



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on the specialist college provision of

Pengwern College

**Sarn Lane
Rhuddlan
Denbighshire
LL18 5UH**

Date of inspection: February 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Pengwern College

Name of provider	Pengwern College
Proprietor	Cambian, a subsidiary of CareTech Holdings PLC.
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Residential provision?	No
Number of learners on roll	41
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/02/2022
Start date of inspection	13/02/2023

Overview

Pengwern College provides a welcoming and caring environment. The extensive and engaging grounds support learners' well-being well and provide opportunities to develop important skills in authentic contexts. For example, learners work in the tuck shop, grow vegetables in the gardens and care for the college animals on the farm.

Learner voice is an important part of the college's work. Learners value the opportunities to contribute to college life through the work of the student council.

Staff develop strong working relationships with learners based on a thorough understanding of their needs and interests. These positive relationships help learners feel safe and valued.

The college benefits from valuable support from a clinical team. Together college and clinical staff develop helpful plans to meet the individual and complex needs of learners well.

Nearly all learners make sound progress during their time at college and achieve a range of relevant accreditations. However, too often teaching is solely focused on the requirements of these accreditations rather than the specific needs of learners and their future pathway.

During their time at college, learners develop an important understanding of how to keep themselves safe. However, there are limited opportunities for them to learn about important topics, such as radicalisation.

Leaders and staff at the college understand the importance of their role in keeping learners safe. However, the implementation of safeguarding policies is too variable.

Leaders promote a caring ethos across the college. They have demonstrated resilience throughout the recent challenges the college has faced. However, instability in college leadership has restricted its ability to plan strategically for improvement.

Recommendations

- R1 Address the safeguarding concerns raised in the well-being letter
- R2 Ensure learning experiences and personal targets focus consistently on the future destination of learners
- R3 Ensure that quality assurance and self-evaluation processes are robust and inform clearly the college's improvement priorities

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the college intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the college.

Main findings

Learning

Over time, many learners at Pengwern College make suitable progress. In relation to their individual starting points, many meet their personal targets and make appropriate progress towards fulfilling their potential.

Many learners develop their social skills well and enjoy the company of others. They listen well in sessions, follow routines successfully and take turns appropriately. For example, in the college shop, learners are respectful of one another, wait patiently in the queue and greet each other confidently. In animal care sessions, learners show a good awareness of the need to maintain appropriate behaviour, moderate their speaking volume and keep a safe distance from the ponies, donkeys and goats. When given the opportunity, a minority of learners work well in pairs and in small groups. With staff support, most learners transition confidently between different activities during the college day.

Many learners make suitable progress in developing their communication skills. A minority strengthen their communication skills appropriately using communication devices and resources such as signing, switches and symbols. Many learners communicate confidently with adults and visitors to the college using their preferred method of communication. More able learners share information well. For example, the president of the student council presents information confidently about his role.

Most learners improve their reading and writing skills appropriately in relation to their needs and abilities. For example, learners with the most complex needs enjoy listening to stories which are suitably supported by sensory resources. They identify single words and match them correctly to photographs. Learners practise mark making and letter formation. A few learners form attractive letters out of foliage to display on the college walls.

Many learners use their developing numeracy skills progressively in a range of practical activities across the curriculum. For example, they weigh and measure ingredients to cook and use money appropriately in the college shop.

Many learners develop their physical skills well. They enjoy taking part in a range of physical activities at the college and in the community, which include hydrotherapy, trampolining and moving around the college's extensive grounds, as well as the dance and keep fit club. Many improve their fine motor skills in a range of different contexts. For example, they use tools to build hedgehog houses and manipulate kitchen utensils to prepare food.

Learners' use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is generally limited. Opportunities for learners to develop their ICT skills progressively across the curriculum are underdeveloped.

Many learners develop valuable vocational and independent living skills during their time at the college, which prepare them well for the next stage in their lives. Learners sell items in the college tuck shop, mow lawns, make compost, plant vegetables,

collect litter on the college site and collect leaves in the orchard. A very few learners benefit from work experience within the local community.

Most learners leave the college with an appropriate range of accreditation. Over the last three years, a minority leave college and progress to supported living and the majority return home.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The college provides a calm, supportive and encouraging environment that promotes the well-being of its learners successfully. Nearly all learners are happy and settled. Many participate fully in their sessions and enjoy contributing to the college community through enrichment activities such as the 'random acts of kindness' initiative and seasonal events.

Many learners engage positively in their college life due to the sensitive and skilled encouragement from staff, who understand learners well. They make good progress in important social skills that impact positively on well-being. They greet and welcome visitors to the college and are keen to share their learning and experiences of college life. Learners are confident and polite in their interactions with visitors. A few learners, where appropriate, are able to use personal communication aids to participate in these interactions with an increasing level of independence.

