

Inspection of Cambian Dilston College

Inspection dates:

14 to 16 September 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Provision for learners with high needs

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Cambian Dilston College offers day and residential placements of up to 52 weeks a year for young people with a learning disability, autism spectrum disorder or other complex needs. The college is situated on a nine-acre site in rural Northumberland. Learners attend lessons in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, animal care, art, catering, information and communication technology, and horticulture. As part of their learning programmes, learners care for a number of farm animals, such as sheep, goats and hens. Over recent years, admissions to the college have included an increase in the number of learners with complex and challenging needs and behaviours.

The college is owned by the Cambian Group, which specialises in the education of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) nationally. At the time of the inspection, 18 young people attended the college, 15 of whom were on programmes that were in scope for the inspection.

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

Leaders and managers have not maintained a culture that promotes and reinforces positive behaviour and high standards. Learning environments are not routinely calm and orderly. For instance, learners often leave their lessons for extended periods of time, distracting others. A few learners engage in challenging behaviour. This disruption results in learners missing valuable learning. Consequently, learners do not develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for the next stage of their education, employment or independent living.

Learners do not receive a rich or inclusive curriculum that meets their individual needs and prepares them for adulthood. Leaders and managers do not promote equality of opportunity for learners in all aspects of the curriculum. For example, learners with the most complex needs do not participate in the same learning that their more able peers receive. This includes lessons relating to understanding healthy lifestyles and relationships, including sexual relationships.

Too many learning resources and activities are not age appropriate. For example, learners read 'The Three Little Pigs' during 'story time' and sang 'Nellie the Elephant' and 'Old MacDonald' in music therapy sessions. The use of children's nursery rhymes is not helpful in developing the character of young adults. Resources also include picture cards that are not suitable for adult learners. These resources use cartoon imagery rather than depicting real-life situations that would be more beneficial to older learners.

Leaders and governors do not promote high expectations or ambitions for their learners through their investment in, and care of the campus. A few areas of the college estate are in a poor state of repair. For example, in the horticulture section, the raised beds are unkempt and overgrown and the polytunnels are poorly maintained. Staff use parts of the horticulture area as a rubbish tip. This is not setting industry standards for learners.

Most learners say that they enjoy attending the college. Staff deal with any issues that learners raise quickly and appropriately. For example, when day learners had concerns about college transport, managers ensured that learners felt comfortable with the arrangements for travelling to and from the college.

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

Leaders, managers, staff and governors are not ambitious for what learners can achieve. They do not ensure that learners have high enough aspirations for their future. The curriculum lacks cohesion and structure. Learning activities are not sufficiently challenging to keep learners interested in what they are doing. Most activities are not planned in a logical order. Instead, they are a series of events that occupy learners' time. Consequently, learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Tutors do not identify learners' starting points consistently and accurately to plan personalised learning. For example, in numeracy lessons, staff do not know what mathematical skills the learners already have or what skills they need to develop further. All learners complete the same learning. In music and singing sessions, staff are not sufficiently skilled to recognise that certain activities are overstimulating for learners. This results in a decline in the behaviour of learners with sensory needs.

Tutors do not make effective use of assessment information to help them plan or review the curriculum. Assessment strategies lack rigour. They do not help tutors to make an accurate evaluation of what learners have learned or what additional learning they need to fill any gaps in their knowledge, skills and behaviour. In a few instances, tutors move learning on too quickly before checking learners' understanding.

Staff do not monitor learners' progress and achievements consistently. Most learning targets are too generic. They focus on the completion of specific tasks rather than helping learners to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their future. As a result, most learners do not achieve their planned outcomes.

Tutors and teaching assistants do not receive sufficiently comprehensive training on the craft of teaching. They do not understand how to teach learners who have specific diagnoses and complex needs. As a result, teaching staff do not have the skills that they need to help learners to overcome their barriers to learning relating to their learning difficulty and/or disability. Most tutors and teaching assistants have relevant subject knowledge for the areas in which they teach or support.

Support for learners is not consistently effective. In a few instances, teaching assistants use appropriate strategies to manage behaviours. This helps to promote the participation of a few learners in learning for short periods of time. However, other learners are overly supported. They do not develop the independence that they need for their next steps.

Attendance is high for the majority of learners. However, managers do not identify trends in absences to support those learners with poor attendance to attend more regularly. Leaders and staff do not ensure that learners who miss lessons catch up on their learning. There is no expectation for learners to reinforce or practise routinely the skills they learn at college when they are at home or in their residential accommodation.

