

Linkage College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates		6–8 February 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding-1
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. The excellent development of personal, social, employability and independence skills enables students to meet their destination goals. Success rates are high.
- Sessions are good where students are engaged in meaningful, realistic activities, which are planned to meet individual needs.
- Teachers and therapists understand the barriers to learning that many students face and provide good interventions to help them learn.
- Transition planning is very effective and multi-disciplinary teams monitor students' progress rigorously.
- Managers have steered the college very well through a period of change, and ensured that students continue to make very good progress. They have accurately assessed the current quality of the provision.
- Students live and learn in an inclusive environment, and staff do not tolerate bullying and harassment.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Teaching and learning and assessment are not consistently good or better across the college, as not all teachers stretch and challenge students sufficiently.
- The programmes of learning for a minority of students are too classroom-based, with insufficient opportunity for meaningful practical activity.
- Managers have not yet developed performance indicators to enable them to monitor all aspects of the college's performance on an annual basis.
- The college has not provided recent updating training on equality and diversity for its staff or trustees, and teachers do not promote these aspects well through the curriculum. The trustees have not had sufficient training in safeguarding.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of all teaching and learning by sharing the good and better practice in the college, and making better use of learning assistants in sessions so that all students are appropriately stretched and challenged.
- Ensure that all students can learn and further develop their skills by increasing the opportunities on all programmes for learning in realistic environments.
- Develop a mechanism to capture the progress made by students in all aspects of their programme, so that managers can better monitor the performance of the college from year to year.
- Ensure that all staff and trustees understand the implications of equalities legislation by updating the policy and implementing a training programme. Extend the good safeguarding training in the college to include trustees.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
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- Outcomes for students at Linkage College are outstanding. They make significant progress in all aspects of their learning programmes, in addition to gaining formal accreditation and achieving their long term goals in relation to further learning, employment and increased levels of independence.
- Students make good progress in achieving externally accredited qualifications. Over the past two years the proportion of students who take external qualifications has increased and in 2011/12 the success rates across all courses, from entry level to level 2 were high. There were no significant differences between the different groups of students. The achievement of functional skills qualifications is good.
- A significant strength of the college is the emphasis placed on developing personal, social and employability skills, as well as skills to enable greater independence. All students make very good progress in all of these areas, and the carers in the residences make very good use of opportunities to enable students to look after themselves and engage in the local community.
- Students make very good use of the college's enterprises to develop vocational skills as well as employability skills such as teamwork and communication. In the community café a student cooked stir-fries for members of the public, unaided, using the correct ingredients and quantities, and also communicated effectively with the customers.
- Students on the college's specialist provision for young people with autism and very high levels of need make very good, and sometimes outstanding progress, particularly in managing their anxieties and other barriers to engaging in formal learning. One student in his second year, who was initially too anxious to take part in college provision, now takes part very effectively in college enterprises.
- In 2012, almost half of the leavers made very good progress to further learning when they left the college, and are now attending further education colleges. Many leavers had been in the college for three years and had progressed by at least one qualification level.
- Just under half of the leavers in 2012 progressed to some form of employment. Very few leavers progressed to open employment, but an increasing proportion progressed to voluntary work or to work experience where they no longer require support. Increasingly, leavers progress to living situations where they require less support in their daily lives than they did when they first started their programmes at the college.

- Attendance rates in the week of inspection were high in many practical sessions in realistic environments, but lower in classroom-based sessions.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good overall and, together with good care and therapeutic support, contribute to the high success rates and very good development of personal, social and employability skills. Most members of staff have high expectations of students and understand their learning needs well.
- In the good sessions, which are the majority, teachers plan activities which have realistic, practical applications. They know their students well and plan activities that fully engage them. Teachers take good account of individual needs and provide appropriate challenge at all levels. Students enjoy their learning and make good progress in these sessions. Teachers are skilled at using strategies to avoid and prevent potential disruption by students.
- In the enterprise curriculum teachers maximise the opportunities available for students to learn through real-life activities using industry-standard resources in cafés, bistros and retail outlets. The experienced teachers plan the sessions in the workplace well for individual students. They use very effective coaching skills, and encourage students to reflect on their experiences in order to consolidate and improve their learning.
- In the specialist provision for students with autism and very high levels of need, skilful teachers choose the activities carefully so that they relate to everyday life. One student was observed learning to use switch technology to turn on his music player, so that he could use it unaided in his room, something he had not previously been able to do.
- In the minority of less effective sessions teachers dominate the groups and fail to take sufficient account of the different abilities and learning needs of students. In these sessions teachers do not plan engaging and meaningful activities and do not make the best use of the learning assistants, to work with and support students with differing needs and levels of attainment.
- Many students improve their application of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills within functional skills sessions. Teachers plan these well and use a variety of learning activities. However, in a minority of sessions teachers do not provide students with sufficient opportunities to practise and consolidate their learning in realistic practical settings.
- Teachers monitor students' progress very effectively. Pre-course, initial and base-line assessments are thorough and form the basis for individual learning plans, which are used for all aspects of the students' experience in the college. Teachers acknowledge students' achievement in sessions very effectively, with praise and encouragement.
- Teachers use very effective behaviour management strategies. These enable students to develop skills to manage their own behaviour and participate fully in activities. Student records show that, over time, this results in reductions in support requirements as students develop greater confidence and become more independent.
- Teachers and care staff provide good support and care for students. They are friendly, approachable and very accessible. Students have frequent meetings with staff members to discuss their individual care and progress needs.
- Staff make effective modifications in programme and support structures to ensure that students receive consistently appropriate levels of support and therapeutic intervention that are tailored to their individual needs.
- Transition planning is very good and contributes to students' successful destinations. In line with the college's mission, staff plan for transition from the start of the programme. They hold frequent and effective multi-disciplinary reviews to help students plan the next steps in their learning, focusing on their medium and long term goals.

