

Inspection of Victoria College

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 May 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

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Victoria College is an independent specialist college based in Birmingham which has been directly funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency since 2018. The college currently has 31 students aged 19 to 25 with profound and complex learning difficulties. The curriculum is based on preparation for adulthood and includes employment, independent living, community inclusion and health. Learners have access to hydrotherapy, rebound therapy, speech and language therapy, dance, music therapy and sports.

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

Staff create a calm atmosphere in college. They know students well and interact with them in a respectful manner. Students respond to this atmosphere well. Classrooms are calm and well organised, and staff go about their work purposefully. As a result, students are more able to engage in their lessons.

When students experience difficulties, the college team draw up individual risk reduction strategies to support them effectively. As a result, students are able to continue to engage in lessons well. These strategies are regularly reviewed and updated as required.

Students enjoy coming to college and particularly like being with their friends. Their favourite lessons include cooking, music and communication. Students and staff interact positively with each other.

Students feel safe in college. They are well supported with their physical and emotional care. During activities, there is a clear focus on safe working practices in the classrooms. Students feel confident in moving around the college and are given enough space to use their mobility equipment. Consequently, they are able to travel between sessions with increased independence.

If students have concerns, they know how to report these and trust that managers will address them. For example, a newly introduced worry box helps them to share concerns they have and, as a result, they feel confident these will be addressed.

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

Leaders have a strong recognition of Birmingham local authority's strategic vision and the needs of the city to reduce day care and support more positive transitions for students. Working with the local authority, leaders have secured funding for a transition year, commencing in September 2022, in which students will be supported by the college for three days per week and will include students volunteering at the Care Village in Birmingham.

Leaders work closely with the community and with parents. To support this further, they have recently recruited a family support worker who provides a direct link between the college and parents and works well to encourage parental engagement with the college, using their knowledge of working with support services to guide parents, for example through transition.

Leaders have started to put in place a curriculum to support students to develop the skills required for adulthood, including communication and cognition, independent living skills, health, community inclusion and employment. However, the implementation of the curriculum is in its early stages and, as a result, does not yet consistently meet the educational development needs of all the students.

Leaders have not ensured that quality assurance processes focus well enough on students' educational progress. Leaders can demonstrate discussion of individual students but this is still too focused on well-being and does not show sufficient detail of discussion of educational progress.

Trustees have worked to strengthen the experience on the board to complement the current expertise from members who have worked in specialist schools', securing two new members, one of whom has experience of high needs education in the post-16 sector.

Trustees have an improved understanding of the educational requirements of the provision and are now receiving information to allow them to start to challenge the progress of students over time. For example, following training on the baseline assessment process being used, they now receive information on students' progress from those starting points and are able to discuss this progress with college leaders.

Staff are appropriately qualified for the roles that they undertake in the college. In addition to the statutory training required for safeguarding, they receive targeted continuing professional development to maintain the currency of skills or support career progression. For example, some staff undertook rebound therapy training and leadership training and are now using these newly acquired skills to support learning.

Teachers do not use baseline assessments well enough to establish students' starting points across the curriculum to enable them to measure broader progress and prompt development across all areas of the curriculum. Leaders and managers do not currently report on students' learning across the curriculum and how the different elements of the curriculum support their overall progress towards adulthood. As a result, not all students make progress to the best of their capabilities.

Leaders are at the early stages of reviewing and reshaping some aspects of the personal development curriculum to ensure they specifically meet the varying needs of the different students joining the college. However, as this is newly implemented, the curriculum is not yet fully personalised to meet individual needs.

Leaders have put in place a new relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education curriculum. This ensures more capable students' needs are being met closely but is still being refined by leaders to meet the needs of students with more complex needs. Consequently, it is not sequenced well enough for students with complex needs to develop their understanding in these areas.

Leaders are developing the curriculum to help teach students about what sustained, healthy and safe friendships and relationships look like. This allows them to start to learn how to manage their natural curiosity about their bodies as shown through sensory physical behaviours and vocalisation.

Students routinely access a range of external activities and, as a result, develop a wider understanding of the diverse community in which they live. Many students benefit from attending specific activities such as arts and sports events and visiting places of historical and cultural interest. However, staff do not use experiences in the community well enough to identify and build on students' knowledge and skills development. The recording of progress in community activities relates to participation, engagement and enjoyment rather than learning.

Teachers develop students' communication skills well. They set and monitor appropriate targets and make accurate assessments. Students develop their ability to make choices and communicate preferences, and many students improve their responsiveness to a range of stimuli. In communication and cognition, teachers plan opportunities for students to repeat and reinforce learning so that it is remembered or becomes familiar. During their time in college, some students improve their communication skills through technology, such as digital tablets, symbols and using an eye gazer.

Students' attendance is generally high. Staff respond promptly when students are unable to attend college to plan their return. Leaders proactively manage the attendance of students where they fall below expected standards, including offering part-time courses that accommodate the needs of a small number of students.

Leaders have made improvements to the transition processes as students move into and out of the college. Activities to support the transition out of college begin in Year 2 and continue into Year 3. As a result, both students and their parents are well prepared for their transition to their next step.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have improved the network of organisations they work with to support safeguarding in the college. They have implemented a new working group in the school and college federation to share good practice and update policies to reflect recent changes in legislation. As a result, leaders have in place appropriate policies, including those for safeguarding, safer recruitment and the 'Prevent' duty, which are reviewed and updated regularly.

Leaders ensure that all members of staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding. Designated safeguarding leads, teaching staff and support workers receive regular training which includes the annual required updates and ongoing development during staff's training days and at team meetings. The trustee responsible for safeguarding completes 'Why walks' to check staff's knowledge of safeguarding and identify gaps in understanding, which are subsequently addressed either individually or through all-staff training.

Managers oversee incident reporting and take steps to address the well-being of students where necessary. However, further development of these plans is needed

to ensure that they capture the reasons for behaviours of concern effectively and build staff's knowledge so that they can recognise, for example, the impact of visual impairment on levels of anxiety.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must continue to develop and implement the curriculum to prepare students for adulthood, ensuring students are best prepared to move on to their next steps outside of the college.
- Leaders must ensure that they use baseline assessment more effectively, identifying clear learning goals to ensure that students have the opportunity to achieve their best.
- Leaders must ensure that students' engagement in community and enrichment activities are used by teachers to inform and build on students' learning.
- Leaders must develop the RSE curriculum further to ensure that students develop an understanding of their feelings and actions and how to manage these themselves, reducing the current need for behavioural intervention for some students.
- Leaders must ensure that teachers engage more capable students in lessons more quickly so that teachers maximise the opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and skills.

Provider details

Unique reference number	146043
Address	Bell Hill Northfield Birmingham West Midlands B31 1LD
Contact number	01214770274
Website	www.victoriacollege.bham.org.uk
Head of College	Clare Scattergood
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of college, 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.

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