

Inspection of Queen Alexandra College

Inspection dates:

22–24 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Provision for learners with high needs

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Queen Alexandra College (QAC) is an independent specialist college located in Harborne, Birmingham. The college has two additional campuses in the Birmingham area. Learners study at these campuses as part of their transition away from the main college site, in order to prepare them for life after college.

The college offers residential and day provision for students with a visual impairment, autistic spectrum disorder, physical disabilities and/or other learning difficulties. There are currently 347 students studying on day programmes and 29 students living in college residential provision. The college offers a wide range of personal development and vocational courses from pre-entry level to level 3.

The college does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Too many students studying on entry level pathways do not yet benefit from high-quality teaching to enable them to gain the skills and knowledge they need to prepare for life after college. Students studying on most vocational pathways benefit from well-planned teaching.

Too few students benefit from well-planned and relevant work experience. Staff do not ensure that placements, including those on the college site, reflect students' long-term goals. As a result, at the time of inspection few students recognised that they were undertaking work experience or how it would help them in the future.

The main college site and the two additional campuses are calm and nurturing environments that enable students to develop their social skills.

Most students improve their confidence during their time at college. Staff provide students with high levels of personal support and encouragement. They provide students with complex needs with visual cues, which enable them to ask for help independently in the classroom. This reduces learners' reliance on aids and support from staff.

Students benefit from a wide range of social clubs, including art, music, gaming, and sports. LGBTQ students value the 'SPARK' group where they can talk to staff and each other about their experiences. Most students maintain their well-being through attending weekly gym and yoga sessions.

Most students are positive and enthusiastic about their time at the college. Staff work closely with students to enable them to give their views on college life. A small number of students become college ambassadors. As a result, managers, staff, and governors listen to students' views when making decisions about the college.

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

Senior leaders and managers do not have sufficient oversight of the curriculum and the quality of teaching. They do not place sufficient focus on the quality of teaching within their quality assurance processes. At the time of the inspection, senior leaders had not successfully identified the variation in the quality of education and the students' experiences. Within self-assessment processes, senior leaders overly focus on the outcomes from the 2016 inspection to inform their judgments of the quality of teaching, as it is now. As a result, the quality of education and students' experience are too variable across the curriculum pathways.

In response to the growth of applications and changing needs of students, senior leaders have put in place a wide range of pathways for students to study on. However, the curriculum does not successfully meet the needs of all students. Too often, students move from one pathway to another from year to year. Staff do not plan students' time at college well enough to ensure that all students develop the

skills they need. Leaders, managers and staff do not ensure that students are ready to move on to life after college at an appropriate time. Too few students are successfully moving on into further training outside of QAC, or into independent living and employment at the end of their course.

Too many teachers do not plan or sequence their teaching well enough. Teachers rely on the coverage of units from qualifications to plan their teaching. For example, on a few occasions students complete units that they do not need to complete for their course. Students are often confused as to the value of what they are being taught. Within English, teachers teach each skill in isolation. They do not develop or improve students' reading, writing, and speaking and listening skills over time. Students do not develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their long-term goals in line with their education, health, and care plans.

Most teachers do not provide students with helpful feedback to improve their work. For example, too often teachers do not identify errors in students' written work. On a few occasions students complete work that is not marked. As a result, teachers do not ensure that students improve the standard of their work or achieve to the level of which they are capable.

Students value the one-to-one sessions they attend with mentors with regard to their mental health and well-being. Leaders and staff have not yet put in place a curriculum to teach all students about healthy and positive relationships. Too often, staff place the responsibility for asking for help and support with these topics on students. Few students have a sufficient understanding of relationships and harmful sexual behaviours.

Most students do not yet receive support to make decisions on what they will do once they leave college. Leaders and managers have recognised the need to provide students with careers education, information, advice, and guidance as a priority. At the time of inspection, too many students did not know what they needed to do to enable them to move on to the next stage of their education, training, or employment.

Governors have extensive experience of sectors, including education and finance. They receive frequent reports from senior leaders to enable them to have oversight of the quality of education at the college. However, governors overly rely on the information they receive from senior leaders. They do not provide sufficient challenge to ensure that the information they receive provides an accurate view of the quality of education. As a result, at the time of inspection, governors were not aware of the key strengths and weaknesses at QAC.

Teachers and learning support staff are well qualified. Most staff who are teaching and supporting students with complex needs use their expertise well to plan and implement strategies in the classroom. For example, they ensure that students can identify coins and understand basic subtraction, and how they can use this to work out how much money they have. Teachers devise these strategies to enable students to make small steps of progress towards their individual targets.