Many learners demonstrate enthusiastic attitudes to learning, particularly when engaged in multi-sensory and practical sessions such as cooking and learning about handwashing. They are quick to settle to their work within sessions due to the well-established routines and calm learning environment. The majority of learners maintain their focus and engagement and complete tasks successfully.

In a very few cases, learners develop positive attitudes and engagement in a wider context, for example learning to travel a new place. Over time, this enables these learners to successfully develop confidence in the community.

With support, many learners learn to manage their behaviours and emotions well, for example by using self-regulation strategies such as movement breaks and singing. This enables them to return to their learning safely and develops the important skills of resilience and perseverance.

Over time, learners understand and follow authentic vocational routines suitably and, where appropriate, with increasing independence. For example, learners demonstrate how to saw firewood safely, by using the correct clothing and the safe handling of equipment.

Learners enjoy participating in a range of recently strengthened activities during lunchtime clubs at the college. These include clubs for signing, dance and reading. Learners are happy and engaged in these activities, which effectively promote their health and well-being, as well as their social skills.

A few learners develop their experience of responsibility and leadership as part of the student council. These learners use their personal strengths and qualities in their roles. Examples of this include collecting ideas from the college community through questionnaires and visiting classrooms, the development and co-ordination of events

such as the Christmas fayre, and representing the college at national events, such as the student parliament. The actions of the student council positively impact the well-being of the college community through initiatives such as setting up relaxation areas and promoting healthy living through yoga routines.

Teaching and learning experiences

The college provides a broad range of learning experiences that focus strongly on the development of learners' vocational, personal, and literacy and numeracy skills. When they join the college, learners are placed onto one of two distinct pathways, called exploring independence or exploring work. This targeted approach ensures that learners have access to a suitable range of accreditation, work-related learning and enrichment activities that reflect their individual needs and abilities.

The college's rural location and spacious grounds provide many beneficial opportunities for learners to develop their independence and work-related skills. In areas such as animal care, horticulture and pottery, learners develop their skills in purposeful and realistic contexts. A wide choice of enrichment activities, including digital skills, cookery and music, enable learners to practise and consolidate their skills in areas of personal interest to them.

There are valuable opportunities for learners to take part in cross-college and extra-curricular activities such as charity coffee mornings, a football tournament and the Queen's Jubilee tea-party. These activities help learners to develop their self-esteem and make a beneficial contribution to the wider community.

Both pathways include a strong emphasis on developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills, which are linked to appropriate accredited courses. However, too often, the teaching of these skills is driven by the needs of the accreditation. In these cases, learning activities focus frequently on the completion of worksheets and centre around low-level activities such as cutting and sticking. Overall, there are missed opportunities to develop learners' skills through purposeful activities to effectively support future destinations.

The college provides a worthwhile programme of internal work experience that aims to develop learners' work-related and vocational skills through activities such as grounds maintenance, catering and recycling. However, partly because of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for learners to participate in external work experience placements and community access are underdeveloped.

Generally, tutors plan carefully to meet the wide variety of learners' needs and abilities in their sessions. They establish beneficial classroom routines that help to create a calm learning environment across the college and ensure that learners are settled and ready for learning.

In many sessions, tutors have a sound knowledge of their subject area and a strong understanding of how to plan for learners' small steps of progress. In these sessions, tutors set clear objectives and ensure that there are meaningful opportunities for learners to address their targets. In pony care sessions, for example, learners develop their independence and social skills, as well as their awareness of subject specific terminology and health and safety as they groom the college ponies.

In a few sessions, planning is less successful. This is because the session lacks a clear focus on outcomes and the sequence of activities lacks variety and challenge. As a result, learners do not make the progress they are capable of in relation to their needs and future destinations.

The college has appropriate arrangements to assess learners' starting points on entry to the college and to review their progress. Leaders and tutors collect a wide range of information and data to track learners' progress, including data on accreditation outcomes and the achievement of personal targets. However, the quality of learners' personal targets is too variable. In a minority of cases, targets are not always age appropriate and lack sufficient purpose. In many cases, short and long-term targets do not focus sharply enough on learners' likely destinations when they leave college.

In most sessions, tutors provide clear instruction and use questioning suitably to reinforce learners' prior learning. In a few sessions, tutors use questioning particularly skilfully to include all members of the class and to develop a whole-class dialogue.

In nearly all cases, tutors and support staff provide helpful feedback to learners that encourages them to remain on task and complete their work successfully. They ensure that there are appropriate opportunities for learners to review their learning and to identify the progress they have made.

Support staff generally provide attentive and caring support and work collaboratively with tutors. They know the needs of their learners well and build positive working relationships with them. In a minority of sessions, learners work independently, initiating learning with little prompting from the tutor. However, in many sessions, the proximity and number of support staff in the classroom restrict learning and inhibits the development of independence.

