



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

Beechwood College

**Hays Road
Sully
Vale of Glamorgan
CF64 5SE**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Beechwood College

Name of provider	Beechwood College
Proprietor	Ludlow Street Healthcare, under the ownership of Ancala partners.
Local authority	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of provider	Independent Specialist College
Residential provision?	No
Number of learners on roll	47
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	04/02/2019
Start date of inspection	13/03/2023

Overview

Beechwood College is an inclusive learning environment which provides opportunities and experiences to prepare learners for their future lives. Staff develop highly beneficial working relationships with learners based on respect and understanding.

Most learners make good progress from their initial starting points and make expected progress towards achieving their personal targets. However, a minority of learners do not attend consistently which impacts on the progress they are able to make with their learning.

The college provides a broad curriculum which supports learners to develop a range of relevant skills in authentic contexts. For example, learners work in the college café, prepare parcels for the college online shop and collect eggs from the college chickens. Learners also benefit from a range of internal and external work experience placements. However, a planned approach for the delivery of personal, health and social education (PHSE) is underdeveloped.

Staff collect a range of useful information to track the individual progress of learners during their time at college. However, these systems do not allow leaders to consistently monitor and evaluate progress, attendance and engagement at a college wide level.

Staff, with the support of the clinical team, gather a range of important information about each individual learner and use this effectively to support their learning, well-being and behaviour. As a result, learner behaviour is good. In line with their abilities, learners develop the skills and knowledge to understand and manage their own behaviours.

Leaders have secured valuable improvements across the college since the time of the last inspection. For example, beneficial changes to the curriculum and learning environment have enriched learners' experiences. However, overall improvement planning processes lack rigour, and the rate of change is too slow.

Staff at the college have a strong understanding of the importance of their role in keeping learners safe. However, important policies in this area are generic to the wider organisation and do not tell staff how to report concerns.

Recommendations

- R1 Respond to the issues raised in the well-being letter
- R2 Improve attendance
- R3 Ensure that tracking systems provide leaders with a clear picture of the progress learners make over time
- R4 Strengthen the strategic approach to planning for PHSE
- R5 Strengthen the quality of strategic leadership and procedures for improvement planning

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.

Estyn will invite the college to prepare a case study on its work in relation to the online college shop for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

Overall, the additional learning needs and abilities of learners across the college vary considerably. Most learners who attend college regularly make good progress from their initial starting points and make expected progress towards achieving their personal targets. In line with their abilities, they listen suitably to staff and to their peers and engage well with learning activities. However, a minority of learners do not attend consistently which impacts on the progress they are able to make.

During their time at the college, many learners who attend regularly make sound progress in developing their literacy skills. Many learners are able to demonstrate basic writing skills appropriately. For example, they are able to write a shopping list and a minority of more able learners are able to construct short sentences. In lessons, a few learners read confidently, for example when following recipes or when reading from their tablets.

Across the college many learners develop their communication skills well over time, using methods which are appropriate to their learning needs. For example, a few learners use signing confidently to communicate with their peers and staff, whilst others are more confident using verbal communication or adaptive technology.

Many learners improve their numeracy skills in a wide range of valuable contexts which support them well to lead independent lives. For example, they take part in counting and recording the class budget and run an online shop which involves pricing raw materials and calculating sales costs with support from staff. A very few learners apply these skills independently.

Most learners over their time at the college make strong progress in developing their social skills. For example, they speak with a quieter voice to be more aware of other learners' needs within the class. A minority of learners work well in pairs and small groups. Learners who are able to further develop their skills with their peers enjoy interacting in a different environment during the college's 'social Friday'. A very few learners benefit from the newly established college clubs taking place outside the college day.

Over time, many learners develop beneficial digital skills which are used to support their learning and communication well. For example, learners contribute to class discussions using online digital platforms and a very few more able learners create interesting podcasts such as 'Beechwood on the rails'.

