

bemix

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

19–21 March 2019

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet good enough.
- Leaders and managers do not give enough priority to the development of students' English and mathematical skills.
- Leaders and managers fail to undertake sufficiently rigorous student selection, and as a result not all students are suitable for the supported internship programme.
- Teachers do not carry out effective and timely assessments to identify students' starting points.
- Leaders and managers have not put in place sufficiently strong quality assurance arrangements.
- Governance arrangements are ineffective and require improvement.
- Too few students who would be capable of doing so complete accredited English and mathematics qualifications.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers have established a highly effective culture and ethos, so that people with and without learning difficulties and/or autism work alongside each other successfully and equally.
- Students benefit from employment placements in a wide range of businesses, which match their career aspirations and are of a high quality.
- Job coaches and employers support students sensitively in the workplace, enabling them to develop confidence and independence quickly.
- Leaders and managers have established very positive relationships with employers and the local authorities to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or autism.
- Almost all students who completed their supported internship in 2018 progressed into paid employment, further training or an apprenticeship.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Skillnet Group began operating in 2001 and became bemix in June 2018. It is an independent specialist college. Based in Kent, bemix runs projects which support people with learning difficulties and/or autism to learn skills, gain qualifications and become more confident and independent. It works with employers, businesses and services in the local area. It provides supported employment opportunities to students aged 16 to 24 who have education, health and care (EHC) plans and who reside in Swale or Medway.
- In 2016/17, bemix ran a pilot supported internship programme in Swale for another provider, supporting five students. In 2017, it received specialist post-16 status and registered as a Section 41 institution. In 2017/18 it supported 14 students into work through its own directly funded supported internship programme. At the time of inspection, 22 students are on the programme, placed with employers in a wide range of businesses.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Board members and senior leaders should quickly establish governance that will provide strong scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders and managers and effective oversight of the quality of the provision.
- Senior leaders should give higher priority to the provision of English and mathematics. They should ensure that all students who are capable of doing so take an accredited English and/or mathematics qualification at a level suitable to their prior attainment.
- Senior leaders and managers should implement effective pre-enrolment selection of candidates to ensure that they can proceed into their work placement at the earliest opportunity, to benefit from the high-quality employment placements available.
- Senior leaders and managers should develop the skills of teachers so that they can undertake effective initial assessment to determine the starting points of students. Leaders and managers should help teachers to more effectively support their students to make progress from their starting points in English and mathematics.
- Senior leaders should develop effective quality assurance systems to maintain good oversight of the entire programme and enable leaders to put in place interventions and improvements quickly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not implemented sufficiently effective quality assurance processes to monitor and improve the quality of provision. Their oversight of the quality of the programme remains fragmented. They have not improved the quality of all aspects of the programme.
- Leaders and managers have not given enough priority to improving students' English and mathematics skills. They have not put in place sufficiently rigorous quality assurance processes for this provision. When assessing the quality and effectiveness of this provision, they do not consider the starting points of students. Neither do they consider the extent to which students develop new skills and techniques. As a result, too few students develop the English and mathematical skills of which they are capable.
- Leaders and managers have been too slow to secure work placements for around a quarter of the students in the current cohort. These students have taken longer to prepare for their placements than expected. As a result, they are at risk of not completing their work placement hours by their expected finish date. Leaders and managers have accurately identified that the selection process for new students needs to be more rigorous. As a result, they have redesigned the programme for next year.
- Leaders, managers and board members have a clear vision for the provision of supported internships, driven by their own experience and expertise. Through their ethos and their organisational values, they create a culture of tolerance, respect and dignity, in which everyone feels valued. Their ethos supports people with and without learning difficulties and/or autism to work together as equals to plan and make decisions about things that directly affect them. Leaders and managers set high expectations for what students can achieve in the workplace.
- Leaders and managers have established positive partnerships with the local authorities. As a result, they have established an effective and relevant supported internship programme for adults and young people who have EHC plans, and who reside in Medway and Swale, as part of the local offer.
- Leaders and managers have built good relationships with a wide range of local employers and work hard to maintain these. Consequently, students benefit from a range of high-quality work placements. Leaders and managers have built a strong relationship with a large retail centre. This allows them to locate one of their centres in the heart of a busy retail development. As a result, they maintain a visible presence in the community. This encourages members of the public and business owners to enquire about, or become involved with, the programme.
- Staff value the effective support they receive to carry out their roles. They benefit from training in a range of approaches relevant to their roles. For example, a third of staff have undertaken a supported employer practitioner qualification. Specialised professional development is also available to staff who require additional training to fulfil a role or support the needs of an individual student. For example, leaders have provided training to job coaches in supporting students who have eating disorders.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate their commitment to, and promotion of, all forms of

equality through their ethos of co-production and self-advocacy for adults and young people who have autism and learning difficulties. As a result, several staff, including board members, draw on their own personal experience of having a learning difficulty and/or autism. They use this to support students on the programme and to promote positive outcomes.

- Leaders and managers value the views of staff, students, parents/carers and employers. They carry out a range of activities to seek feedback on the quality of the programme and act upon this to secure improvement. However, the processes they use to monitor the progress they are making towards these improvements lack accuracy and rigour.

