

The Ridge Employability College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

7–9 November 2018

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Provision for learners with high needs Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Good	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Directors and leaders have successfully established high-quality provision for learners who have high needs. Most learners achieve their personal targets and their qualifications.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers use information about learners' prior achievements effectively. They provide challenging work and set ambitious targets that enable learners to make good progress.
- Learners receive good support. They manage their behaviour well and show that they understand equality and inclusion. They develop the skills that they need to lead fulfilling lives.
- Most learners progress to higher levels of study during their programme, and the very small number who have completed their programme so far have gained jobs or internships.
- Learners benefit from high-quality work experience with local employers. They develop strong work-related and organisational skills that help them to move on to appropriate jobs.
- Learners benefit from many enrichment activities that develop their independence, well-being and emotional resilience.
- Leaders and managers use the funding for learners who have high needs effectively to provide an ambitious learning environment that helps learners to develop good practical skills.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance at the start of their programme. They develop clear and realistic plans for their programme and work placement, and most achieve their personal goals.
- Directors and leaders provide a curriculum that is well aligned to local employment opportunities. As a result, learners who have complex needs gain appropriate jobs.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve weaker aspects of the provision.
- Staff do not provide sufficiently helpful independent careers advice to enable learners to understand all the options available to them at the end of their programme.
- Directors and leaders recognise rightly that they need to improve their analysis of all aspects of learners' achievements so that they can challenge staff to improve provision further, and to inform curriculum planning and design.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Ridge Employability College is an independent specialist college that provides further education and training for learners aged between 16 and 25 who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college opened in September 2016 and is located five miles from Doncaster town centre. It is a private company limited by guarantee without share capital. At the time of the inspection, the college had 26 learners. Learners, who have complex needs, study an employability programme that aims to provide them with education, training and support to improve their employment chances.
- The Doncaster district covers a mix of urban and rural communities and has a resident population of approximately 302,000. Doncaster is ranked as the 48th most deprived district in England. The number of residents who have gained qualifications at level 1 or above is below the regional and national averages, and the number of residents who have no qualifications is higher than the national average. The unemployment rate for Doncaster is higher than the national average, at 6.0% compared with 4.6% nationally.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners receive helpful independent careers advice that supports them to understand all options available to them at the end of their programme.
- Continue to develop the analysis and evaluation – at strategic level – of learners' performance by ensuring that:
 - reporting accurately identifies all aspects of learners' achievement
 - curriculum planning and design take account of the skills and knowledge that learners need to acquire and the behaviours that they need to develop in preparation for employment and adult life.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and directors have successfully implemented high-quality new provision for learners who have high needs. They have developed an aspirational vision for the college and are committed to developing the work-related skills that learners need to help them to gain jobs in the local area and succeed in their adult lives.
- Leaders have successfully developed good partnerships with a broad range of supportive employers in the local area. This has resulted in a well-designed curriculum that reflects the local context well and provides employment opportunities for learners who have complex needs. Leaders and managers use the funding for learners who have high needs effectively to provide an ambitious and enterprising learning environment that supports learners to develop good practical skills.
- Leaders and managers have created a culture where all learners and staff show mutual respect and tolerance towards each other. Leaders have developed and enhanced support teams to respond to the needs of vulnerable learners. As a result of this good support, learners manage their own behaviour well and show that they understand the importance of equality and inclusion.
- Leaders and managers ensure that learners receive good advice and guidance at the start of their programme and that they understand and agree with all aspects of their individual education, health and care (EHC) plans in preparation for adulthood. Staff ensure that learners quickly settle into all aspects of their programmes, including work placements, and enjoy their learning. Staff work closely with parents and carers, and provide helpful information, particularly for learners who have not thrived at school, about the facilities, support and opportunities available. Learners develop clear and realistic work plans for their future and most achieve their work-related goals.
- Leaders have recently strengthened their methods for improving the quality of provision. These include self-assessment, ways of improving the work of individual staff and the observation of teaching, learning and assessment. They have developed a team which has the appropriate skills, qualifications and experience for future roles. Through quality assurance, leaders accurately identify the college's strengths and areas for improvement. They have achieved a consistently good standard across all new initiatives.
- Leaders and directors do not ensure that learners receive a sufficiently effective independent careers education to inform their next steps. They have very recent plans in place to implement the Gatsby careers guidance benchmarks, but it is too early to see the impact of these plans.

