

Derwen College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

20–22 April 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Governors and senior managers have successfully created a culture and ethos through which all staff have very high expectations of students; as a result, students respond positively and thrive.
- Students greatly enjoy their education and training. A high proportion of students successfully gain their qualification and almost all students make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Leaders and managers develop close employer links which lead to extensive, high-quality and meaningful work experience for the vast majority of students.
- Leaders and managers' innovative partnership working with 'industry champions' substantially increases students' opportunities for employment.
- Students benefit from a wide range of real working environments at the college, which offer authentic opportunities to develop work-related skills.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Teachers stimulate and engage students in practical and imaginative activities, which contribute to students' progress and enjoyment of learning. Teachers' development of students' English and mathematics skills in all learning settings is excellent.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum is individualised to meet the needs of each student; as a result, students develop valuable skills that prepare them for their future life exceptionally well.
- Students participate in an extremely wide range of sport, leisure and social activities that effectively promote their health and well-being and help them to develop sustained and absorbing hobbies and interests.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Derwen College was founded in 1927 for young people with disabilities and learning difficulties. It is a specialist independent residential college, situated in the village of Gobowen, two miles from Oswestry. The college currently provides provision for 172 students from a wide geographical area. Some 48 students are from Wales, 124 are from England. The college also provides provision for a further 88 people on living and work programmes who are funded by social care or are privately funded. Some 7% of college students are of minority ethnic heritage and 59% are male.
- The college also offers provision on three additional satellite sites: Ashdale House in Wrexham, Craven Arms in Shropshire and Walford in Shrewsbury.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should ensure that staff adopt a more coordinated approach to planning teaching, learning, assessment and support to meet more closely the needs of a very few students with more complex learning needs; they should monitor these students' progress throughout their time in college more precisely.
- Leaders should ensure the collection of a more comprehensive set of student destination data and use this to better inform the planning for students' transition after they finish their course.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Governors, the chief executive and senior managers have established a culture of very high expectations for all students. Staff reinforce very high standards across the college, at work and in the residences. Students greatly enjoy their learning, their work experience and the social aspects of college life. Almost all make excellent progress in the development of their personal and vocational skills, and are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The range of provision is excellent. Leaders and managers carefully monitor the progression of students and use this information well to improve and inform changes to curriculum design. For example, leaders identified that proportionally fewer students progressed from college into office work and catering than into retail and hospitality. Managers have made significant changes to vocational programmes which enable students to develop the relevant skills required for all sectors, increasing their opportunities to progress to employment when leaving college.
- Managers have developed very close links with employers, particularly in retail and hospitality. 'Industry champions' work closely with college staff to enhance college vocational programmes. They ensure that staff and students are fully aware of the standards and skills required in the workplace and provide students with meaningful work-experience opportunities. These companies have invested in industry-standard learning resources at the college. For example, one national hotel company has converted a room at the college into a bedroom enabling students to develop and practise housekeeping skills. As a result of this successful partnership work, two students have gained employment as housekeepers and 18 students are currently on experience to develop their reception, food and beverage, and housekeeping skills in three local hotels.
- Managers adopt robust performance management strategies to tackle weaknesses in teaching and learning, and in student support. Underperforming staff receive carefully tailored support and training, which has resulted in improvements in the standard of teaching and learning. In a few cases, staff that have not improved have been dismissed. The college arranges an extensive range of training and professional development activities which is informed by the observations of learning sessions.
- Leaders develop highly effective strategic partnerships on behalf of young people who have learning difficulties and disabilities. These partnerships have contributed to a number of national initiatives to develop and increase opportunities for students to engage in a wide range of competitions and skills events, for example, the 'Inclusive Skills Competition' that mirrors 'WorldSkills UK' and the 'World Abilitylympics'. These initiatives enable students to develop further their confidence and skills for work, perform under pressure and gain relevant, work-related experience.
- Leaders and managers give strategic priority to English and mathematics. Teachers plan effective opportunities for all students to develop their skills in English and mathematics in all learning settings, in vocational contexts and in discrete English and mathematics classes. Students self-refer onto additional classes, such as the 'speak, sign, symbol maths' provision for lower-level students and the 'advanced functional skills' for the most able.
- Leaders and managers closely monitor the progress of groups of students to ensure that none is disadvantaged or underachieves. There are no significant gaps in the achievement of any groups at the end of their learning programme. However, leaders and managers do not always identify the gaps in performance for a few groups of students at each stage of their learning.
- The student residential accommodation is mostly fit for purpose. However, leaders and managers recognise that the older buildings need modernising. They have planned significant improvements to the accommodation over the next 18 months.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governors and the chief executive have a strong vision and plan for the future of the college. They provide a rigorous level of challenge to senior managers, high levels of support and a clear strategic direction. Governors are well qualified and have a range of expertise that benefits the college and its students.
 - Governors have worked relentlessly with senior leaders to improve continually the quality of provision and the college environment. They have invested in three new sites and increased the opportunities for students to engage in new work-related activities at these and at the existing Derwen site, while ensuring that the college remains viable.
 - Since the previous inspection, a number of governance sub-committees have been established, led by the new chair of the governing body. Governors sit on a wide range of cross-college committees,

