This prevents them from achieving their full potential.

Members of the student council enjoy making decisions about college life. For example, they are planning how to celebrate the college's ten year anniversary. They are very enthusiastic and take their responsibilities seriously, liaising effectively between the council and their class. Learners also make their views known by using a comment box.

All learners develop useful independent living skills through a range of activities. For example, they carry out household tasks such as washing up and tidying. They learn how to produce simple snacks and meals that are healthy and inexpensive. These skills help to prepare learners for life after college.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Adequate

Learning experiences: Adequate

Overall, the college offers a well-planned curriculum and provides most of its learners with a relevant range of learning experiences. These include classroom-based activities and access to the local community to enhance learners' development of social skills and understanding of appropriate behaviour. There are many opportunities for learners to develop their creative skills, such as pottery and music. The college actively encourages learners to take part in a range of leisure and exercise activities to enhance their wellbeing and physical fitness.

The college uses initial assessment data effectively to group learners according to their needs and abilities. However, for more able learners, the curriculum and learning experiences focus too much on classroom-based activities. Very few learners have the opportunity to participate in meaningful work-based learning or to develop their vocational skills in realistic settings.

Over the last two years, the college has improved the range of qualifications available for learners, with a greater focus on independent living skills and essential skills. However, at times the planning is based too much on the requirements of these qualifications, and does not focus enough on the specific needs of individual learners in order to prepare them fully for life after college.

The college places a strong emphasis on developing learners' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, both in discrete sessions and across the curriculum. Schemes of work identify opportunities for learners to apply their skills in an appropriate range of contexts. Individual learning plans include targets for essential skills.

Teaching: Adequate

In all lessons, staff create an environment that helps learners to engage well. Tutors and support staff are very calm in their interaction with learners. Staff prepare lessons well and deliver them with appropriate pace. All staff use questioning very effectively, and consistently allow learners enough time to respond. This is a clear strength.

All staff manage learners' behaviour well. On the few occasions where learners display challenging behaviour, tutors and support staff help them to settle down quickly.

In nearly all lessons, there is an appropriate range of strategies and resources to support teaching and learning. However, in a minority of lessons, work is not matched well enough to the needs of individual learners. In particular, staff do not challenge the more able learners effectively enough for these learners to achieve to the best of their ability. In these lessons, tutors rely too much on worksheets.

Staff carry out an initial assessment for each learner who enters the college. However, they do not have effective systems in place for recording and tracking learners' progress over time against baseline data. They do not capture the very small steps made by the learners. Learners' individual targets are not specific enough or measurable. Although the college provides regular feedback for parents, it does not focus well enough on standards.

Tutors and support staff give praise and encouragement to learners when they have done well. However, verbal feedback does not regularly help learners to understand what they need to do to improve their work. In a few lessons there are missed opportunities to help learners to understand their errors and make corrections.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The care, support and guidance of learners are strengths in all areas of the college. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to support learners' health and wellbeing. The college encourages learners to live healthy lifestyles through offering appropriate healthy meal choices. The college takes the interests of the learners into account in planning a range of suitable leisure activities.

Staff have a very clear understanding of the emotional needs of learners and provide an environment where learners develop their confidence and their self-esteem. Staff monitor and manage behaviour consistently and appropriately, and help learners to gain valuable skills to manage their own behaviour.

The college promotes learners' moral and cultural development appropriately through a range of appropriate learning experiences. There is good provision to ensure learners' personal safety, for example through important sessions on stranger danger and internet safety. However, not all staff make the most of opportunities to reinforce learners' understanding of these issues during lessons.

The college works effectively with a wide range of professional specialists to support the social, emotional and health needs of the learners. These include speech and language and occupational therapists, a dietician and a clinical psychologist. Learners who are anxious benefit from aromatherapy and pet therapy. There are monthly meetings to review and discuss individual learner needs. The effective joint working between specialists is a strength of the college.