Many learners develop their creativity skills well in a range of areas. For example, creating cards in a lesson to celebrate a good friend, or making earrings out of clay.

Many learners develop their physical skills suitably through a range of planned activities which include dance, swimming and cycling as well as walks in the local area and in college grounds.

Many learners take part in valuable vocational experiences which support them well developing skills for future pathways. For example, a few learners take part in activities as part of enterprise groups where they calculate costs, purchase materials and advertise their produce on social media.

Most learners develop important independence skills over their time at the college. Many learners acquire a beneficial range of life skills such as ironing and using the sewing and washing machines. For example, using a sewing machine to make pencil cases. Most learners leave Beechwood College having made sufficient progress to enable them to access provision where they are able to live more independently.

Many learners leave the college with accreditation in an appropriate range of beneficial qualifications which positively support their progress in personal development and work skills.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Learners have highly positive working relationships with their staff team which effectively supports the progress they make over their time at the college.

Many learners feel safe in college and understand how to keep themselves safe in a range of settings. Many learners know who to turn to if they are concerned, upset or worried and they are confident that their views are listened to by the staff. Overall, learners know how to keep themselves safe. However, a few learners with more complex needs are not confident in their ability to stay safe online and have had the confidence to identify this as part of their student voice activities.

Nearly all learners have meaningful opportunities to share their ideas as part of student voice initiatives. They have beneficial weekly opportunities to make decisions about their learning in the student council sessions. Learners take seriously their role on the student council and this is having a positive impact on their life at college. For example, learners have influenced the curriculum offer, which now includes history and dance. In addition, as a result of learner voice, new after-college clubs are in place, for example construction games and woodworking.

Many learners speak enthusiastically about the various off-site opportunities. They engage in a variety of practical and vocational activities such as dog walking and cleaning a local train station. Most learners agree that they have become more independent since joining Beechwood. Many learners also value the opportunities to participate in a range of weekly physical activities such as trampolining and indoor climbing.

Many learners enjoy taking part in creative and outdoor activities. For example, they create bird feeders out of a range of recycled materials such as whisks. A minority of learners take part in regular animal care activities. For example, caring for the class fish and feeding the college chickens and collecting their eggs.

In sessions, most learners, are polite and behave appropriately towards their staff, peers and visitors. Many learners demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. They settle appropriately to work, follow instructions suitably and persevere with appropriate support from staff. However, a few learners do not have the resilience to remain in class for the duration of the session. This impacts on their ability to make progress.

Over time, learners develop a suitable understanding of how to manage their own behaviours. For example, they are increasingly able to self-regulate using designated sensory areas and the well-planned outdoor spaces. They respond suitably to the skilful guidance of teaching and support staff. They understand acceptable behaviour

in sessions and outside college. Learners develop the confidence and skills they need to work with increasing independence.

Learners develop a sense of responsibility and are eager to help others. For example, a very few learners have prepared a box to collect items to donate to the local food bank and have helped to organise a lost property facility within the college. Learners within their sessions prepare cakes for charity bake sales for their staff and peers to buy.

The persistent absence of a minority of learners has a negative impact on their progress and well-being. Overall, attendance at the college is too low.

Teaching and learning experiences

The college provides a broad and balanced curriculum which is learner centred. When learners join the college, they are placed into one of three discrete pathways, which cater appropriately for learners' individual needs and abilities. This effective strategy ensures learners experience a suitable range of learning activities and accreditation pathways that support their individual needs and abilities well.

The college's strategic approach to curriculum planning successfully involves contributions from teaching staff and learners. As a result, many learners are interested and engaged in their learning and make progress in areas that are important to them. The curriculum and learning experiences provided at the college support the additional learning needs (ALN) of learners well and prepares them effectively for the next stage in their lives. However, the college's provision to develop a consistent approach for the delivery of personal, health and social education (PHSE) is underdeveloped. Therefore, a very few learners are missing out on important aspects of their education relating to their personal development.