Leaders and managers provide staff with extensive training in order for them to support the health and care needs of students. Staff undertake mandatory training in de-escalation and intervention techniques, manual handling and personal care. Staff working on the 'springboard' pathway have benefited from specialist training in autism, sensory perception, and intensive interactions. This training has enabled staff to provide highly individualised support for students with complex communication needs. As a result, staff use their skills to enable students to make choices and become more independent in sessions.

On a small minority of pathways teachers plan an effective curriculum. They use their expertise well to plan teaching sessions to ensure students develop significant skills and knowledge. For example, teachers teaching on the level 2 and level 3 art and design pathway sequence their teaching to ensure that students develop their practical skills quickly. Teachers use baseline assessments to identify students' skills and knowledge of the subject carefully. They teach students how to use different art materials first. They then teach students to apply these skills on to more-complex tasks, such as the production of animal heads using textiles and papier mâché. As a result, students produce work to a high standard. Teachers arrange for students to exhibit their work in local art galleries.

The majority of teachers and learning support staff on vocational pathways support students to develop their independence and ability to work with others well. Students on the performing arts pathway undertake project work where they take on specific job roles. Students learn how to work as part of a professional team. Teachers across the creative arts pathways work with students to develop their skills in self-reflection. This enables students to think about what they would do differently next time. As a result, students make expected or better progress in their vocational studies over time.

Leaders and managers have developed strong partnership working. They have developed partnerships which enable students to study in local venues. The small number of students studying on the Power Chair Football Academy (PCFA) pathway study at a local football club. Teachers demonstrate high expectations of the academy students. They have developed the curriculum in line with the requirements for the sports coaching industry. Students demonstrate they can apply the skills they have learned to coach other students. Students successfully plan sports sessions for their peers. They use the skills they have learned to make adjustments to enable other students to take part in sports activities.

Leaders and managers have ensured that students have access to well-qualified and experienced therapy teams and services. Therapy staff undertake comprehensive assessments of students' support needs before they start at college. They work closely with students, their families and school staff to gain information on students' therapeutic needs. Staff put in place individualised therapy programmes and equipment to ensure students can access their learning as independently as possible.

Most staff communicate well with parents. They use this feedback to support assessments and to identify the progress students are making against their personal targets. For example, parents provide feedback on how well students are completing tasks such as cooking at home. Parents support students in developing their independent living skills. As a result, students improve in their confidence and independence.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors and staff, including those with designated safeguarding responsibilities, are appropriately trained. They have up-to-date training on topics such as safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Managers have put in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. They have implemented safer recruitment procedures well. Managers and staff are appropriately trained to manage, record, and administer students' medication safely.

Leaders have put in place a team of safeguarding officers who work across the three college sites. A central referral system is in place to record and monitor safeguarding incidents.

Managers and staff work with families and agencies to ensure they have an accurate picture of students' safeguarding needs before they start at the college. They are able to quickly put in place the support that students need, including one-to-one mentoring. During the inspection, students spoke to inspectors positively about the mentoring support they received. They said that mentors were available whenever they needed someone to talk to. Mentors teach students to use 'thinking cards' to help them manage their mental health. As a result, most students improve their ability to manage their emotions over time.

Most students demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practices. Staff support students to use their understanding of their own disabilities to work safely together. For example, PCFA students ensure that they have strategies in place for visually impaired students to minimise risks when playing sports such as boccia.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Governors must ensure that senior leaders have accurately identified the weaknesses for all curriculum pathways, and that their actions result in swift improvements.
- Senior leaders must review the curriculum to ensure that it is aspirational for all students. They should ensure that they accurately identify pathways for students which will enable them to gain the skills they need to leave college when they are ready.

- Senior leaders must ensure that they quickly improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan their teaching to reflect students' starting points and their long-term goals as outlined in their education, health, and care plans
 - ensuring that all teachers sequence their teaching to develop students' skills and knowledge relevant to their learning and support needs
 - ensuring that teachers provide helpful feedback to students on their practical and written work to ensure they achieve to the level of which they are capable.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all students receive impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance, and the training and support they need in preparation for adulthood.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that students are taught to understand the risks associated with relationships and harmful sexual behaviours. They should develop a curriculum which teaches students how to develop positive and healthy relationships, including sexual relationships.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all students benefit from well-planned and relevant work experience.

Provider details

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Contact number	01214 285050
Website	www.qac.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Bev Jessop
Provider type	Independent Specialist College
Date of previous inspection	8–9 June 2016
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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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