

# Inspection of Derwen College

Inspection dates: 9–11 November 2021

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Information about this provider

Derwen College is an independent specialist provider for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities focusing on the development of employability, independent living and personal and social skills.

The college offers vocational pathways in horticulture, hospitality and food, retail and enterprise, performing arts, business support and sport and fitness. It also provides the 'learning for life pathway', a pre-vocational course for learners with more complex needs. A small number of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties are enrolled on the 'nurture' programme. Currently, these learners are all funded by the Welsh Government and not in scope for this inspection.

The College operates across four sites. The main campus is at Gobowen, in Shropshire, for day and residential learners. There are three smaller sites in Telford, Walford and Ludlow for day learners.

The college currently provides learning for 137 learners from a wide geographical area. Some 22 are from Wales, with 111 from England. The college also makes provision for four people on living and work programmes, who are funded by social care or are privately funded. These learners are not in scope for this inspection.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Learners feel safe and enjoy their time at the college.

Learners are well supported during their transition to college. Staff provide them with helpful advice on course choices and ensure that they receive the academic, personal and therapeutic support that they need to work towards their aspirations.

Learners become more independent in their personal lives. Through regular tutorials, learners participate in discussions and take more control of their decision-making. They improve their ability to travel, shop, cook and manage their personal laundry. As they acquire these skills, they move successfully into more independent living arrangements.

Learners attend their education and work commitments punctually and with enthusiasm. With the support of staff, and the consistent use of behaviour contracts, learners follow rules and routines well in working environments. Most learners make good progress. Learners take pride in their achievements and are keen to learn more.

Learners benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities. For example, during evenings and weekends, learners can participate in sports and a planned schedule of trips to theatres, lunches and shops, which improve their social skills. Learners on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (Gold, Silver and Bronze levels) develop good teamwork, communication and physical skills.

Learners are encouraged to join the thriving student union and to represent their fellow students, including the views of ethnic minority groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. Representatives improve their communication skills and negotiate improvements for the benefit of all learners.

Learners receive regular and impartial careers advice from highly qualified careers advisers. Learners also take part in national careers week to sample a variety of options available to them. Learners are well prepared for when they leave the college. Staff continue to support them in subsequent months.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Senior leaders have created a caring, calm and inclusive environment for staff and students. Staff are well trained in supporting good behaviours. Staff have high standards and clear expectations of learners' behaviour. As a result, staff support learners well. Learners' behaviour and attitudes are exceptional, and they make good progress in their vocational courses and independent living skills.

Senior leaders have developed a curriculum which reflects local authority needs and student demands. For example, working with Telford local authority, they have developed provision in business support, sales and marketing. They have adapted the creative arts

curriculum to focus on performing arts, and they have introduced a sports and fitness pathway at Walford. They anticipate that this curriculum will provide better employment opportunities for their learners. It is, however, too early to see the impact.

During the pandemic, senior leaders invested in innovative ways of providing students access to realistic work opportunities. For example, they developed internal placement opportunities through a charity shop and a food takeaway outlet. Students continued to develop their vocational skills during this time.

Most teaching facilities are currently good, and managers have plans to improve them. Within performing arts, there are extensive rehearsal and practical spaces. Within horticulture, learners can access a walled garden, a garden centre, large greenhouses and the college grounds. As a result, they can experience different areas of horticulture, including grounds work, general clearance, potting and planting and basic maintenance using a variety of tools.

Leaders plan vocational pathways well. After a period of core skill development, teachers help learners to apply their knowledge, skills and behaviours in internal and external work placements. Leaders have established industry champions who ensure that teachers train learners in the most up-to-date approaches and procedures for the sector.

Within hospitality, sport and horticulture, teachers plan and order the curriculum logically. Learners develop significant new knowledge and skills. For example, within hospitality, learners establish good hygiene and use knives safely, before moving on to more advanced food preparation skills. In horticulture, learners understand the basic skills to prepare and look after winter-flowering plants. Over time, they learn how to use power tools within a controlled environment. As a result, learners can undertake more challenging and varied tasks.

