

# Inspection of Sense College

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 February 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Sense College East is a large independent specialist college and is part of the national 'Sense' parent organisation, a national charity. The college operates from eight resource centres across the East Midlands, West Midlands and the east of England. The college has no subcontracted provision.

A high proportion of learners have very complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities affecting their communication and emotional and behavioural development. Most learners also have physical disabilities and require mobility support. Currently, 81 learners are enrolled at the college and in receipt of high needs funding.

Sense College offers three curriculum pathways. These consist of a pre-entry learning for life programme, which is based on the recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) approach, a foundation programme and an employment pathway. Most learners follow the learning for life curriculum. A small minority of learners supplement their programme with accredited qualifications, where appropriate.

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

Learners have a positive attitude to learning. They come to college attentive and ready to learn. They demonstrate a high level of respect for college staff and their peers. Staff support learners to develop an active lifestyle to stay mentally and physically healthy. Learners participate in a range of unfamiliar activities. These include accessible tabletop sports with their peers, sensory activities and physical exercises, such as walking.

Learners develop their confidence, self-awareness and communication and social skills. Staff ensure that learners are sensitive to and understand the different communication needs and triggers of their college 'friends'. Staff support learners to manage and self-regulate their own behaviours. As a result, learners develop their understanding of positive relationships and appropriate behaviours. Learners can manage their behaviour effectively when in the community and on work placements.

Learners have good attendance. When learners are absent, this is mostly due to ill health and medical appointments. Managers and staff monitor learner attendance and work with parents and carers to try to reduce absences. Teachers have appropriate strategies in place for learners to catch up when they return from a period of absence.

Staff support learners to stay safe. Learners develop their understanding of appropriate and safe ways to greet people in different social contexts. This keeps learners safe when new people come to college and when they meet new people out in the community and on work placements. Staff use social stories with learners to develop their understanding of what is and is not safe. When learners use the internet in lessons, they can recall from previous lessons the importance of being safe online. They understand what they need to do to stay safe before starting their task.

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

Leaders have developed an effective and ambitious strategic intent. They plan to ensure that learners with complex disabilities take an active part in society, can fulfil their potential and live life to the full. Leaders have designed a coherent and suitably ambitious accredited and non-accredited curriculum. They routinely evaluate the curriculum to ensure it is purposeful and supports the changing needs of their learners. Leaders rightly prioritise the development of learners' communication, educational and independence skills.

Leaders ensure that staff are well qualified and experienced. They ensure that staff benefit from a broad range of professional development opportunities. Leaders have introduced expert teachers to develop and share good practice across centres. Leaders target support effectively for trainee teachers and those who need further

development. As a result, staff have the confidence and expertise to work effectively with learners with complex learning needs.

Leaders and staff work closely with therapeutic staff. They ensure that learners receive a comprehensive assessment when they first enrol at the college. As a result, leaders put in place the specialist support learners need to remove the physical or communication barriers they may face. Most teachers set appropriate, individualised targets for learners. The targets they set take account of learners' education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Leaders and teachers frequently check for any progress against these targets. They take appropriate actions where learners may not be achieving targets set. As a result, most learners are working at or above their predicted targets.

Staff create a calm and welcoming environment by setting a clear framework of expected behaviour. Staff adopt a person-centred approach, which creates a positive culture to enable learning. Learners help their peers and staff when needed. Staff provide learners with structure and familiarity through routines. For example, staff remind learners to wash their hands. Staff ask learners if they need their coat or apron to cook, and they challenge the learner to make the correct choice. Staff use social stories to support learners to develop appropriate behaviours for work. Learners develop the ability to manage anxiety during busy periods at work. As a result, learners successfully build resilience and persevere with work experience placements.

Most teachers sequence their lessons effectively to build on what learners already know and can do. Most teachers plan lessons that skilfully build learners' independence. These include topics such as cooking, domestic skills and shopping. Often, learners apply their skills in less familiar settings, such as work placement or when accessing the local community. For example, in a domestic skills session, the teacher used repetition to enable learners to practise basic laundry tasks. As a result, learners can do these tasks with increased fluency, including operating the washing machine unaided. For a small minority of learners, teachers do not plan educational topics effectively to ensure that learning is meaningful.

Most teachers make very good use of adaptive technology, such as switches, eye gaze and other communication aids. From the start of their programmes, staff teach learners effective strategies to express how they are feeling. Teachers use talking mats and picture exchange systems to help learners identify their needs, such as where they may feel pain. Learners use appropriate body gestures, such as turning their head to the right to signal to peers that it is their turn in the ball game. As a result, many learners can express preferences and increase their interaction with others.