Care, support and guidance

Pengwern College is a caring community that offers valuable support and guidance for its learners. The calm, nurturing and happy ethos permeates the work of the college and has a positive impact on learners' well-being. In addition, the spacious and attractive grounds at the college support learners' well-being and skill development effectively.

The college has effective arrangements to meet the needs of learners with a wide range of significant additional learning needs. Staff develop valuable working relationships with learners. They know them well and have a comprehensive understanding and awareness of their needs and abilities.

Overall, the college has appropriate transition processes in place. As a result of the helpful information collected and beneficial visits to the college before starting, learners settle well and feel safe.

The college carries out a range of worthwhile assessments for all learners on their arrival. This enables staff to gather a clear understanding of learners' needs. As a

result, learners have beneficial individual learning and care plans, which highlight important information for staff.

The therapeutic approach adopted at the college supports learners' needs appropriately. Learners benefit from therapeutic input from a speech and language team and an occupational therapist. These staff work appropriately with the wider staff team to support learners' needs.

The college has effective procedures for managing the attendance and behaviour of learners. Leaders monitor this information daily and respond swiftly and assuredly to any concerns raised.

The college provides useful opportunities to support learners to develop better understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. This includes sharing information on relationships, consent and bullying in ways that the learners can relate to. However, the college does not plan strategically to tackle important topics, such as exploitation and radicalisation.

The college provides appropriate opportunities for learners to develop leadership skills and to learn about responsibility. This provision includes the student council where learners are encouraged to take responsibility for issues such as anti-bullying and providing new resources for the college.

Leaders at the college place a strong emphasis on safeguarding and keeping learners safe. They have established a community where learners feel safe and secure.

Staff have a sound awareness of the procedures for safeguarding. Leaders respond to concerns appropriately and with sensitivity. However, in a few cases important training in this area is not refreshed, policies are not implemented consistently and record keeping lacks rigour.

Leadership and management

There have been significant changes to the leadership and management of the college over the last five years. The current interim principal has provided consistent leadership for the college and has demonstrated considerable resilience and commitment throughout this time. However, these challenges have restricted improvement planning at all levels, in particular progress against recommendations from previous visits.

Leaders are committed to creating an inclusive and vibrant learning community. They have developed effective arrangements to ensure the smooth running of the college on a day-to-day basis. They have developed successful systems for communicating with parents and carers. Parents and carers value the regular updates regarding their child and their achievements at college.

Leaders have introduced new quality assurance processes to evaluate the quality of the college's work. These include learning walks, reports to senior leaders and an analysis of data. These arrangements are at an early stage of development.

In many cases, quality assurance processes focus too much on demonstrating compliance rather than the evaluation of strengths and areas for development of the college's work. As a result, evaluations are overly generous and do not provide sufficient focus on areas for development. In addition, self-evaluation processes do not take sufficient account of the views and contributions of learners and staff.

Leaders have taken beneficial steps to support staff well-being, for example through sharing 'pamper hampers' and the 'employee of the month' initiative. However, these initiatives are not reflected well enough in self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.

Leaders use the information from their self-evaluation work appropriately to inform the college's development plan. Leaders are developing a new approach to improvement planning. However, currently, these processes do not provide leaders with a clear understanding of the priorities for improvements, resources needed to secure improvements or the timescales to implement changes.

The organisation governance team meet regularly. The regional educational lead provides helpful support and guidance for the interim principal. The interim principal provides suitable reports to senior leaders to evaluate the work of the college. These processes are beginning to involve feedback from a wider range of stakeholders on the work of the college.

Leaders have developed beneficial partnerships with a range of agencies. These include links with other specialist colleges and specialist services. Learners benefit from the college's collaborative work with these partners.

Leaders promote safeguarding as a high priority at the college. Links with local authority safeguarding boards are secure. However, there are inconsistencies in the implementation of the college's safeguarding policies and procedures.

The college provides an inviting learning environment where learners benefit from learning across a range of authentic settings, such as the farm and café. There have been improvements in the maintenance of the environment since the time of the last inspection. However, in a few areas, limited resources have a negative impact on learning and communication, for example as a result of recent information technology (IT) issues.

A performance management process is in place for all staff. However, the process is inconsistent and performance management targets do not link well enough to college priorities.

Staff at the college benefit from a worthwhile range of professional learning opportunities to meet the complex needs of learners, for example recent training on using signing, intensive interaction and positive communication. Further, leaders are developing a wider offer of training for support staff. However, opportunities for professional learning do not focus well enough on teaching and learning.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and learner questionnaires and consider the views of teaching and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet proprietors, college leaders and individual members of teaching and support staff to evaluate the impact of the college's work
- meet learners to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their college
- visit sessions and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms and in outdoor areas
- look closely at the college's self-evaluation processes
- consider the college's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the college has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of college documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the supervisory body, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2023: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 19/04/2023