

# Short inspection of Ascent Autism Specialist College

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 March 2025

## **Outcome**

Ascent Autism Specialist College continues to be a good provider.

## **Information about this provider**

Ascent Autism Specialist College is a college for young people aged 16 to 25 who face significant barriers to education and training, including autism and special education needs and/or disabilities. The provider is based at an education centre in Newton-le-Willows and a vocational learning hub in Haydock. The college is part of Remarkable Autism Ltd.

Students follow personalised learning programmes and participate in one of two pathways. Students on the foundation pathway focus on preparing for adulthood. On the mainframe pathway, students prepare for the world of work by participating in work experience. The college has recently developed a supported internship programme and plans to expand into new premises to develop its education and vocational offer further.

At the time of the inspection, there were 41 students enrolled at the college, all of whom had an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Of these, 22 students were studying on entry-level courses, 13 were on level 1 and six on level 2.

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

Students enjoy studying at Ascent College. They take part in a wide range of high-quality activities to explore their talents and interests. Students engage enthusiastically in enterprise projects and experiences in the workplace that enable them to explore their career aspirations. These include learning how to care for and look after animals at a local farm, and working as part of catering teams at Haydock racecourse. Students have the opportunity to work in the college's mobile catering trailer and with housekeeping teams at a national hotel chain.

Students take part keenly in activities beyond their main pathway. They participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award as well as leisure activities such as swimming, accessing local gyms, and residential trips. Students become more confident and resilient through the college's well-planned personal development programme.

Students feel safe. They say that the college is welcoming and supportive, and there are staff readily available to help and support if needed. Students learn to recognise when others are facing difficulty. They are confident to raise concerns.

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

Leaders and teachers provide highly personalised, individual learning programmes to ensure that students achieve their EHC plan outcomes. Teachers carefully design and sequence curriculums to introduce new topics on a termly basis that build students' skills over time. For example, while travel training, students first learn how to safely travel on the minibuss with other students to learn routes. They then progress to travelling safely as a pedestrian and then practise using public transport.

Teachers use students' starting points and the information in their EHC plans to establish and develop individual targets for students. Where appropriate, students work towards qualifications including English and mathematics. Students demonstrate good progress across the year and the vast majority achieve these qualifications.

Teachers use targets well, and students clearly understand what they are learning and can explain what skills they have developed and how to apply them. However, in some lessons, teachers focus too closely on students completing tasks rather than developing students' skills and knowledge further. As a result, a small number of students are not sufficiently challenged in their learning.

Leaders and managers have adopted a proactive approach to integrating therapies into students' programmes. This includes therapeutic intervention, behavioural support and assessment for all students when they start college. Students needing more intensive support benefit from bespoke programmes facilitated by qualified and experienced therapists. As a result, students learn how to regulate their behaviours quickly and are supported to develop independent living skills.

Leaders are ambitious for the college and its students. They have diversified their curriculum and built significant links with local and regional employers. Leaders have developed supported internships to enable students to gain paid employment. At the time of the inspection, students were coming to the end of this programme. Although students have not yet completed their internship, they have gained essential employability and practical skills in catering, horticulture and customer services via the college's employment hub.

Learning mentors are well qualified and are skilled in supporting students. They use effective strategies such as regular recaps, effective questioning and positive reinforcement. However, on a few occasions, staff are too quick to verbally prompt and help students, which does not give students adequate time to process what is being asked of them and develop their own responses.

Leaders and managers have made significant progress to ensure that the college's careers information, advice and guidance curriculums meet the needs of students and are of high quality. Managers have employed qualified career advisers who proactively work with local authorities to ensure that all students benefit from unbiased advice and guidance. Consequently, students are prepared well for their next steps and are ready to progress to positive destinations, including further study, supported internships and work.

Governors receive up-to-date information to provide appropriate support and challenge to college leaders. Governors are committed members of the college community and proudly take part in college activities such as learning walks, student voice meetings and college celebrations. However, governors accept there is a need to strengthen the board's expertise within the further education and skills sector to continue to offer the level of support and challenge college leaders require.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure that all students are sufficiently challenged to further develop their skills and knowledge.
- Ensure that governors have a deeper knowledge of the further education and skills sector so that they can more effectively support college leaders.
- Ensure that staff members promote students' independence by giving them adequate time to process information and questions that are asked of them.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139251
<b>Address</b>	Remarkable Autism Ltd, 449 Wargrave Road Newton-le-Willows Merseyside WA12 8RS
<b>Contact number</b>	01925224899
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ascent.college">www.ascent.college</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Julliet Doherty
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	25 to 27 September 2019

## Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Ascent Autism Specialist College was judged to be good in September 2019.

The inspection team was assisted by the head of adult services 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

Steve Kelly, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Joanne Keatley

Ofsted Inspector

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