



A report on
Coleg Plas Dwbl (ISC)

Date of inspection: May 2015

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Coleg Plas Dwbl, which is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust Group, opened in September 2011. It is situated on a farm of one hundred acres at the base of the Preseli mountains in Pembrokeshire. The land consists of pasture, woodland and extensive gardens for horticulture.

The college caters for residential and day learners with a range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and attachment disorders. Residential learners live in houses on the site. There are currently seven learners aged 18 to 25 years.

The college bases its educational philosophy on the founding principles of the philosopher and scientist Rudolph Steiner. It offers a Practical Skills Therapeutic Education curriculum, which gives learners the opportunity to learn through real life activities.

The head of education and residential care manages the day-to-day work of the college. Until very recently, a deputy principal at Ruskin Mill College provided regular strategic support for the college. In May 2015, he took on the role of principal at Coleg Plas Dwbl.

A board of trustees oversees the work of the college.

The college shares key functions with Ruskin Mill College. These include technical services, human resources, health and safety management, staff training and development and financial support.

Summary

The provider's current performance	Good
The provider's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Current performance at the college is good because:

- Learners settle at the college quickly and make steady progress
- Over the last two years, all leavers moved onto employment or further training
- All learners benefit from good quality work experiences directly linked to their developing vocational skills
- Behaviour across the college is good and learners remain on task throughout their sessions
- Learners develop their social and life skills very well
- Tutors pay very good attention to the literacy and numeracy needs of the learners

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- Leaders and managers have a very clear vision, which they communicate well to all stakeholders
- Roles and responsibilities are clear
- The college has recently appointed a principal with responsibility for the strategic management of the college
- Performance management identifies individual and whole-college training needs, and the college addresses these well
- The trustees have relevant knowledge and expertise and provide useful support and challenge for the college
- The college has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development
- The quality improvement plan is a clear, well-presented document that identifies and prioritises appropriate areas for development

Recommendations

- R1 Improve learners' punctuality when attending sessions
- R2 Provide more opportunities for learners to work in groups
- R3 Ensure that all staff give learners time to complete tasks as independently as possible
- R4 Improve the use and analysis of data to inform strategic planning

What happens next?

Estyn advises the college to amend its current quality development plan to show what action 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 and carers at the college.

Estyn will monitor the progress against the recommendations at the next annual monitoring inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Learners arrive at the college with very little confidence in their own ability. They are often unable to manage their behaviour or work independently. Many struggle to make relationships and work well with others. Due to the strong support and encouragement that they receive from staff, they settle quickly and make steady progress.

Due to the small numbers of learners it is not appropriate to analyse trends in performance.

Learners develop their speaking and listening skills well. They are able to answer important questions about their tasks and take part in related discussions with their peers. They are responsive to questioning and able to give clear explanations about their work. For example, they describe how they set up an electric fence and explain the voltage required. They show a clear understanding of subject specific language, such as the diameter of a turning tool.

All learners make steady progress in developing their ability to write simple sentences and record important information. For example, they list cuts of lamb and keep a tractor fluid log. A few learners use extended writing well to evaluate their work. They use information and communication technology (ICT) to write letters and produce a good quality community newsletter. Most learners punctuate their work consistently, using capital letters and full stops.

When learners arrive at the college, their reading skills are well below those expected for their age. All learners make good progress in improving the accuracy and fluency of their reading. They make good use of these developing skills to read recipes when cooking, to use catalogues when ordering work clothes and to read menus when ordering food.

All learners develop their numeracy skills well, often from a very low baseline. They learn to measure and weigh accurately, and estimate and then check their accuracy. They calculate the savings made by the farm by chopping down their own wood and work out how much money is raised in the Christmas fayre.

Staff make good use of a tracking system to record each learner's small steps of progress. This is highly motivating for learners and they are actively involved in evaluating their own progress. They know exactly what to do to improve their performance in order to achieve the long term goals that they have set for themselves such as to find employment and to live independently.

Through the courses on offer and work in the wider community, learners gain a very good understanding of the world of work. They achieve a wide range of appropriate vocational qualifications. These include land-based studies such as caring for farm animals and horticulture, brush cutting and food hygiene. Many attend the local college's courses, on a part-time basis.

All learners benefit from good quality work experiences directly linked to their developing vocational skills. For example, they work in the National Park, in a community garden and in a bread making social enterprise. Learners pay good attention to health and safety. They handle kitchen knives and cutting tools with care. In the last two years, all eight leavers moved onto employment or further training. This includes fork lift truck driving, work as a teaching assistant and training to be a plumber. This is a significant achievement.

Learners gain a range of other awards designed to increase their independence and encourage creativity. By working towards the John Muir award, learners become more able to reflect and express themselves through the arts. Learners from the college have achieved success at the Urdd Eisteddfod in metalwork, pottery and basket work.

Wellbeing: Good

All learners develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through regular exercise and informed eating choices. Many learners improve their diet by being willing to try different foods that they have grown. Most learners take part in well-planned physical activities such as swimming, cycling and use of the local gym.