such as the student council and the committee for 'Prevent'. As a result of this new, improved level of engagement, governors have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement and a good understanding of the students' experience at the college.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Arrangements for safeguarding are appropriate and focus strongly on the needs of the students. Staff and governors have regular training on safeguarding, and as a result have a thorough understanding of the potential risks to students. They take necessary measures to ensure that they are safe.
- Students have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet at home, in college and in the workplace. They feel safe and they know how and when to report any concerns regarding their safety.
- The culture of health and safety is strong. Staff work hard to ensure that students are kept safe in all learning settings. Risk assessments are thorough and include all settings and living arrangements. Policies on safeguarding are appropriate and regularly reviewed.
- Since the previous inspection, the college has appointed a safeguarding manager, and four governors now have a safeguarding role. Staff handle safeguarding incidents professionally and sensitively. Appropriate incident recording is in place; referrals to external agencies are carefully recorded and tracked. The college has good links with external agencies, including the Care Quality Commission.
- Records of checks on staff, including criminal record checks, are up to date and accurate.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Students are lively, enthusiastic about learning and greatly enjoy their education and training at the college. Staff tailor all programmes of learning, training and support specifically to individual needs. As students grow in skills and confidence, they become increasingly able to work independently, correct their own mistakes, and discuss their learning and plan for their future. This development equips them very well for life after college.
- Staff are dedicated, highly skilled, ambitious for students' success and work tirelessly to ensure that all students achieve the best possible outcomes in skills and knowledge. Teachers design engaging and challenging learning activities and at different levels, depending on need. They make sure that students understand and can apply the knowledge that underpins the skills that they are developing.
- Learning sessions are full of purposeful activity, during which students also develop the wider work skills of teamwork, concentration and improved communication. Staff give supportive and at the same time honest feedback on students' work. This makes it clear how to improve and provides a model for students in the useful skills of self-evaluation and self-reflection. They challenge students constantly to extend their abilities.
- The college has detailed and thorough systems to establish students' starting points before they join the college and use all available records of students' learning and support at their previous school. Parents are involved at an early stage to ensure that students get the support and engagement they need when leaving home, often for the first time.
- The recording, monitoring and tracking of students' progress are outstanding. Students and their families receive regular, detailed reports that give a highly accurate picture of students' development, including any areas where progress has been slower than expected. Most parents are surprised and delighted at the way students develop once they have settled in to their new situation. They comment enthusiastically on the greater maturity and confidence of the young people and on their willingness to undertake housekeeping tasks at home.
- Staff integrate English, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT) imaginatively and successfully into every session. As a result, many become interested in the roots and meanings of the English language and increase their confidence in using mathematics in daily life.
- A very effective ICT policy encourages students to bring their own technological devices to college. Students learn to make skilled and responsible use of tablet computers and mobile phones for research, the presentation of their work, to make calculations or to check spelling.
- Students engage in real tasks that develop strong vocational skills and have access to outstanding resources at the college campuses. They make artisan-quality bread and cakes for sale in college outlets. They serve food competently and operate tills, mow lawns and plant shrubs. They recycle waste and repair small electrical items. They prepare hotel guest rooms in a practice room provided by their partner hotel chain, working at a standard required by the industry. One of the college partners, a hotel chain,

has installed a model guest room at the college. Students use this facility to practise their room preparation skills and achieve to industry standard.

- Students research artwork and use it as inspiration for their own designs of craft items and to learn desktop publishing skills. They design and perfect dance routines and sign-supported songs and perform these in public.
- Staff are alert to any occasional derogatory or stereotyping remarks and always engage with students in a calm and non-judgemental way that helps both the recipient and the student making the comment.
- Students' targets in a number of areas of their work are too general to enable the precise monitoring of progress. Care plans, in particular, contain few explicit targets for students. However, the impact of this on learning and progress is very slight, because teachers mostly design highly specific targets which support progress in smaller steps in all learning settings, particularly for learning that is not externally accredited.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