The governance of the provider

- Directors know the college well and understand its challenges. They have high aspirations for young people and provide good support to the new leadership team in shaping plans. They challenge leaders to improve the quality of provision and focus well on other aspects of the college's strategy, such as securing funding and investing in resources for a sustainable future. Directors have appropriate experience, skills and knowledge, including how to provide the complex support required to help vulnerable learners lead active lives.

- Directors have a clear view about the effectiveness of support that learners receive and its impact on learners' achievement. They recognise that management reporting requires further development to help senior leaders to analyse all aspects of learners' progress and achievement. In particular, senior leaders need to evaluate the technical skills and behaviour that learners develop from their starting points in preparation for work or adult life. Without this information, they are unable to ensure that the curriculum is as effective as it might be and that tailored work placements provide maximum opportunities for individuals.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers take appropriate actions to safeguard learners. Learners keep themselves safe during practical activities by identifying and wearing personal protective equipment. They follow safety instructions closely when using sharp knives in the kitchen and handle garden equipment safely when working in the community garden. As a result, learners are safe while attending college and when participating in external activities.
- Leaders and staff record any concerns or incidents promptly and follow up concerns quickly. They have effective working relationships with the local authority and external specialist support services. Staff make swift referrals to ensure that learners and their families receive the necessary support appropriate to the concern.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are appropriate and include a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan. Leaders follow safe recruitment practices for staff and volunteers.
- Leaders provide mandatory and regular training on safeguarding topics, including radicalisation and extremism, online safety for young people and vulnerable adults, and honour-based abuse.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use learners' starting points effectively to plan activities that challenge learners and prepare them well for their next steps. Teachers know their learners well and use the outcomes recorded in EHC plans to break down tasks into smaller targets that learners achieve well. As a result, learners make good progress against their personal goals over time. For example, they learn to prepare healthy meals independently and produce a curriculum vitae to plan for a work placement interview.
- Teachers develop learners' English and mathematics skills effectively in practical settings and activities. Learners develop their confidence and communication skills through serving customers and recording orders in the community cafe. In the social area kitchen, learners prepare jacket potatoes for sale and, after reviewing costings and calculating the lack of profit, quickly realise that these items are not a successful option unless they increase the sale price. Learners effectively develop the skills that they need for employment and life after college.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for the most able learners that allow them to demonstrate their skills and provide support to others who need more help. Learners

work well together and, as a result, they develop personal, social and communication skills, such as the use of appropriate language and sensitivity to the needs of others.

- Teachers and support staff use assessment strategies effectively to help learners to develop their skills. They review learners' progress frequently and provide learners with clear feedback on how to improve their work further. Learners use this feedback to make the corrections required and to work effectively with staff to record their progress against their targets. Learners develop their writing skills to a higher level.
- Teachers effectively use the high-quality accommodation and resources to support learners to develop their skills in preparation for life after college. They help learners to develop practical and enterprise skills by making craft items and garden objects to sell locally. Learners benefit from software resources that help them to improve their English and mathematical skills, and to work more independently at home.
- Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. They use their expertise well through skilful questioning to check learners' understanding, prompting and encouraging learners to reflect on their progress and identify appropriate actions to take. In a Duke of Edinburgh's Award lesson, learners produced a woodland route map using images. They decided to improve the map by using different fonts and colours for the visitors to follow. Learners effectively built on their existing skills and developed an understanding of how they could become more independent learners.
- Learning mentors know their learners well and work effectively with teachers in lessons to manage group activities and to support and manage the behaviour of anxious learners. In a lesson on shapes, learning mentors challenged the most able learners to produce more complex two-dimensional shapes, allowing teachers to support other learners in their understanding of more basic shapes. As a result of clear communication and effective support, most learners make good progress in lessons.
- Teachers and staff work well with parents. They build good relationships and working partnerships that help learners to achieve their personal targets in preparation for their next steps. Teachers share good practice ideas with parents and encourage them to use the activities with learners at home. Parents told inspectors that their sons and daughters had grown in confidence and that they were completing more domestic tasks at home in readiness for exploring independent or semi-independent living.
- In a small proportion of taught sessions, teachers do not use learning activities to develop learners' English, mathematical and information and communication technology skills as well as they could. They use interactive boards well to encourage learners to share ideas and produce group records of the tasks they need to complete. However, activities in these lessons focus too much on the criteria needed to achieve qualifications and do not consistently reflect the work and life skills that learners need to acquire.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners develop good everyday living skills and greater independence through participating in a range of realistic work settings and practical environments on college sites. Learners working in the social area kitchen prepare lunchtime snacks for staff and peers, and learners working in a community cafe plan, prepare and cook healthy meals for the residents. These activities support learners to develop social behaviour and

organisational skills which will help them prepare for a fulfilling and independent adult life.

