

Derwen College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 133173

Name of lead inspector: Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Whittington Road
Gobowen
Oswestry
Shropshire
SY11 3JA

Telephone number: 01691 661234

Information about the provider

1. Derwen College is a larger than average specialist independent residential college, situated in the village of Gobowen, two miles from Oswestry. The college currently provides for 256 learners from a wide geographical area. Some 54 learners are from Wales and are funded by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) Welsh Assembly Government, two learners are privately funded, eight are funded by social services and the remainder are funded by the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA). The college community consists of learners with a wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties. Some 9% of college learners are of minority ethnic heritage and 55% are male.

2. The college has a curriculum framework, based on four strands, which link to the themes outlined in Every Child Matters and Youth Matters, and through which literacy and numeracy are delivered. For the purposes of self-assessment the curriculum is divided into two broad areas: vocational and prevocational studies and the extended curriculum, which includes all aspects of independent living and social skills. The emphasis in the vocational and prevocational curriculum is on practical activities in realistic settings, for example learners are involved in the running of the college restaurant and garden centre, both open to the public. The college appointed a new acting principal in August 2010 and confirmed the appointment as principal in December 2011.

3. The college’s mission states that ‘Derwen College is committed to promoting, through personalised learning, the vocational, educational, personal and social development of young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities’.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to18)	44 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	198 full-time learners
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	4 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Grade 1
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2

Overall effectiveness

4. Derwen College continues to offer an outstanding quality of education for its learners. Learners thoroughly enjoy their studies and this is evident through their high levels of attendance and their excellent attitudes to learning. The vast majority of learners achieve their accredited qualifications successfully and make significant gains in developing independence. They demonstrate very good social skills and high levels of self-esteem. An extensive, highly responsive and personalised curriculum, including strong partnership working that gives access to a wide array of real work settings, develops learners' employability skills effectively. This, along with frequent reinforcement of learners' literacy and numeracy skills, prepares learners exceptionally well for a more self-sufficient life after college.
5. Most lessons are very well planned and enable learners to make consistently good or better progress. Interactive technologies are used well and often imaginatively to support learning. In a small minority of lessons, however, learners' progress is sometimes less rapid owing to a lack of precise individual target setting, limited range of activity or insufficient feedback by teachers to meet the needs of learners with varying levels of ability. Diversity is promoted well through the curriculum, including the celebration of Welsh culture. The care, guidance and support learners receive is outstanding and ensures they understand how to manage their disabilities, take control of their own lives and make their own key decisions and choices with confidence.
6. Senior leaders, governors and staff share an ethos of high expectations of learners. Learners have an influential voice in the college. Managers use data well to inform their decisions. Most analyses of data by managers to inform

target setting is meticulous, although in a small number of departments and in aspects of equalities monitoring, it is less detailed and purposeful. Overall, comprehensive and self critical self-assessment and sharply focused quality monitoring enables the college to maintain and, more notably, build upon its previous strengths. As a result the college demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. The great majority of learners achieve their main qualification aim and a useful range of additional qualifications. Learners develop very good employability skills through taking part in a wide range of vocational options; approximately two thirds undertake either internal or external work experience. Standards of work are high overall and in many cases, outstanding.
- Learners make excellent progress with the development of independent living, social and personal skills. They learn how to use functional skills well, including their ability to communicate with others effectively. They gain an increased understanding of the options open to them once they leave college and become more able to manage their own lives.
- Learners make an excellent contribution to the college and local community. The learner voice is very influential and has gained national recognition for its work. Learners have very positive attitudes to learning within the curriculum and during enrichment activities. They improve their ability to make choices and to direct their own current and future lives very well.
- Teaching and learning are good. Learners are highly motivated by stimulating teaching. The best lessons meet individual needs very well and use a wide range of resources and techniques so all learners are included. The lack of precise target setting, narrow range of activities and insufficient use of feedback in a few sessions slows progress and reduces learners' involvement in learning.
- The college's curriculum and partnership working is outstanding. Learners have individually-designed, flexible programmes incorporating a wide range of options. Work experience opportunities are very good. The enrichment programme is extensive and many learners participate. The extensive use of community facilities, local and national employers and other organisations extends learning opportunities significantly, provides realistic work experiences and increases learners' independence.
- Care, support and guidance are outstanding. The college provides an extensive range of excellent therapeutic support for all learners which includes a wide range of counselling, nursing, personal tutorial support, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and support for mental health needs. Highly effective planning for transition is in place for all learners and ensures comprehensive preparation for their next steps.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers and governors are very ambitious in their desire to improve the quality of provision. They set