All learners feel safe in college and know who to speak to if they have a concern. They feel comfortable approaching key staff members and nearly all are confident they will be listened to.

Most learners attend lessons on a regular basis. However, not all learners arrive at their sessions on time. As a result, they miss valuable curriculum time and do not develop important time-keeping skills required for future employment and training.

Behaviour across the college is good and learners remain on task throughout their sessions. Where learners are upset, they make good use of strategies that they have agreed with staff, such as sitting in the garden or walking around the college grounds. As a result, they return to their sessions and continue their work.

Learners are proud of the work they produce and are keen to show their homemade jewellery and baskets to visitors.

Learners are fully involved in planning their own learning. They take part in regular college meetings and make important choices about college life. For example, they decide what fund-raising events they will hold and how they will spend the money that they have raised. The college has recently introduced a new staff interview process. Learners are involved in showing potential candidates around the college and provide feedback on their suitability.

Learners develop their social and life skills very well. They engage with the local community through a bread making social enterprise. They sell their own produce at a local shop. They work in groups to tidy gardens within the community and go out for meals together at the local pub. Learners benefited from work with a dance therapist to help them relate to and work with their peers.

Learners gain in confidence. They engage in mature conversations with staff members during lunch times, talk about their personal achievements and can describe events of significance to them.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The college provides a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of the learners well. The three-year programme includes opportunities for learners to gain nationally accredited qualifications and apply the skills they learn in both internal and external settings. All learners access a wide range of internal and external work placements. These include an animal rescue centre, community shops and a National Park. The qualifications that learners work towards support these placements and are linked to their personal interests and long-term goals.

The college provides appropriate relationships and sex education. All learners take part in a ten-week course that is tailored to meet their individual needs.

There is an appropriate focus on literacy and numeracy throughout the college day. All schemes of work include the development of essential skills. For example, learners have opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills through spelling key words related to a metal work task and weighing vegetables in horticulture. All learners access discrete essential skills sessions.

The college has recently introduced a robust system to track progress across the curriculum and this has had a positive impact on planning and session delivery.

Students have opportunities to improve their social and life skills, for example when using public transport to access the community, paying for items in a café and ordering their own food. However, because the learners have individual programmes, opportunities to take part in group work across the curriculum are limited.

Learners gain a useful understanding of other cultures. For example, when harvesting grain, they are encouraged to find out where the grain originally came from. Tutors use sessions well to reinforce valuable messages about their local environment, such as the importance of beach cleaning.

Teaching: Good

All staff relate very well to the learners and have a clear understanding of their particular difficulties and needs. They create a climate of praise and encouragement, which helps learners to feel confident when attempting new tasks. However, on occasions, staff do too much for the learners rather than allowing them enough time to complete a task independently.

Tutors use the detailed information on the learner profiles to plan their sessions carefully. They provide learners with many opportunities to meet their short-term goals. The learner profiles give staff helpful pointers towards helping learners to manage their behaviour. As a result, incidents are avoided or quickly resolved. Tutors use very clear language so that learners know exactly what they have to do to complete a task. They use questioning well to check learners' understanding.

Tutors pay very good attention to the literacy and numeracy needs of the learners. Within the vocational workshops, there are many planned opportunities for learners to practise their developing skills.

The college uses effective assessment to identify learners' strengths and areas of need. Staff and learners use this information to set targets, which include small steps of progress towards learners' short and medium-term goals.

Learners are expected to reflect on and take responsibility for their own learning and receive helpful feedback at the end of each session. However, tutors do not always mark work carefully enough.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Provision for care, support and guidance is good. The college provides a calm and caring environment that contributes positively to learners' wellbeing. Where learners have particular issues that concern them, staff make sure that they receive the help that they need. This includes support with bereavement and family issues. The college promotes the spiritual, moral and cultural development of learners well. A few learners attend their local church with staff support.

There is a strong focus on developing learners' independence and enabling them to become mature adults. For example, staff encourage learners to look after their own finances and develop the skills that they need to shop for their own clothing. The college prepares learners well for transition to employment, further training or other appropriate provision.

There are clear policies and procedures in place for managing learners' behaviour. Information is shared on a regular basis to ensure that all staff have a consistent approach. The college has effective processes in place for addressing minor disputes between learners and these are resolved quickly.

Individual learning plans are detailed and include relevant targets that focus on learners' wellbeing. Staff make very good use of the recently introduced tracking system to make sure that they are aware of any difficulties that learners are experiencing. As a result, staff can intervene quickly where learners have issues.

The college identifies additional learning needs well and provides learners with well-matched support when it is needed. The college has recently employed a clinical psychologist to provide one-to-one sessions for learners. He provides valuable staff training which has had a positive impact on the management of behaviours and on learners' wellbeing.

The college's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

The college provides a welcoming and inclusive ethos based on mutual respect between staff and learners. As a result, learners feel supported and valued and are keen to learn. All learners have equal access to all areas of the curriculum and provision.