Learners use technical vocabulary well. For example, in horticulture, they know the names of the tools they are using and the names of many of the trees and plants found across the college campus. In sport and fitness, learners can talk about respiration and how this is important not only in general activity but also in playing sport.

Teachers are well qualified and experienced in their vocational areas. They provide clear demonstrations and verbal feedback, which enables learners to make progress. However, a few learners would benefit from receiving a permanent record of what has gone well, what they have done incorrectly and what they need to do to improve.

Leaders prepare realistic work placements for learners within the college campuses. For example, learners will work in the Garden Café, The Vintage Advantage charity shop, Hotel 751 and the extensive gardens. Learners develop industry-standard skills, which help them to find employment on leaving the college.

Within performing arts, students participate enthusiastically in public performances. They experience performing in different styles and settings. They build their

confidence. However, within the core skills section of the performing arts curriculum, teachers do not plan in sufficient detail what they will teach and what individual learners need to learn. Teachers do not systematically provide learners with the opportunity to repeat or practise specific knowledge and routines, so that they become more automatic.

Leaders find and support excellent external work placements across the vocational pathways. For example, learners in hospitality undertake placements in Premier Inn hotels and learn how to strip and prepare hotel bedrooms ready for guests. Learners use a digital application, devised jointly by the college and the employer, to remind them of the routines.

Most learners gain knowledge of how to conduct personal relationships through the planned personal, social and health education programme. Managers provide relationship and sex education to selected learners based on a risk assessment. They intend to extend this provision to all learners in line with their needs. However, at the time of the inspection, we identified a very small number of learners with recorded sexualised behaviour who had not yet received the support they needed.

Leaders have developed a well-designed supported internship programme. It is currently for a small number of learners. Teachers provide them with an individualised package of learning and support, which helps them to succeed in their internship. An intern in the garden centre is having a positive impact on the merchandising for Christmas.

Leaders and managers track the destinations of leavers well. They use this information to reflect on and change the shape of the curriculum to meet the needs of learners. Just over half the leavers in 2021 have positive destinations, including paid and voluntary work and internships.

Nearly all leavers are deemed ready for supported independent living. At the time of the inspection, about a third were in supported independent living, with a quarter still with their family pending confirmation of suitable arrangements for supported living.

Governors are highly experienced within the education and care sector. They use their experience well to scrutinise the information they receive from senior leaders, managers and staff. They provide strong and appropriate support and challenge to senior managers.

Leaders do not ensure that the smaller number of learners with more complex needs on the pre-vocational course make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers provide learning activities but do not plan for, and teach, the small but challenging steps that learners need to complete to make progress.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders have recently expanded the safeguarding team. There are trained designated safeguarding leads or deputies on the main and satellite sites. Leaders ensure that training is updated and completed in a timely way. Managers ensure that staff are recruited in line with safer recruitment policies. Managers have appropriate policies in place to meet the legal requirements in relation to the support needs of students. Staff have put in place appropriate procedures to track and monitor the administration of medication. Staff plan well to minimise the risks to learners at work and in the classroom.

Safeguarding leads have developed a comprehensive system for recording, monitoring and responding to safeguarding incidents for students. The number of reportable incidents to external agencies has reduced over the last three years.

Leaders inform governors of changes to policies and safeguarding incidents. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of the recent Care Quality Commission inspection, action plan and progress made against this action plan.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders should provide learners with a permanent record of what they have done well, what they have done incorrectly and what they need to improve so that learners gain greater control of their learning.
- Leaders should improve the curriculum for learners with complex needs by planning for and teaching the small but challenging steps that learners need, to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders should improve the core skills part of the performing arts curriculum by deciding the fundamental knowledge, skills and behaviours that they want to teach. Teachers must then provide learners with planned opportunities to practise and repeat them so that learners become more fluent.
- Leaders should swiftly provide relationships and sex education for all learners at the appropriate level for their emotional, behavioural and cognitive development, so that the risk of making poor decisions about sexual behaviour is reduced.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	133173
<b>Address</b>	Whittington Road Gobowen Oswestry Shropshire SY11 3JA
<b>Contact number</b>	01691661234
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.derwen.ac.uk">www.derwen.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Meryl Green
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	20–22 April 2016
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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