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

A report on

Aspris College North Wales

Date of inspection: January 2022

by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Aspris College North Wales

Aspris College North Wales is an independent specialist college, situated next to the Wrexham campus of the further education institution serving north-east Wales. The college was established in 2011 when it was known as Priory College North Wales. Aspris College North Wales 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 42 learners at the college, nearly all funded by local authorities in Wales. A very few are funded by local authorities in England. 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).

Around two-thirds of learners access education exclusively at the college and follow courses from pre-entry level to level 1 including independent living skills. The other learners follow courses at Coleg Cambria. They study a wide range of courses from entry level through to A levels. All learners, irrespective of their main place of study, receive both in-class and additional support from Aspris College staff.

The headteacher has been in post since June 2017. She is supported by three tutors, a speech and language therapist, a counsellor and a team of around 20 learning support workers (LSWs).

The college's last monitoring visit was in April 2019.

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

Main findings

Strengths

Over the last two years, the college has shown resilience and imagination in continuing to provide education for its learners throughout the period of the pandemic. It has adapted and adjusted its provision appropriately to enable learners to continue on their programmes and has maintained detailed records of learners' progress during this time. This has helped the college to assess the impact of the pandemic on learners' progress and identify suitable responses to address these. For example, the college has implemented robust attendance plans to support anxious learners return to face-to-face education full time.

The headteacher has responded positively to the feedback from the last monitoring visit. She has an accurate understanding of the college's strengths and priorities for improvement. The college's priorities for development are ambitious and set a clear direction for the future of the college. The headteacher has implemented appropriate systems to quality assure and monitor progress against key aspects of the college's work. These systems have helped the college to make suitable progress against most of the recommendations from the previous monitoring visit.

Teaching and learning support staff build strong working relationships with learners. They know the learners well and provide sensitive and caring support.

The leaders plan carefully to provide a relevant and meaningful range of learning experiences to support the development of learners' resilience, independence and life skills. This includes activities such as travel training, money management and interview skills.

Areas for development

The college is based across two buildings. One of the buildings is not well suited to learners with sensory needs, or who have impaired mobility or challenging behaviour. There are few opportunities for learners to develop their independence and life skills on site in practical, authentic contexts. The external environment around both buildings is limited. The college has recognised that the facilities available across the college as a whole are too restricted for the needs and number of learners currently on roll at the college.

The speech and language therapist provides beneficial opportunities for learners to develop their speech and language and communication needs through one-to-one and group sessions. However, there is too much variation in teaching staff's understanding and application of communication strategies to support learners' communication needs. This means that a few learners do not engage consistently well in their learning or make the progress they are capable of.

Learning support workers provide effective support to meet the emotional needs of learners. They receive valuable training to extend their understanding of the needs of learners, including recent training on managing challenging behaviour, attachment disorder and epilepsy. However, training to improve their role supporting learning and teaching in a specialist setting is underdeveloped. Overall, staff training does not

focus well enough on or respond well enough to the full range of needs of learners who attend the college.

Recommendations

The college should:

R1 Ensure that the buildings and facilities are appropriate to meet the full range of needs of learners at the college

R2 Implement consistent approaches to support all learners' communication needs

R3 Implement a robust workforce development strategy to support the capacity of staff to meet the current and future needs of all learners

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Ensure that learners build on their prior learning and experiences during their time at the college

The college has suitable processes to identify learners' prior learning and experiences before they join the college. The college liaises well with previous providers, and meets with the learner and their parents and carers to gather a wide range of information about the learner. This information contains details of academic qualifications and courses followed, individual learning plans (ILPs) and positive behaviour plans along with any other relevant information about the learners' needs and abilities.

Staff at the college use this information to compile detailed initial assessment reports that identify learners' current level of achievement across a relevant range of skills and learning areas, including independence, life skills and social communication. The reports then help the headteacher to plan programmes of learning, set targets and allocate appropriate support according to the needs of the learner.

When learners join the college, there are appropriate systems to track and monitor their progress. The college's assessment of learning and progress show that most learners achieve their qualification outcomes, and many learners make good progress against their non-accredited learning goals. However, shortcomings in the quality of target-setting identified on the previous monitoring visit remain. These shortcomings impact on the rate of progress learners make during their time at the college

R2. Ensure learner targets are clear and consistently support learners' progression

The college has clearly defined processes for setting targets on learners' ILPs and reviewing the progress they make against these. ILPs include targets for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, as well as areas of non-accredited learning such as independence, social communication and attitudes to learning. Learning support workers play a key role in setting targets and reviewing learners' progress regularly.

Since the last monitoring visit, staff have had relevant training on target setting. However, the quality of targets on learners' ILPs remains too variable. Targets do not consistently identify small steps of learning that are easily measurable and meaningful. ILPs do not consistently identify effective strategies to help learners achieve their targets or success criteria to assess when they have been achieved. In many cases, targets do not link clearly enough to the content of the lesson being taught or learners' medium and long-term goals. As a result, staff feedback on learners' progress against their targets is not specific enough, and learners and staff are not always clear about the next steps needed for progress.

R3. Improve the working partnerships with feeder schools to ensure early planning for effective transition

The college has taken useful actions to strengthen its working partnerships with its feeder schools to ensure early planning for effective learner transition. These strategies have helped reduce learners' anxieties when they join the college and enable learners to build appropriately on their prior learning.

Transition planning is undertaken purposefully in partnership with feeder settings from the time that the learner is referred to the college. This planning is tailored appropriately to the individual learner's needs. The college identifies key contacts from learners' current or previous setting to foster partnership working and to plan for individual needs.

Once a placement is offered, teaching staff from the college offer observation visits to the student's current school. In addition, teaching staff from the previous setting accompany pupils on useful transition visits to the college. This approach allows for further communication between key contacts and college and provides familiar reassurance for the learners in their transition to the college .

R4. Develop and implement a clear strategy for identifying and recording incidents and occurances effectively

The college has implemented an online system that has strengthened the recording, tracking, and analysis of incidents. The system enables the college to ensure that all incidents are now recorded. The system prompts users to answer specific questions and confirm appropriate actions according to the type of incident. This ensures that all incidents are recorded in a consistent, clear manner and include a description of the actions taken, for example a referral to an external agency.

Staff record incidents within 24 hours, but in practice, it is usually immediately. The headteacher reviews the records daily, and each month meets with the regional best practice lead who quality assures these records and writes a monthly report. Leaders use this information appropriately to highlight patterns and review their actions and systems.

Information is shared frequently with staff regarding incidents, and all staff meet regularly where there are relevant opportunities to discuss lessons to be learnt.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website
([Estyn site](#))

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