- The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and learning requires further improvement. Teachers foster very good working and social relationships between students in their groups and create an environment of trust and respect. However, teachers only demonstrated examples of integration and discussion about equality and diversity in a small minority of sessions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal and senior managers, supported by trustees, are ambitious for the students and have high expectations. They focus in particular on providing programmes leading to employment and to independent living, reflecting the Trust's mission.
- The principal has led the college successfully through a period of significant change and disruption, as enrolments have decreased substantially since the last inspection. Despite the significant changes in staffing, the outcomes for students have continued to be outstanding.
- The college's self-assessment processes have become more rigorous: revised programme reviews were introduced for the first time in 2011/12, with a greater focus on outcomes. The views of stakeholders are collated, analysed and acted upon if necessary, although not well reflected in the summary self-assessment report.
- The college has accurately identified in its self-assessment report the decline in aspects of its performance since the last inspection. The strategic plan and the quality improvement plan focus well on key priorities and are already having a positive impact on teaching and learning.
- The observation of teaching and learning has become rigorous, and teachers are observed at least once annually. The college's profile of observations shows an increasing proportion of good or better grades, as teachers assessed as requiring improvement have been supported and re-observed.
- Inspectors found the observation team mostly identified key strengths and areas for improvement. The team recognises that more needs to be done to further improve the consistency of teaching across all areas of the provision.
- Management information is used very effectively for six weekly reviews of students' progress, with an increasing emphasis on the starting points of students. Although managers identify high success rates in the self-assessment report, they have not yet developed performance indicators to monitor the performance of all aspects of the provision on an annual basis.
- The college has developed two strands of its curriculum particularly well. The enterprise curriculum has enabled students to engage in programmes of learning in realistic environments, both in and out of the college. These opportunities include a community café and retail outlets.
- The new specialist provision for students with autism and very high levels of need has been very successful in assisting students to overcome barriers to learning and to progress gradually from the safe environment of their residential home to activities in the college.
- An increasing proportion of students across the college have an opportunity for good quality work experience, and the college has a large number of partnerships with local employers, so that they can match placements to the students' interests. However, opportunities are missed in some areas of the curriculum for developing and consolidating skills, including functional skills, in practical, realistic environments outside the classroom.
- The college successfully fosters an inclusive environment and provides good support to students with a wide spectrum of learning needs. Staff and students show a mutual respect for each other, and students are well supported to overcome any behavioural barriers they have in achieving their long term goals.
- Managers successfully promote a culture in which bullying and discrimination are not tolerated, and care is taken to ensure that students understand the consequences of bullying. Gaps in achievement are analysed and action taken if needed.

- The college has been slow in updating its policies and in training staff and trustees in response to the most recent equalities acts. Students are not formally represented on the board of trustees. These aspects require improvement.
- The residential provision meets Care Quality Commission standards and the arrangements in the college focus well on individual students and meet the requirements. However, the board has not ensured that the named safeguarding trustee has received safeguarding training, and this aspect of safeguarding requires improvement.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Linkage College			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	1	1	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Provider details

Linkage College	
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 161
	Part-time: 0
Principal/CEO	Matthew Orford
Date of previous inspection	February 2008
Website address	www.linkage.org.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)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	18	78	3	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
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"> ■ Grimsby Institute Group 							

Additional socio-economic information

The College is part of Linkage Community Trust, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The College provides further education for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and has recently developed specialist provision for learners with autism. The majority of students are residential. The college is based in Lincolnshire and has two main sites, one at Weelsby Campus and one at Toynton Campus. The College offers two individualised pathways based on Independence and Employability. The curriculum provides a range of courses including independence, personal and social development as well as vocational options that take place in work environments and enterprises. The college's mission is 'to deliver excellence in education and training to learners with learning difficulties, which promotes independence and employability'.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Joyce Deere HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the deputy principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions and looked at learners' progress files. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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