Careers information, advice and guidance are not effective. The guidance that learners receive does not directly link to their planned next steps or to what they are capable of achieving. It reinforces the low expectations that leaders and staff have of learners. For example, learners with more complex needs do not receive appropriate careers information. They do not undertake work experience placements that are available to their peers. Consequently, they do not develop the work-related skills, confidence and independence that they are capable of gaining.

Tutors and teaching assistants do not include British values, promote equality or

celebrate diversity sufficiently in lessons. They demonstrate a limited understanding of British values and their importance in helping learners to prepare for life in modern Britain. Staff are unable to articulate clearly how they support learners to be responsible citizens in the community. Consequently, too many learners are unaware of the wider world beyond the college environment or of opportunities in their local communities.

Leaders, managers and governors do not have an accurate oversight of learners' progress. Their self-assessment processes are underdeveloped and lack rigour. Leaders' evaluation of the quality of the curriculum is too positive. All of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report remain. The newly appointed principal has recognised that there are weaknesses in the curriculum and safeguarding. However, she has not had sufficient time to implement any significant changes.

A few more able learners develop their English and mathematical skills successfully over time. They can write simple sentences accurately and read and interpret information from a range of basic texts. These learners carry out simple calculations using whole numbers and identify information in simple charts and graphs.

A very few of the more able learners develop skills for work that align with their intended job roles. Staff support these learners initially with on-site work experience placements, such as working in a reception area. These placements help learners to gain confidence and an understanding of workplace expectations in a supportive environment.

Governance arrangements are not effective. Governors do not have the breadth of expertise required to understand or evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the education curriculum at the college. Consequently, they do not hold college leaders to account sufficiently to ensure that the curriculum is meeting learners' needs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders, managers, governors and staff do not ensure that they protect learners from potential harm while in the college and the community. Risk assessments are not sufficiently rigorous to demonstrate that learners are always safe during activities both on and off the site. Access to the main building and external access points to the estate are not secure.

Leaders, managers and governors do not ensure that staff comply with health and safety requirements. For example, staff working in practical learning environments do not securely store hazardous materials, such as cleaning fluids. They do not complete standard safety checks, such as monitoring daily refrigerator and freezer temperatures.

Staff do not monitor the content that a few learners view on their mobile phones. They trust what learners tell them they are watching. Inspectors identified that the firewall on classroom computers is ineffective. It does not protect learners from accessing inappropriate material, including that relating to radicalisation and extremism.

Staff do not have sufficient expertise to apply appropriate strategies to manage frequent and challenging behavioural incidents involving learners. Too many staff are regularly injured as a result of learners' behaviour. In incident debriefs, managers do not identify lessons learned or how staff can improve the future handling of heightened situations.

Leaders carry out appropriate pre-employment safeguarding checks on staff.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Take urgent action to rectify swiftly the serious safeguarding concerns identified throughout the inspection.
- Put in place an ambitious and inclusive curriculum that meets all learners' needs, prepares them for adulthood, and promotes positive behaviours and high expectations.
- Invest in the care and cleanliness of the campus to promote high standards and industry expectations.
- Ensure that tutors assess learners' starting points accurately and plan a personalised curriculum that includes appropriate and challenging targets.
- Introduce a thorough process for assessing what learners know and can do, including their progress over time.
- Improve and monitor learners' attendance both at college and in lessons, and ensure that learners quickly catch up on any learning that they miss.
- Provide opportunities for both day and residential learners to practise regularly and reinforce the skills that they learn at college.
- Provide tutors and teaching assistants with high-quality and relevant training, including training in British values and equality and diversity, that helps them to teach and support learners with complex needs effectively.
- Ensure that all learners receive relevant careers information, advice and guidance so that they can make well-informed decisions about their next steps, either independently or with support.
- Improve the rigour and effectiveness of quality improvement processes to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of education and rectify weaknesses swiftly.
- Improve governance arrangements to ensure that all governors understand the requirements of an ambitious and inclusive curriculum and that leaders and managers are held to account fully for the quality of learners' education and support.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131868
Address	Dilston Hall Corbridge Northumberland NE45 5RJ
Contact number	01434 632692
Website	www.cambianguroup.com/specialist-education/our-colleges/cambian-dilston-college
Principal	Zahida Hammond
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, 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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