- Students develop self-confidence exceptionally well, take great pride in their work and very much enjoy learning. Students benefit significantly from taking part in national work skills competitions that build their confidence further and celebrate their skills' development.
- Almost all students undertake high-quality work experience placements which link very well with their vocational studies and longer-term career aspirations. For example, the college manages the local railway station café, which provides students with the opportunity to develop excellent social, vocational and wider employability skills while working in the heart of the community. They learn to work as a team and communicate with customers.
- The college provides exceptionally good opportunities for students to develop their skills for work through a wide range of commercial ventures on campus. They use their English and mathematics skills effectively to cash up tills and do stocktaking; they provide a good and highly valued service to customers when working in the college's industry-standard restaurant, kitchen, large farm retail unit, business centre and small café.
- The college works very effectively with large national businesses to support students' transition into employment in the students' home areas. For example, two students had work placements with a large supermarket chain while at college. They moved into full-time employment in branches of the chain close to home on leaving college.
- Another student is on work experience as a porter at a hospital based near the college. He collects and sorts blood samples and ensures that they are despatched to the correct department. As a result of his excellent skills development, he now works as a 'bank porter' at his local hospital in the college holidays, with the aspiration to continue there when he leaves college.
- Students feel safe and identify very effectively the importance of internet safety and what to do in case of cyber bullying. They are confident to talk to staff about concerns and know how to keep safe in the workplace. Health and safety risk assessments are very thorough and detailed, and meet the specific needs of the individual students extremely well.
- Students receive excellent guidance before they start college and throughout their learning programme. Staff have very high expectations of students and provide very good support with the transition into work and towards independent living.
- The extensive range of excellent enrichment activities and sports encourages students to have a healthy and active lifestyle while developing their social and teamworking skills. These activities include swimming, canoeing, dance, prop-making, karaoke, boccia, healthy cooking, additional English and mathematics workshops, and vocational tasters.
- Students demonstrate a high level of respect for each other, staff and visitors. They develop excellent communication skills through 'learner voice' meetings with staff and governors. The college supports the vast majority of students to engage fully and vote in both national and student union elections. The college's student union proposed a motion at the 2015 National Union of Students (NUS) conference to enable students who have special educational needs or disability to have a voice within NUS structures. This motion was carried unanimously. The college has won the NUS disabled students' further education union of the year award.
- All students follow a well-designed personal development programme which helps them to understand unfamiliar cultures and prepares them well for life and working with diverse groups of people.
- Students benefit from an outstanding use of behaviour management strategies. They access an extensive range of specialist support and, as a result, they learn quickly to manage their behaviour more effectively. Attendance and punctuality in the vast majority of sessions are very good.

- The standard of students' work on vocational courses and at work is exceptionally high. Most students develop highly effective practical skills and a mature understanding of the world of work through carefully planned and relevant work-related opportunities within the college. Many progress on to challenging external work placements with a diverse range of established local and national employers. In a few cases, this has enabled students to achieve purposeful paid employment when they return home after leaving the college. The progress that students make in developing their work-related skills through meaningful work experience is a clear strength of the college.
- Almost all students make excellent progress as a result of the outstanding teaching and stimulating learning experiences that the college provides. All students have a wide range of challenging targets relating to their functional skills, vocational areas and work experience. Almost all make consistent and sustained progress against these targets.
- Many students develop excellent communication skills during their time at the college. In lessons, students listen attentively, take turns appropriately, respond positively to questioning, and develop the accuracy of their answers. Many students talk confidently about the work they are doing, using subject-specific vocabulary effectively. Performing arts students explain clearly the effects of dance upon the body, including the need to remain hydrated and warm up properly. Around the campus, students welcome visitors to the college, show them where to park and ask them to sign in at reception.
- The college has very well-established processes and a competent and highly committed team of staff in place to support the communication needs of most students. However, currently a very few students do not make the progress they are capable of because staff do not always plan sufficiently carefully or consistently how to meet needs of students with the most complex and challenging communication needs.
- Students' achievement of accredited qualifications is excellent, with almost all students achieving full qualifications or units in line with their ability and the aims of their programmes. This includes useful accreditation that directly supports the achievement of greater independence in their future lives, such as in food hygiene and first aid. Nearly all students successfully achieve accreditation at the appropriate level in English and mathematics.
- Students develop skills that prepare them exceptionally well for life after they leave the college. The college's own data suggests that students achieve the positive destinations set out at the start of their programme of study. However, currently managers are not able to give a comprehensive analysis of all students' destinations as they do not have reliable information on the destinations of just over one third of leavers.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16–18 and 19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	124
Principal/CEO	Ruth Thomas
Website address	www.derwen.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	6	117	0	1	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	1	1	0	0	0	0		
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Denise Olander, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Tither	Her Majesty's Inspector (Estyn)
Pippa Wainwright	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted conducted this inspection with the assistance of the Welsh inspectorate Estyn. The above team was assisted by the quality and compliance manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.



Employer View is a new website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too.

To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2016