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

Learning environment: Good

The college has an inclusive ethos, which promotes equality and diversity effectively. All learners have equal access to the curriculum. Relationships between staff and learners are very positive and there is an obvious mutual respect. Specific provision is made for learners who have particular cultural or religious beliefs, for example where special diets are required.

The college provides a safe environment, which encourages learners to gain in confidence and make progress. Classrooms are well maintained and effectively decorated, with attractive displays on the walls. The college has a range of useful specialist areas, where learners can experience for example art, cookery and music, as well as a sensory room for those learners with more complex needs. The grounds are secure and well maintained.

Although the college has plans for the development of a new educational centre, currently a few of the classrooms have limited space and this hinders learners' opportunities and progress at times.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?
--

Adequate

Leadership: Adequate

Senior managers promote high standards for the behaviour and care of all learners. This has a positive impact on learners' wellbeing. However, they do not always provide staff with a clear enough direction for improving provision to meet the educational needs of all learners.

The college management structure is clear and appropriate with well-defined lines of accountability. Senior managers have a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the general strategic aims and objectives.

Management and committee structures are well defined and coherent. There is clear communication from tutor level through the senior management team meetings to the board of directors. Meetings at all levels of leadership are held at regular intervals and are well structured with consistent, planned agendas. Minutes of meetings are circulated appropriately. Relevant and concise information is shared from the board of directors through the senior team meetings to tutors. This ensures that all staff have a general overview of the leadership's aims.

The board of directors receive regular information and data on learners' attendance, learners' behaviour, and incidents and issues around their wellbeing. They use this information well to provide appropriate support for the college. However, they do not have enough focus on learners' progress, achievement and outcomes.

There is a clear process for managing the performance of staff. The directors and senior management carry out regular performance review meetings with staff and offer a useful range of options for training and professional development. However, staff performance targets do not have a sufficient focus on learner standards and outcomes.

The senior management and directors promote the work of the college well with stakeholders and outside agencies. The chief executive has a clear vision for the future development of the college site to bring about improved facilities for learners and staff.

Improving quality: Adequate

Planning for self-assessment and improvement over the short term is an established part of the work of the college. Tutors make a valuable contribution to the self-assessment process.

The college self-assessment report is concise and well-structured and is an accurate reflection of the position of the college. It identifies relevant areas for improvement. In a few parts the report is evaluative. The college's own evaluation of teaching matches the findings of the inspection team well. However, many of the statements in the report are descriptive and are not evaluative enough. The report does not focus well enough on learners' outcomes. It does not assess the impact of provision or leadership and management on learner progress and achievement.

The college improvement plan combines effectively the identified areas for improvement in the self-assessment report with the recommendations from the Estyn annual monitoring inspection in 2013. It prioritises areas for improvement, and clearly defines responsibilities, timescales for completing actions and resource implications. Tutors take a shared responsibility for meeting the improvement targets. However, reviews of the self-assessment report and college improvement plan by senior managers are underdeveloped. Improvement targets are not monitored, tracked, evaluated or challenged well enough to ensure the quality process is robust.

The college uses learner and staff surveys effectively to plan improvements to the learning and teaching experience. There is a clear and consistent focus on improving the quality of the site and the resources.

The college has a good track record of addressing recommendations from annual monitoring inspections. This has included building new classrooms and developing the use of total communication across the college. It has made appropriate progress in starting to address a minority of the recommendations from the annual monitoring inspection in 2013. However, it is too early to judge the impact on learner outcomes.

Partnership working: Good

The college has developed successful and effective links with a range of external agencies and partners to support learners' wellbeing and progress. There are well-developed systems to ensure learners' smooth transition to the college. Staff collaborate effectively with parents and social workers. Members of the transition team attend reviews in a range of local authorities and schools to plan for learners' future needs at the college.

Staff maintain good and frequent contact with parents through weekly phone calls or emails. There are six-monthly progress reviews to ensure that all relevant partners are well informed about the progress and wellbeing of the learners. The college has developed a range of initiatives with local schools and universities to extend staff development and consistency in understanding the needs and wellbeing of young people with autism.