aspirational targets, most of which they achieve within challenging deadlines. They are very committed to increasing their learners' skills and employability. They promote a culture of respect and provide a harmonious and high quality learning environment.

- Managers use very inclusive and accurate self-assessment processes to inform highly effective quality improvement plans. Most managers analyse data thoroughly to determine areas for improvement, but others are yet to develop these skills. Most managers are proactive in driving improvements in their areas, but a few are less effective in setting challenging targets, promoting ambition and prioritising key issues.
- Governors set the demanding ethos, mission and culture of the college. They place the needs of learners at the forefront of policies, planning and practices. Governors have highly appropriate expertise and experience. They use their wide ranging skills and educational and financial expertise to very good effect to ensure the continuing achievement of high standards.

What does Derwen College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure target setting and the planning and delivery of all lessons provides learners with opportunities to make very good progress according to their varying abilities.
- Ensure all teachers use and record evaluative feedback more effectively to enable learners to understand clearly what they have already achieved and the steps they need to take to improve further.
- Increase the skills of all managers so that they are all able to analyse data effectively to inform actions. Increase their ambition so that they become more proactive in implementing quality assurance processes rigorously to promote improvements.
- Strengthen the monitoring and analysis of a few aspects of equality and diversity data including more detailed monitoring by different groups and at different qualification levels so that managers are better placed to track all potential trends and patterns more clearly.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- making friends
- feeling that they are making good progress in their studies
- all the different activities they can do in lessons and in the evenings
- going to town at the weekend
- working in a real life environment
- feeling safe around the college
- being prepared for employment.

What learners would like to see improved:

- even more evening enrichment activities planned into the end of the week
- more choice in some of the food.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the training and support the college provides
- the mentor support for teacher trainees
- the college's contribution to the community
- good communication with staff
- high standards shown by learners in a range of settings
- the information they get through the learners' employability pack.

What employers would like to see improved:

- no negative responses received.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

7. Managers have made significant improvements in many areas since the previous inspection. The documentation for individual risk assessments is much more comprehensive. The accommodation for retail and performing arts has improved considerably through the provision of new commercial outlets and dance studio, separate music room and social centre stage.
8. Managers use very effective self-assessment and quality improvement processes to sustain high levels of learners' progress and outcomes. Most of the judgements in the self-assessment report are accurate. Managers inspire their staff to achieve demanding targets which benefit learners greatly. Governors use their considerable experience and expertise very effectively to challenge senior and middle managers and to raise standards. The user engagement processes are successful in initiating improvements to the quality of provision. Governors, senior managers and staff have very good expertise, commitment and financial resources to implement their ambitious plans for future learners.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

9. Learners gain an excellent range of accredited qualifications with the great majority achieving their main learning goal and a large number of additional qualifications. Attendance and retention are very high. Learners' attainment of personal and social skills is very good. Learners develop greatly increased levels of confidence, self-esteem and independent living skills. They interact well with the public in the college's enterprises and during external work experience. They reinforce their skills development, including functional skills, well across all aspects of the curriculum. The standard of learners' work is very high and in creative arts, where they often produce art work that they sell in the college gallery, it is outstanding.
10. Learners make at least good or better progress during their time at college. This was confirmed by inspectors' observations where learners were often seen evaluating their own progress and collating evidence well through high quality interactive records of achievement. Learners demonstrate proficient computer skills, including uploading and manipulating images and text. Where appropriate, learners direct and support each other well in classroom activities. In a few cases, particularly in mixed ability lessons, learners do not make the progress they are capable of as their targets are not always sufficiently differentiated, leading to learners all working on tasks at the same level.
11. The college collates and reports on learners' main achievements by age, gender and ethnicity and college data suggest no significant differences in outcomes in 2010/11, including outcomes for learners from Wales. The analysis by different

groups at qualification level, however, is not systematically reported to enable managers to track trends in performance thoroughly.

