

Downs View Life Skills College

Monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From autumn 2019, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to independent specialist colleges newly Education and Skills Funding Agency funded from August 2018 onwards. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Downs View Life Skills College (DVLSC) is an independent specialist college which was established in 2018. It was formerly part of Downs View School and College. It provides programmes for young people aged 19 to 24 at entry level or below which focus on preparing them for independent living and/or employment. At the time of the visit, there were 37 learners attending the college. Learners have moderate to profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

At the time of the visit, most learners had returned to face-to-face learning, following periods of lockdown where they had been supported remotely. The curriculum had been adjusted to support their return by delivering a bespoke 'recovery curriculum' to integrate learners back into college life. The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant learning programmes that are clearly defined and tailored to suit the individual needs of learners? Reasonable progress

Leaders have developed an appropriate curriculum which prepares learners well for employment and/or more independent living in adulthood when they leave the college. Leaders developed this curriculum in direct response to an identified need in the local authority for specialist provision. Leaders work closely with the local authority special educational needs and disability team to identify suitable outcomes for the learners throughout their time at the college. These outcomes are aligned closely to the learners' education, health and care plan targets. As a result, leaders have tailored a curriculum which meets the needs of learners.

Leaders review the quality of education effectively. They develop actions to improve the provision, which they continually review to identify their impact on the learners' experience. These methods are also used to identify and plan appropriate training for staff. Trustees take part in the self-assessment process and scrutinise with rigour the impact of improvement actions. They challenge the leaders and managers to continue to

improve, through half-termly meetings where quality of education is a standing item. Trustees have a good oversight of the progress of learners and visit the college frequently to gain direct feedback from them.

Leaders have built up useful partnerships with a range of employers so that learners are able to experience different areas of work and gain real-life work skills, including building friendships.

Leaders, managers and teachers have wide experience of working with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which they use well to support learners. However, some of the resources and language used are not always appropriate to support learners to prepare for adulthood. For example, tutors do not always encourage learners to read age-appropriate materials, so they use books aimed at primary school children.

Leaders acknowledge that the building, which is not purpose-built, does not always meet the needs of the learners. This is particularly the case for those learners who use a wheelchair. However, leaders are working closely with the local authority to improve this.

How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality learning programmes that develop independence, communication and skills and help them to achieve their personal and/or work-related goals? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have implemented a carefully-thought-out curriculum which has a clear, overall structure of three different main pathways, but retains the flexibility to make sure that learners' individual needs are met.

When learners join the college, teachers carefully capture the skills and interests of learners so that the teaching/support team can build on these over time. Learners follow the curriculum pathway most suited to their needs, as well as developing their wider skills and independence.

Teachers confidently use the very comprehensive monitoring tool to monitor and review the individual journey learners make through the curriculum. Teachers identify and select the most important and relevant priorities for each learner effectively, and set these as targets. These support most learners well in knowing what they need to do to make progress in developing their skills and knowledge. However, for some learners the targets are too complex and as a result, progress is slower.

Learners enjoy developing their practical skills and confidence in a range of scenarios. Teachers plan learning to include different tasks according to the learner's stage of readiness. Teachers build learning towards these activities effectively and help learners refine their skills and manage their excitement. For example, teachers support learners in serving lunch in the college café or in keeping surfaces clean in the café kitchen.

Currently, external visits and placements have been curtailed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Wherever possible, leaders and teachers have simulated work environments within the college grounds. However, leaders have not been able to replicate the independent living space that they have lost and as a result, learners are not able to practise their skills for independent living in a realistic setting.

Learners develop their confidence in English and mathematics. Teachers set targets for each learner which relate to their wider personal goals. For example, some learners build their reading skills by identifying emotions in a fictional story.

Teachers and teaching assistants are well qualified and skilled; they work well together to support learners. They use their skills well to motivate and encourage learners. However, sometimes the language and resources they use are rather childlike, and do not effectively prepare these adult learners for adult life.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Learners feel very safe in the college. They are aware of how to keep themselves safe outside of college and they know to whom they can report any concerns. Staff responsible for safeguarding are suitably trained in identifying, reporting and managing concerns that staff or learners may have.

Leaders and staff at the college ensure that learners are safe during all activities through thorough risk assessment and the continuous review of health and safety. Leaders conduct risk assessments of any activities which learners take part in outside of the college. Leaders and staff ensure that employers are aware of their responsibilities while learners are at their place of work, and provide a member of college staff to work alongside the learners.

Staff have received safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training and can identify some of the risks to their learners. However, they do not demonstrate sufficient awareness of other specific risks to their learners. For example, teachers were not aware of the risk to their learners of county lines activity.

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