Learners develop a good understanding of how to take turns, share resources and work together to cook. They celebrate each other's achievements. These important outcomes enable learners to take greater control of their lives. Learners can do more things for themselves, increase their social circles and make their own choices. For example, learners develop cooking skills and learn about different ingredients.

They expand the range and type of foods they eat, such as three bean chilli. As a result, learners are more able to contribute to and take part in family life.

Learners have a good understanding of healthy relationships. Learners have developed a good understanding of consent. They use this knowledge to make decisions about their lives. For example, staff support learners to use sign language to communicate 'stop' and 'more' early in their programme. As a result, learners can communicate clearly to staff if they are enjoying an activity or if they are not enjoying it and want to stop. Teachers use body map resources effectively to develop learners' understanding of inappropriate touching.

Most teachers develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills effectively. Teachers ensure that learners' understanding of literacy and numeracy meets the outcomes of the EHC plans. For example, in enterprise lessons, learners understand simple values of money. Learners then apply this learning in the work experience placement in the afternoon lesson. For literacy, learners deliver a presentation to the rest of the class by reading what they have done. In a minority of cases, teachers' planning for developing learners' English and mathematical skills is less explicit.

Staff provide good opportunities for learners to deepen their understanding of fundamental British values. For example, learners follow the 'I' statements, which includes 'I will listen to others', 'I will respect others' and 'no decision about me without me'. This has enabled learners to develop their tolerance of others and form friendships with their peers. Learners enjoy working together and spending communal time together. Staff encourage learners to use 'please' and 'thank you' and be polite to each other. Learners have an active learner voice forum and make choices about college life. For example, they voted for the prizes for the student award ceremony.

Most learners develop and extend their knowledge of equality and diversity during lessons and social time. They learn about respect, choice and difference through a well-planned cultural awareness programme. They take part in celebrations such as Chinese New Year. Learners develop an understanding of different events and cultures throughout the year. Where teachers do this well, content is carefully considered to be meaningful for the cognitive level of the learner, reinforcing, for example, the point about what it means to be 'different' or 'the same'. In a minority of cases, teachers' promotion of equality and diversity is not effective and does not follow the planned curriculum.

Leaders and staff do not plan and prepare learners in a timely way for their transition out of college. Leaders and staff do not work early or consistently enough with learners to develop their new routines. Leaders recognise that they need to develop the curriculum further to support learners' transition destinations. Leaders have taken steps to plan earlier, helpful discussions with parents about transition. Leaders schedule regular transition opportunity events. They support parents and carers to engage with local partners. Leaders and staff educate parents on the next step opportunities available to them.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have a good understanding of the quality of their provision across the different sites. They have developed rigorous quality management arrangements and reporting. Leaders use a wide range of data frequently and effectively to track learner progress. Leaders accurately identify weaknesses in the quality of education. Leaders put in place appropriate and timely actions to drive improvement. As a result, they have a clear oversight of their strengths and areas for improvement. For example, at the time of the inspection, the quality of education varied too much across a minority of their sites. Leaders have taken effective actions to improve weaknesses that inspectors found. However, it is too early to see the impact of these.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand their responsibility for safeguarding. They have developed a culture that has safeguarding of learners at the centre of everything they do. They have established effective safer recruitment practices. They place a high priority on ensuring that staff are appropriately trained and kept up to date. Leaders have developed systems that flag up concerns. They carry out frequent audits to ensure that systems are effective and acted upon.

Leaders have comprehensive and transparent recording of safeguarding and low-level concerns. Staff and leaders know their learners well. They understand that changes in behaviour are how learners with complex needs may communicate with them. Consequently, leaders and staff observe and respond swiftly to any changes in learners' habits or behaviours.

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

- Leaders must ensure that teachers provide learners with a consistently good educational experience across all the Sense college centres.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that learners' transition out of education is planned earlier to better prepare learners for a change in their routine.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	132011
<b>Address</b>	50 Forder Way Cygnet Park Hampton Peterborough PE7 8JB
<b>Contact number</b>	01733425053
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.sense.org.uk/our-services/education-and-work/sense-college/">https://www.sense.org.uk/our-services/education-and-work/sense-college/</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Pat Dyson
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 to 9 February 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	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

Penny Fawcus, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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