There are worthwhile opportunities for learners to take part in a range of activities which develop skills that are important to them. Teaching staff support progression in learners' communication by practising their preferred communication methods regularly. This includes the use of signing and other communication strategies. Learners develop their independence and work related skills well in meaningful, real life contexts such as gardening and animal care. A notable feature of this provision is the college's online marketplace for independent crafters. Learners develop their creative skills as they produce attractive goods to sell. As a result, they develop their independence, literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills swiftly, when calculating the costs of buying resources, calculating profit, and publicising and promoting their products online.

The college provides a useful range of internal and external work experience for learners. At the college these activities include caring for the college's chickens, working at the college coffee shop and grounds maintenance. Within the community learners benefit from work experience at a local tortoise sanctuary, a canal boat centre and a local garage. These opportunities to participate in purposeful activities support learners' progression to destinations after college well.

There are valuable opportunities for learners to take part in extra-curricular activities such as football club, woodwork club and gaming club. These activities successfully help learners to develop their self-esteem and confidence.

Teaching staff at the college develop nurturing and trusting relationships with learners. They know the learners very well and have a robust understanding of their ALN. As a result, they have accurate and realistic expectations of learners' progress in their learning and well-being.

Overall, staff manage learners' behaviour skilfully. Where this is most effective, it enables those who require a high level of support to manage their behaviour and re-engage with their learning in a meaningful way. Generally, support staff are well directed within classes and encourage and motivate learners. As a result, learners are calm and engaged in their learning.

Class routines and transitions are well established. This provides valuable stability and predictability for students which supports them effectively to participate in their learning and to achieve their individual targets.

Overall, staff plan appropriately to meet learners' needs. They ensure that learners have opportunities to make meaningful progress against their individual targets during sessions. However, in a few cases the overuse of worksheets inhibits learners' progress and limits practical application of concepts.

In the most effective sessions staff use questioning particularly well to move learners on in their learning. They adapt questions skilfully to the specific needs and abilities of the learners and manage incorrect answers sensitively when explaining misconceptions.

Assessment and feedback methods across the college are suitable. In most sessions verbal feedback is effective and moves learning forward. However, written feedback does not consistently provide guidance for learners and their support staff on next steps in learning.

Care, support and guidance

Beechwood College provides a supportive learning environment for learners with a wide range of complex needs, including those with challenging behaviours.

The college has effective transition processes in place that identify needs and allocate support through a timely and person-centred approach. Staff have early access to comprehensive learner profiles and strategies for support, which has a positive impact on the learners' induction experience.

The provision of personal and specialist support is comprehensive and focuses successfully on learners' individual needs. The college provides on-site access to a range of therapies, including speech and language, occupational health and specialist mental health support. The college develops useful individual assessments and helpful strategies that are used effectively to support learning.

The college provides specialist support for managing behaviour. This is a strength of the college's work. Staff collaborate well to regularly review highly detailed plans and adapt these well to the changing needs of learners. As a result, support is delivered skilfully and learners develop strategies to manage their own behaviours over time successfully. When appropriate, learners participate in beneficial reflection sessions which support them well to develop their personal awareness.

The college promotes healthy eating well throughout the curriculum. Many learners develop skills and understanding of healthy lifestyle choices through life skills classes. These learners identify and choose healthy food choices. For example, when compiling shopping lists before supermarket visits.

The college provides valuable opportunities for learners to develop important independence skills and resilience. Learners benefit from valuable opportunities to apply these skills within the community which support their understanding of staying safe.

A notable feature of the college is the provision of additional learning support. Individual learning plans include detailed information and support strategies. Staff use this information well to provide highly appropriate support within the classroom. Many learners work towards successful completion of their targets and these are reviewed regularly. However, leaders do not have a robust system to consistently monitor and evaluate progress, attendance and engagement at a college wide level.