12. Learners develop an exceptionally thorough understanding of employability through well-structured training in a wide variety of vocational options. Many become much clearer about their future career paths. For example, a learner now knows she wants to work in catering after taking part in a successful work placement in the kitchen of a local hospice. Learners develop adept office skills and provide a valuable service by carrying out useful tasks in the college business administration centre. Around two-thirds of learners take part in either internal or external work experience. Learners' progression to independent living or to voluntary or paid work is very good.
13. Learners have a very good understanding of safe working practices. They become more competent at managing their medication independently and learn the benefits of taking control of their own well-being. Learners are involved fully in making a wide range of choices about their curriculum and enrichment activities.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

14. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lively and stimulating sessions that engage learners. The college's thorough initial assessment to gauge learners' abilities, aspirations and support needs is highly effective and used well in the planning of lessons. Individual target setting for learners continues to improve. In most lessons teachers adapt content and activities to challenge learners and stretch them to improve their performance and take responsibility for their own learning. In the small number of less effective lessons the pace of learning was too slow and too many activities were directed by the teacher.
15. Resources for learning are of a high standard and are linked well to real working environments in the café, farm shop and working kitchens. Information and learning technologies are used very effectively by staff to engage learners' interest. The development of learners' literacy, numeracy and communication skills in lessons is good. Functional skills are integrated effectively into most vocational lessons relating them appropriately to the world of work. Well-qualified residential staff reinforce learners' skills well to ensure learners' knowledge is transferable between settings. The residences enable learners to develop their independent living skills which prepares them for transition to the next stage of their lives.
16. The teaching and learning observation process is good and improving, with most observers providing targeted, evaluative feedback to staff that leads to improved performance. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made by observers in the jointly observed lessons although the overall grade profile in the self-assessment report judged a greater proportion of teaching sessions as good or outstanding than the sample seen by inspectors.

17. Learners' individual needs are met very well by a broad curriculum offering a wide ranging and responsive programme with extensive co-ordinated progression routes from pre-entry to foundation level and a small number at intermediate level. Learners have very good, well planned and unique timetables that identify clearly their vocational, personal development and therapeutic needs. The college is highly responsive to the needs of employers and uses destination data to inform curriculum development to enhance long-term work opportunities for learners. The enrichment offer is outstanding. Learners' feedback is influential in creating a dynamic and engaging choice of activities that enables learners to explore new experiences both on and off the college site.
18. Derwen uses its strong and highly effective links with employers, charities, other educational organisations and national bodies to support learning, influence the curriculum and significantly increase opportunities for learners. The college's external relationships ensure industry standards and commercial expectations are replicated within the vocational areas. For example, involvement in local farmers' markets and food fairs gives learners a good opportunity to liaise with customers and suppliers that improves their communication skills and develops good business practices. The recent involvement in sector skills competitions has raised standards across departments, motivating students and broadening their aspirations.
19. The college provides an extensive range of therapeutic support for all learners that includes a wide range of counselling, nursing, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and support for mental health needs. Central to this is that learners are encouraged to manage and sustain their own support, and this enables them to continue to access support after they leave college. The college promotes an innovative approach to physiotherapy enabling learners to continue to access easily available resources, such as a local gym, once they have left college. Derwen College is a centre of excellence for Makaton and has been instrumental in the development of a new national application for a touch screen device. Highly effective transition planning is well established throughout learners' programmes to prepare them successfully for their next steps after college.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

20. The principal, senior managers and governors set very demanding targets to raise expectations and improve the quality of learners' experiences. The strategic plan is ambitious and wide-ranging and shows an astute awareness of the potential risks to achieving its aspirations. Governors, managers and staff are committed to achieving extremely high standards to improve learners' independent living, social and vocational skills. They achieve these laudable aims. Senior staff and governors give a high priority to careful succession planning. Curriculum management is very good in most areas. In others,

managers are insufficiently proactive in setting challenging targets, promoting ambition and in analysing data to prioritise their key areas for improvement.