In addition, the college works with a range of local institutions to promote opportunities for individual learners. For example, it has worked closely with the University of South Wales to create an exhibition of learners' art work. The college initiated the Create! Art for Autism competition, attracting over 850 entrants from across the UK. However, although the college attaches great importance to developing links with a range of diverse partners in the area, these do not always have impact on the wellbeing or standards of learners at the college.

Resource management: Good

Overall, the college manages its resources well. There is a very clear focus on improving the learning environment and there are extensive plans in place for the future development of the college site.

Senior managers and directors make sure that the college is appropriately staffed to deliver the curriculum effectively. The college maintains an extensive team of tutors and support staff and there is a clear commitment to ensuring that learners have suitable care and support relevant to their individual needs.

Staff development is a high priority and staff are actively encouraged to identify their own training needs and requirements. Many staff take advantage of this strategy to update their existing skills and to continue their professional development. A few staff at the college have progressed from learning support roles to qualify as tutors.

The college manages its budget well. Resources are allocated appropriately to areas of need and there is a consistent strategy to ensure that all equipment at the college is up-to-date and well maintained.

The college offers value for money for its learners.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Learner Questionnaire / Arolwg Dysgwyr

All Pupils / Pob Disgybl

	Nifer o ymatebion Number of responses	Nifer o ymatebion / Number of responses Agree Cytuno Disagree Anghytuno		
I feel safe in my college	33	30 91%	3 9%	Rwy'n teimlo'n ddiogel yn fy ngholeg.
The college deals well with any bullying	33	27 82%	6 18%	Mae'r coleg yn delio'n dda ag unrhyw fwlio.
I have someone to talk to if I am worried	32	24 75%	8 25%	Mae gen i rywun i siarad ag ef/â hi os ydw i'n poeni.
The college teaches me how to keep healthy	32	30 94%	2 6%	Mae'r coleg yn fy nysgu i sut i aros yn iach.
There are plenty of opportunities at college for me to get regular exercise	32	28 88%	4 13%	Mae digonedd o gyfleoedd yn y coleg i mi gael ymarfer corff yn rheolaidd.
I am doing well at college	32	30 94%	2 6%	Rwy'n gwneud yn dda yn y coleg.
The teachers help me to learn and make progress and they help me when I have problems	31	29 94%	2 6%	Mae'r athrawon yn fy helpu i ddysgu a gwneud cynnydd ac maent yn fy helpu pan fydd gen i broblemau.
I have enough books and equipment, including computers, to do my work	31	24 77%	7 23%	Mae gen i ddigon o lyfrau, offer a chyfrifiaduron i wneud fy ngwaith.
Learners behave well and I can get my work done	31	26 84%	5 16%	Mae dysgwyr eraill yn ymddwyn yn dda ac rwy'n gallu gwneud fy ngwaith.
Staff treat all learners fairly and with respect	30	27 90%	3 10%	Mae staff yn trin pob dysgwr yn deg ac yn dangos parch atynt.
The college listens to our views and makes changes we suggest	32	27 84%	5 16%	Mae'r coleg yn gwrando ar ein barn ac yn gwneud newidiadau rydym ni'n eu hawgrymu.
I am encouraged to do things for myself and to take on responsibility	32	28 88%	4 13%	Rwy'n cael fy annog i wneud pethau dros fy hun a chymryd cyfrifoldeb.
The college helps me to be ready for my next college or to start my working life	31	25 81%	6 19%	Mae'r coleg yn helpu i mi fod yn barod ar gyfer fy ngholeg nesaf, neu i ddechrau fy mywyd gwaith.
The staff respect me and my background	31	28 90%	3 10%	Mae'r staff yn fy mharchu i a'm cefndir.
The college helps me to understand and respect people from other backgrounds	31	28 90%	3 10%	Mae'r coleg yn helpu i mi ddeall a pharchu pobl o gefndiroedd eraill.
I was given good advice when choosing my courses	30	24 80%	6 20%	Cefais gyngor da wrth ddewis fy nghyrsiau yn y chweched dosbarth.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Parent Questionnaire / Arolwg Rhieni