The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements are ineffective. The management committee does not sufficiently oversee the quality of the supported internship programme. There are too few external members on the committee to provide sufficiently rigorous scrutiny and challenge to leaders and managers.
- External members of the management committee are suitably qualified and experienced. They used their expertise effectively to support leaders and managers in the early stages of developing the programme. They correctly recognise that they need to recruit more external members to hold managers to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Students feel safe and know whom to speak to if they are worried about themselves or others. They frequently take part in activities that focus on key safeguarding themes appropriate to their level and ability.
- Leaders and managers have put in place effective safeguarding procedures that clearly identify roles, lines of responsibility and referral routes. All staff understand these procedures. Designated safeguarding leads respond effectively to concerns that staff and students raise. They have well-established and good working relationships with external agencies and refer students to these when appropriate.
- Staff recruitment procedures are effective. All staff receive safeguarding training that is appropriate to their role. The attention paid to health and safety is strong.
- Leaders have implemented the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty, and students demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. Leaders have embedded British values well into the ethos of the organisation, and students and staff demonstrate and promote them. However, board members are insufficiently aware of their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Classroom-based learning activities require improvement. Students spend up to 12 weeks in a job club preparing for their work placement. Although many useful work-related activities are included, students do not benefit from them sufficiently, because teachers

do not link them closely to any specific experiences that students might have in the workplace.

- Teachers do not provide good-quality teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics classes. Students do not receive enough tuition in functional skills because the lessons are infrequent. Teachers do not consider the learning needs of all the students in the group. Teachers set tasks that are either too difficult for some students or too easy for others. Consequently, students learn very little.
- Teachers and managers do not assess students' starting points early enough. The types of assessments that staff use to determine students' starting points are not coordinated. Teachers and managers do not use assessment outcomes effectively to monitor students' progress across all aspects of their programmes.
- bemix staff select work placements very carefully so that they match students' aspirations. The students who have a work placement receive good preparation for employment.
- Job coaches provide employers with information about the adjustments they need to make for students and specific strategies they can adopt to support them. For example, work placement staff are encouraged to give students very clear instructions, which reduces students' levels of anxiety.
- Job coaches know the students well and provide sensitive support to enable them to work effectively. They help students to adjust gradually to a working environment and assist them in learning the skills they need to undertake work tasks. Consequently, students become more confident and learn to engage productively in the workplace.
- Students benefit from an inclusive environment in the college and in the workplace. Respect for others is encouraged and bullying is not tolerated. Employers support students well and take a keen interest in their progress.
- Job coaches monitor students' goals in the workplace very well. They hold monthly reviews with employers, set new goals as appropriate and discuss reducing levels of support as students become more independent.
- bemix staff carry out rigorous health and safety checks and risk assessments in the workplace prior to placements. They spend time preparing employers for the placement and clarifying the job role. They ensure that students participate in an internship in which permanent employment is a possible outcome.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- A significant minority of students do not start their employment placement early enough and, as a result, this limits the extent to which they can develop their workplace skills or gain relevant experience.
- Students' rates of attendance are too low on classroom-based provision. This reflects a lack of enthusiasm, expressed by a few students, for this aspect of their programme.
- Students do not have enough opportunity to develop their mathematical and English skills before they start their employment placements. Once they are on placements, teachers in classroom sessions do not adequately identify and meet their specific ongoing individual needs.
- Students in work placements develop appropriate behaviours for the workplace and

gradually become part of a team. In taught sessions, students respect each other. Staff make sure that students conform to their expectations of conduct, intervening to reinforce these when required. Students enjoy their time with the college and speak positively about the willingness of the staff to support them in work placements and the classroom sessions.

- Students in work placements become more confident as they become familiar with their work setting and the people with whom they work. Within a few weeks, for example, a student working in a shop approached customers to ask if they needed help, and responded appropriately to requests for information from them.
- Students feel safe. They have comprehensive training in all aspects of safeguarding. Those in work placements develop a good understanding of employers' arrangements for health and safety and fire procedures and speak confidently about them. One student, working in a children's day nursery, developed the skills to carry out risk assessments in the garden.
- Students in work placements attend well, and most have full attendance. Often, they arrive early and are ready to work.
- Managers have effective connections with a range of local charities. This allows them to respond positively to any therapeutic needs that students develop, such as counselling.
- Students benefit from enrichment activities and visits involving several external agencies. These activities include the opportunity to participate in a local disability forum organised by the council. This allows students to express their views assertively in a public forum alongside others, to bring about change.
- In classroom sessions, students use notebooks that help them to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Those with little previous experience become more confident in their use of ICT and know how to keep themselves safe online.
- Students explore career options through the job club and attend careers fairs. The national careers service visits to provide impartial careers advice and guidance. The vast majority of students receive good preparation for their next steps. They are aware of a range of options that they may consider on completion of their internship.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Students make slow progress in their classroom-based learning.
- Too few students are challenged to complete accredited qualifications in English and mathematics. The proportion of students achieving relevant and meaningful qualifications in English and mathematics is too low.
- The large majority of students who completed their supported internship in 2018 progressed to paid employment, further training or an apprenticeship. The remaining students have progressed into volunteering roles.
- Students complete additional qualifications and certification in areas relevant to their career aims. These include food hygiene certification and the construction skills certification scheme card. As a result, students increase their employability in those

industries.

- Students develop good personal, social and employability skills that enhance their independence. They improve their communication skills and develop their confidence. As a result, the vast majority function effectively in the workplace and take an active part in the local community.

Provider details

Unique reference number	144788
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	14
Principal	Helena Jennings
Telephone number	01227 374285
Website	www.bemix.org

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	4	14	-	4	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	22							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of supported employment, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners, staff, parents/carers and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Judy Lye-Forster, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joyce Deere

Ofsted Inspector

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