

Inspection of Valley College

Inspection dates:

20 to 22 September 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Provision for learners with high needs

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Valley College is an independent specialist college based in Haslingden, Lancashire. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Sea View Trust. The college opened in 2019 and provides education and support for young people aged 18 to 25 with severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder. The college offers three learning pathways in independence, employability and employment. At the time of the inspection, there were seven learners on the independence pathway, 12 on the employability pathway and four on the employment pathway. Learners study on programmes from entry level 1 to entry level 3.

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

Learners enjoy their time at college. They make new friends. Learners' behaviour is consistently good, and most participate in lessons enthusiastically. Learners value highly the skilful support that they receive from staff. This helps most learners to develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours and achieve a range of personal targets linked to their education, health and care plans.

Learners develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem during their time at college. Through a combination of classroom and community sessions, learners develop the skills they need to become confident and active citizens in their own community. Many learners are ambitious to move into paid employment or sustain voluntary work when they leave college. Learners who attend work placements as part of the employability pathway and the employment pathway develop the skills they need for the workplace, including the social and communication skills needed to interact with customers effectively.

Learners are very complimentary about their experience at college and report that they are confident that their learning pathway is preparing them for what they want to do next. The culture of the college places high levels of respect on the ability of learners to make choices and decisions for themselves. Learners feel safe and know who to talk to and where to go if they need support.

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

College leaders have created a safe and calm learning environment. All staff are fully invested in helping learners prepare for life beyond college, including being active citizens and, wherever possible, gaining voluntary or paid employment.

Leaders and managers fully use the range of therapeutic support and expertise that is available to them through the Sea View Trust. This includes direct support and intervention for learners from behaviour specialists, speech and language therapists and autism specialists.

Leaders and managers have not designed a sufficiently ambitious range of curriculums for learners. Planning for and the sequencing of learning does not always consider the wide range of learners' abilities. For example, learners on entry level 1 programmes are taught about weeding the garden by looking at written guidance. As many of the learners in the group are not able to read, they are not able to fully understand and follow the main points of the activity about recognising weeds and how to successfully remove them from raised beds. As a result, several learners working at entry level 1 are unable to participate fully in activities because the activities are too difficult.

Tutors do not consistently support the needs of individual learners in class. For example, they do not always provide the specific resources learners need to help

them to communicate, such as pictures and symbols. Consequently, these learners become bored and disengage from learning.

The majority of tutors are new to teaching and to the college. They do not have sufficient specialist teaching experience or training to meet the wide variety of learners' additional needs. Tutors do not use the results of assessments of learners' starting points well enough to plan their teaching. As a result, learners do not make the progress of which they are able. Leaders and managers have planned comprehensive specialist training for new and experienced tutors. However, this is yet to be implemented.

Leaders and managers have carefully selected external agencies, including the local police constabulary, to provide workshops and activities to develop learners' understanding of personal development topics such as sexting and managing feelings in friendships and relationships. Learners understand how to keep themselves safe and how to maintain healthy relationships.

Managers provide learners with effective and informative advice about their next steps through one-to-one sessions, national careers week and the college's annual careers convention. The link careers director and external agencies skilfully support managers to provide accurate, impartial careers education, advice and guidance. Learners are fully aware of how to reach their next steps.

Managers have not ensured that quality assurance processes such as self-assessment identify accurately the key strengths and areas for improvement. Managers overly focus on processes rather than evaluating the quality of the college provision and identifying the impact of improvement strategies on the quality of education. Leaders and directors have rightly identified weaknesses in quality assurance processes and have begun to put actions in place to improve these weaknesses. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of these actions.

Directors have significantly improved the challenge they give to college leaders and the scrutiny they apply to the information leaders provide for them. They recognise that, previously, scrutiny has focused on the leadership and management of the college rather than on the quality of education. Directors have begun to improve this but know that there is further work to do to ensure they stringently hold leaders and managers to account for their actions. Directors now have a good understanding of the key strengths and areas for improvement of the quality of education. Directors have been working diligently to develop employment opportunities, community links and to raise the profile of the college to benefit the learners.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Design and implement curriculums that are ambitious for all learners.
- Improve the quality of education, particularly for learners on entry level 1 programmes.
- Ensure tutors receive specialist, comprehensive special educational needs and disability training.
- Improve quality assurance processes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	147464
Address	Clod Lane Haslingden Rossendale Lancashire BB4 6LR
Contact number	01706214640
Website	www.valleycollege.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Louise Parrish/Kelly Swindells
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the executive headteacher, 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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