21. Governors are very determined to initiate significant improvements in the quality of college policies, procedures and provision. They challenge senior and middle managers robustly to raise their standards and their ambitions for learners. They are extremely knowledgeable about local and national initiatives. Governors are rigorous in their scrutiny of financial health, management and planning. They continue to drive changes in curriculum, accommodation and resources to increase learners' employability skills and to meet employers' needs. Governors ensure statutory requirements are met and give a high priority to health and safety.
22. The college's arrangements for safeguarding learners are outstanding. Learners' individual risk assessments are very comprehensive and are reviewed continually. Teachers emphasise the importance of health and safety frequently through lessons. The promotion of e-safety is innovative and highly effective. Careful monitoring and risk management by the college enable learners to use a wide range of technologies, including social networking sites, confidently, sensibly and independently. The college campus provides a safe and secure working environment with clear guidelines in place regarding access to the commercial areas of the college that are open to the general public. The college recognises that signage around a few areas of the campus could be more visible for visitors and plans are in place to improve this.
23. The college promotes successfully a culture of respect. Learners are courteous and compassionate towards their peers and show a very good understanding of what is right, wrong and fair. Cultural diversity is celebrated well across the college. For example, learners within performing arts collaborated with a local dance group to perform Bollywood dancing to the general public. The promotion of disability is very well integrated into the curriculum that enables learners to develop an excellent awareness of their own disabilities and to appreciate others' differences. The college analyses equalities data for staff and learners to help it monitor the impact of its work, but this analysis is not sufficiently detailed in all cases. For example, the views of learners are collected but not reviewed to see if there is any variation in opinion between different groups.
24. Managers at all levels include the views of staff and external contacts in their self-assessment reports and associated action plans. These have significant impact on increasing the quality of provision. Managers have improved significantly the processes to elicit and act on learners' views. Managers and governors give a high profile to the student council and empower learners to contribute to operational and strategic decisions. Communication between managers and staff has improved through a wide range of initiatives and this is an ongoing process.

25. The strategic plan, self-assessment report and quality improvement plan focus on learners and interrelate closely. Managers use them very effectively to improve learners' progress, attainment and employability. The self-assessment report is moderated rigorously by external partners and governors who instigate important changes to judgements and emphasis. The report is self-critical and evaluative. It lists key strengths but not key areas for improvements. Departmental self-assessment reports are readily accessible by all staff. This provides greater openness and promotes the sharing of good practice between departments. Many staff have higher level specialist qualifications and benefit from excellent staff training, often in conjunction with partners. Staff set challenging but realistic targets and are acutely aware of the financial implications. Most of these targets are achieved within their expected timescale and many have a considerable impact on improving the quality of learners' experiences.
26. Financial health, management and control are outstanding. Managers make very effective use of their finances to increase the quality of accommodation and resources to a high degree. The excellent learning environment helps staff and learners to enjoy college life. Managers and governors oversee capital projects very rigorously to ensure best purchasing practice. Value for money is outstanding.

Information about the inspection

27. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), two additional inspectors and one Estyn inspector assisted by the college's vocational manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
28. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from a range of programmes the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Derwen College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	246	51	193	5
Part-time learners	0	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	1	1	1	1
Capacity to improve	1			
Outcomes for learners	1	1	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1			
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1			
How well do learners progress?	2			
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1			
How safe do learners feel?	1			
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1			
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1			
Quality of provision	1	1	1	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2			
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1			
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1			
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1			
Leadership and management	1	1	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1			
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	1			
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1			
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2			
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1			
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1			

*where applicable to the type of provision

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Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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