	Nifer o ymatebion Number of responses	Nifer o ymatebion / Number of responses					Don't know Ddim yn gwybod	
		Strongly Agree Cytuno'n gryf	Agree Cytuno	Disagree Anghytuno	Strongly disagree Anghytuno'n gryf			
Overall I am satisfied with the college	17	13 76%	3 18%	1 6%	0 0%	0	Rwy'n fodlon â'r coleg yn gyffredinol.	
My child likes the college	17	10 59%	6 35%	1 6%	0 0%	0	Mae fy mhentyn yn hoffi'r coleg.	
My child was helped to settle in well when he or she started at the college	17	10 59%	6 35%	1 6%	0 0%	0	Cafodd fy mhentyn gymorth i ymgartrefu'n dda pan ddechreuodd yn y coleg.	
My child is making good progress in college	17	10 59%	6 35%	1 6%	0 0%	0	Mae fy mhentyn yn gwneud cynnydd da yn y coleg.	
Learners behave well in college	15	7 58%	4 33%	1 8%	0 0%	3	Mae dysgwyr yn ymddwyn yn dda yn y coleg.	
Teaching is good	17	10 59%	6 35%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Mae'r addysgu yn dda.	
Staff expect my child to work hard and do his or her best	17	9 60%	5 33%	0 0%	1 7%	2	Mae'r staff yn disgwyl i fy mhentyn weithio'n galed ac i wneud ei orau.	
Staff treat all children fairly and with respect	17	12 75%	3 19%	0 0%	1 6%	1	Mae'r staff yn trin pob plentyn yn deg a gyda pharch.	
My child is encouraged to be healthy and to take regular exercise	17	10 59%	6 35%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Caiff fy mhentyn ei annog i fod yn iach ac i wneud ymarfer corff yn rheolaidd.	
My child is safe at college	17	11 65%	5 29%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Mae fy mhentyn yn ddiogel yn y coleg.	
My child receives appropriate additional support in relation to any particular individual needs'	17	11 65%	5 29%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Mae fy mhentyn yn cael cymorth ychwanegol priodol mewn pertynas ag unrhyw anghenion unigol penodol.	
I am kept well informed about my child's progress	17	11 65%	5 29%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Rwy'n cael gwybodaeth gyson am gynnydd fy mhentyn.	
I feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions, suggestions or a problem	17	11 69%	5 31%	0 0%	0 0%	1	Rwy'n teimlo'n esmwyth ynglŷn â gofyn cwestiwn i'r coleg, gwneud awgrymiadau neu nodi problem.	
I understand the college's procedure for dealing with complaints	17	8 53%	6 40%	1 7%	0 0%	2	Rwy'n deall trefn y coleg ar gyfer delio â chwynion.	
The college helps my child to become more mature and take on responsibility	16	8 50%	7 44%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Mae'r coleg yn helpu fy mhentyn i ddod yn fwy aeddfed ac i ysgwyddo cyfrifoldeb.	
My child is well prepared for moving on the next college or work	16	6 38%	7 44%	2 13%	1 6%	0	Mae fy mhentyn wedi'i barato'n dda ar gyfer symud ymlaen i'r coleg nesaf neu waith.	
There is a good range of activities including trips or visits	16	9 56%	6 38%	0 0%	1 6%	0	Mae amrywiaeth dda o weithgareddau, gan gynnwys teithiau neu ymweliadau.	
The college is well run	14	10 71%	3 21%	1 7%	0 0%	0	Mae'r coleg yn cael ei rhedeg yn dda.	

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Mrs Caroline Rees	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Gill Sims	Team Inspector
Richard Mark Tither	Peer Inspector
Mrs Ann Dackevych	Team Inspector
Mrs Anne Stephens (Assistant Head of Education)	Nominee