- Learners benefit from high-quality work placements in settings such as a library, a community farm and garden, a recycling company and shops. They develop good skills, such as following instructions effectively while working as part of a team to complete tasks, talking confidently to customers, clearing raised garden beds and digging borders ready for spring planting, and storing cardboard sheets and packaging safely in recycling workshops. Learners build their confidence and independence while undertaking the same work tasks as employees. They develop strong practical and organisational skills that help them to move into work.
- Learners have a positive attitude to their learning. They take pride in their work and are respectful of each other and staff. They understand their responsibilities and the high standards of behaviour expected while in the college and the workplace. Learners celebrated 'anti-bullying' week and wore blue to raise money for charity when selling wristbands to staff and visitors. Staff foster a democratic culture within all classroom discussions that supports learners to manage their behaviour effectively.
- Learners benefit from a wide range of enrichment and 'after-college' activities that develop their well-being and emotional resilience. They participate in physical exercise such as bowling, dance and fitness classes in local leisure facilities. Learners participate in community life by completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and carrying out volunteering projects, such as picking up litter in the local area and packing shopping bags in large supermarkets. Staff promote good emotional health and relaxation by encouraging learners to 'take time out' and walk the college's dog during the day. Learners are supported well to manage their anxieties and learn how to be responsible for others.
- Learners have an appropriate understanding of how to be safe and who to go to if concerned about safety at college or on work placement. They are aware of the potential risks when interacting with people they do not know. A small proportion of learners travel independently from their homes to meet the college minibus.
- Learners develop their English and mathematical skills well in practical work settings. Staff support learners to identify and record ground maintenance tasks, take food orders, handle money and provide accurate change to customers. These activities help learners apply learning in work placement tasks, such as following work guides, counting cardboard sheeting and cataloguing and classifying library resources.
- Learners benefit from highly effective and swift pastoral support from staff who work well with external agencies. Teachers and support staff use a variety of strategies well to reduce learners' anxieties. They update support plans frequently to meet individual learners' needs. Parents acknowledge the benefits for learners of their college course, such as greater independence and resilience, leading to more fulfilling and happier family lives.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality are good in lessons and on work placements. Learners understand the importance of good timekeeping and reliability, particularly in the workplace, and how important this is to be able to gain employment.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners' achievement of qualifications is high and above that of similar providers. Learners gain recognised qualifications to prepare them well for life after college. Most achieve travel training and preparation for work qualifications that enable them to make progress in their work placements and access further community activities. Information provided by leaders indicates that, in the current year, four learners have achieved the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award.
- Learners enjoy their learning and most make good progress towards achieving their personal development goals. A high proportion make good progress towards achieving their enterprise, fitness and sport goals, helping them to prepare for healthy adult lives.
- Most learners successfully move on to a higher level of study during their programme. All of the very small number of learners who completed their programme in 2017/18 successfully moved on to employment or an internship. In addition, two learners have gained part-time paid employment in recognition of the hard work and commitment they demonstrated during work placements in the local area.
- No differences in achievement exist between different groups of learners.
- A small proportion of learners do not make the progress that they should towards achieving English and mathematics qualifications based on their skills on arrival, and do not pass their qualifications in these subjects. Leaders have recently implemented a new English and mathematics strategy, including revised teaching and assessment methods for current learners. However, it is too early to see the full impact on learners' achievement.

Provider details

Unique reference number	142921
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	21
Principal/CEO	Martin Fittes
Telephone number	01302 897 445
Website	www.theridgecollege.co.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	3	23	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	26							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, 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 learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. They reviewed learners' progress by using a case-study approach. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Tracey Mace-Akroyd, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Talbot-Strettle

Ofsted Inspector

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