Learner voice in the college is effective. For example, the annual review process provides a valuable opportunity for learners and their parents and carers to share their views. In addition, learners benefit from a range of taster sessions in different curriculum options before making their final decisions.

Staff at the college provide carefully planned sessions for learners to develop valuable skills and knowledge to keep themselves safe. For example, through individualised sessions regarding relationships. However, current approaches to this across the college are inconsistent. As a result, a very few learners do not have sufficient opportunities to develop these important skills.

Leaders at the college place a high importance on safeguarding and keeping learners safe. They have established a community where many learners feel safe and secure. Staff benefit from a range of important training in this area.

Staff have a strong understanding of the importance of their role in keeping learners safe. They use their in-depth knowledge of learners effectively to identify issues. However, important policies in this area are generic to the wider organisation, do not tell staff who to report concerns to and do not consistently reflect Welsh legislation.

Leadership and management

The principal has a clear vision and leaders diligently work towards achieving an inclusive learning environment which provides opportunities and experiences to prepare learners for their future lives. This vision is shared by the wider staff team and successfully promotes a caring and focused ethos. College leaders are enthusiastic and dedicated, they place learners at the heart of all they do.

Leaders provide a caring and supportive environment for staff. They are developing an effective and engaged staff team who are flexible and responsive to the complex and changing needs of learners. Leaders have high expectations of staff and oversee this through a suitable performance management process.

Since the time of the last inspection, there have been changes at all levels of leadership. New leaders have made a number of valuable changes to the work of the college. For example, the curriculum has been strengthened to better meet the

needs of learners. However, the systems and processes to oversee these changes are underdeveloped.

Leaders have responded thoughtfully to recommendations from the last inspection. For example, reducing staffing levels where possible to promote independence and ensuring a learner focused approach to supporting communication. However, when considering levels and recording of attendance, the rate of improvement has been too slow.

Leaders gather a range of helpful first-hand evidence to inform self-evaluation processes. For example, through learning walks, audits and work and planning scrutiny. As a result, leaders have a sound understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. However, leaders do not use all aspects of the college's work to inform self-evaluation. For example, systems at the college allow staff to carefully monitor individual progress of learners, however, leaders do not currently evaluate progress at a whole college level.

Improvement planning processes highlight the actions and resources required to secure progress. However, current plans are limited and do not show the small steps of progress, timescales and evaluation required to achieve planned improvements. This inhibits the college's ability to make sustainable changes at pace.

The college has established secure practices to seek the opinions of all stakeholders. Leaders use a wide range of relevant questionnaires and information gathering processes to establish the views of learners, staff and parents and carers. Leaders have developed worthwhile learner friendly formats and approaches to support learners to make decisions about college life. Leaders use this information appropriately to support self-evaluation and it is beginning to support improvement planning.

Senior leaders provide helpful support and challenge for the principal. The organisation governance team meet regularly to evaluate the work of the college. The principal provides suitable reports and feedback to support senior leaders to evaluate the work of the college.

Leaders place a high priority on safeguarding and keeping learners safe. However, college policies are generic to the wider organisation and do not provide clear guidance to leaders and staff in this area. This inhibits college leaders' ability to adapt approaches to the specific context of the college.

The college benefits from a range of worthwhile partnerships with a range of settings including mainstream colleges, special schools and the college clinical team. Leaders use these partnerships purposefully to improve provision and outcomes for learners. For example, through securing staff training and improving transition processes for learners.

Leaders have a valuable understanding of how best to use the college's resources. Since the time of the last inspection there have been beneficial improvements to the college learning environment, such as developing an outdoor education area and café. These improvements support learners to develop important skills for life within authentic contexts.

The college's professional learning offer ensures that staff develop the appropriate knowledge and skills to support to broad range of complex needs of learners. Staff

benefit from visits to other settings, including mainstream and specialist colleges and special schools to share good practice. However, opportunities for staff to share learning from these visits within the staff team are underdeveloped.

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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Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

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

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