The farm land and buildings have been extensively restored. They are very well maintained. The site allows learners space in which to reflect and become calm. It gives them the opportunity to be independent within a secure setting. Workshops and classrooms are well equipped with attractive displays to create a stimulating environment.

Learners have access to ICT resources, such as tablet computers in workshops and a computer in the essential skills room. However, connection to the internet is patchy due to the remoteness of the site.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

Leaders and managers have a very clear vision which they communicate well to all stakeholders. Staff work very well together to create a positive ethos in which all staff and learners feel valued.

Roles and responsibilities are clear. The post of head of education and residential care ensures effective communication and consistency between the two settings. This contributes to the positive outcomes for learners.

Staff meet regularly on a formal basis and, as a result, they have a clear understanding of issues relating to individual learners and developments at the college. Minutes of meetings clearly identify who is responsible for specific actions. Managers monitor progress against these actions effectively.

As part of the Ruskin Mill Trust, the college receives appropriate strategic direction from the wider organisation. The trust has a clear vision for Coleg Plas Dwbl to operate more independently as a college in Wales. In order to take this forward, they have recently appointed a principal who is now responsible for the strategic management of the college.

Managers across the organisation meet on a regular basis. This gives managers at Coleg Plas Dwbl useful opportunities to share good practice and develop their management roles. Close working with the other colleges has resulted in improvements such as establishing systems for monitoring learner behaviour and tracking progress.

The college has appropriate systems in place for managing the performance of staff. Staff are positive about this process. Individual targets link well to the identified priorities of the college. Performance management identifies individual and whole-college training needs, and the college addresses these well. Lesson observations provide tutors with useful written feedback about strengths and areas for development.

The trustees have relevant knowledge and expertise and provide useful support and challenge for the college. They receive regular reports from the head of education and learning, which keep them well informed about the work of the college. This includes detailed information on safeguarding and health and safety issues. The trustees have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development, and what the college needs to do to improve further.

The college collects a range of data on learner outcomes, and is starting to collate this more effectively so that it is easily accessible. Staff use individual learner data effectively to plan appropriate programmes and interventions. However, the analysis of whole-college data to inform development planning is less well developed.

Improving quality: Good

The college has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. These are included in the self-assessment report. The report provides an honest account of the college, although in places it is too descriptive and not evaluative enough.

The college regularly seeks the views of learners through student meetings. Formal processes for obtaining the views of other stakeholders are at an early stage. However, the college has recently developed a survey for parents and carers and other stakeholders, for example social workers, colleges and the clinical psychologist. This has provided useful information relating to learner outcomes and the quality of provision at the college.

The self-assessment report links well to the quality improvement plan. The quality improvement plan is a clear, well-presented document that identifies and prioritises appropriate areas for development. It includes realistic timescales and clear responsibilities. There are robust systems in place for monitoring progress against the actions.

The college focuses well on continuous improvement. Staff across the college have made important improvements, which have had an impact on the quality of provision and standards and the college. For example, they have improved their recording of learner progress and the quality of lesson planning, with an increased focus on essential skills.

Close working with other colleges within the wider organisation has contributed to many of the improvements made.

Partnership working: Good

The college has developed a range of effective partnerships that have increased learning opportunities for learners and had a positive impact on their outcomes.

A partnership with a local college gives learners the opportunity to follow courses that suit their individual needs and preferences, for example a course in horse management. Attendance at the college provides important opportunities for learners to develop their social skills through interaction with other young people.

Effective links with local businesses give learners the opportunity to take part in relevant work experience, for example caring for horses at a riding stables, making wooden signs at the Woodland Centre and working in a community shop. A successful partnership with the National Park has given learners valuable opportunities to work as volunteers and learn about the environment.

The college has gained the trust and support of the local community. It holds regular well-attended community events, where learners practise useful work skills such as serving food and running stalls. These events help them to develop the confidence they need to interact with people they do not know well.

The college is developing useful links with other similar colleges. This helps them to share knowledge and expertise, for example in relation to suitable courses and qualifications.

The college works very closely with parents and carers. Staff keep them well informed of their child's progress through regular phone calls, open days and exhibitions of learners' work. The college produces clear, informative reports that are easy accessible to parents and learners.

Resource management: Good

The college employs staff with appropriate knowledge and expertise in their specialist areas. Support staff work well with the learners to help them achieve their goals. All staff benefit from a comprehensive training programme, including sessions on teaching and learning, safeguarding and autism awareness.

Learners have access to a wide range of suitable learning resources, with a focus on work-based learning. The college uses craft-based workshops and the farm to prepare learners well for life in the community, employment and further training.

The college manages its resources well. Important functions such as human resources, staff development and health and safety are shared with Ruskin Mill College. This helps the college to use its resources effectively. The college makes effective use of grants and fundraising to enhance its provision and purchase additional equipment.

As a result of the good outcomes achieved by learners, the college provides value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

The number of responses received was fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Responses to parent questionnaires

The number of responses received was fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Caroline Rees	Reporting Inspector
Claire Yardley	Team Inspector
Lucy Pottinger	Peer Inspector
Jane White	Nominee