

Chatsworth Futures Limited

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Elaine Price, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Chatsworth Futures Limited (Chatsworth Futures) following publication of the inspection report on 22 February 2019 which found the provider to be inadequate overall. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for learners were judged requires improvement. Personal development, behaviour and welfare and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged inadequate. The arrangements for safeguarding were not effective.

Chatsworth Futures is part of Chatsworth Multi-Academy Trust. The trust includes Chatsworth High School and Community College, which is a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder, and Chatsworth Futures. At the time of the re-inspection monitoring visit, there were 12 learners on roll, three learners on the discovery pathway, four learners on the independence pathway and five learners on the employability pathway. All learners have an education, health and care plan.

Themes

What actions have leaders and managers taken to address weaknesses identified at the previous inspection in relation to the health and safety of learners at the college?

Senior leaders have responded swiftly to address the health and safety concerns identified at the previous inspection which placed learners in potentially harmful situations.

Following the inspection, senior leaders commissioned a comprehensive health and safety review, which was carried out by an external specialist. As a result, senior leaders have implemented a range of changes. They have removed the need to use the kitchen area as a learning environment. Learners now make use of the newly refurbished life skills environment located in the annex building between the college and the school. Learners use this kitchen area to develop their food preparation skills safely as part of their independent living skills programme. All potentially hazardous substances are kept in locked storage areas in the college building. Access and egress to the college areas within the building have keycode locks. Tools, in workshops and horticulture areas of the college, are stored safely.

Senior leaders have responded to the lack of leadership oversight by establishing a lead governor role for health and safety. The principal has taken on the role of health and safety coordinator and the trust's business officer has the role of health and safety officer across the trust. All have received appropriate health and safety training. The health and safety action plan is closely monitored by the governor for health and safety to ensure actions are achieved. The principal reports on health and safety in his frequent principal's report to the governing board.

Staff have received internal training to raise their awareness of health and safety issues. Staff teams carry out frequent health and safety classroom checks. Where concerns are identified, these are logged and action is taken. This action is carefully monitored by the principal.

Senior leaders have revised policies relating to health and safety. They have put in place thorough risk assessments of potential harmful situations to learners. For example, a comprehensive risk assessment of keeping chickens in the outside space at the college has been carried out. The assessment considers risks such as zoonotic diseases and allergic reactions, and identifies the control measures needed to address potential risks to learners, staff and visitors. The health and safety of learners are now a high priority for governors, senior leaders and staff.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that health and safety remain a high priority and are embedded within the safeguarding culture of the college so that learners are kept safe.

What quality improvement processes have leaders and managers put in place to address swiftly the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection to improve the quality of provision?

Leaders quickly put in place a post-inspection action plan after the previous inspection, focusing on the key weaknesses identified. The action plan replaces the previous quality improvement plan and will remain in place until the end of the summer term, when senior leaders plan to implement a revised self-assessment process involving all staff. At the time of the re-inspection monitoring visit, the vast majority of actions had been fully or partially implemented.

Senior leaders have revised the curriculum for learners at Chatsworth Futures, based on three pathways: discovery, independence and employability. These changes ensure that learning programmes meet the range of abilities and needs of learners to prepare them for adulthood and their next steps. Senior managers rightly acknowledge that the delivery model for the discovery pathway for learners with profound or multiple learning difficulties requires further development, to ensure it meets learners' very specific and individual needs. The employability pathway is designed to prepare learners for internal and external work placement opportunities, which are currently being explored by senior leaders.

Senior leaders have designed a quality cycle that includes formal lesson observations, learning walks and quality review audits. Each month, leaders focus on reviewing a specific aspect of quality, such as the standard of learners' work, the quality of target setting, individual learning plans and behaviour support plans. However, the quality cycle has yet to be fully implemented. To date, senior leaders have focused on conducting learning walks and observations and reviewing target setting for learners.

Governors are currently being consulted on their involvement in carrying out observations and the tracking of learners' progress.

Priorities for improvement

- Review the effectiveness of teaching and learning on the discovery curriculum pathway to ensure this meets the needs of all learners.
- Implement fully the quality cycle and evaluate its impact in bringing about rapid improvements in the quality of provision.
- Identify and share good practice across the college.
- Revise and implement the self-assessment process and quality improvement plan.

What actions have leaders and managers taken to improve quickly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?

Senior managers have introduced weekly training workshops for staff, informed by the outcomes of learning walks and observations of practice. For example, staff have received training on stretch and challenge, promoting independence, target setting and achieving a 'crisp start to lessons'. Staff value the training and senior leaders' participation in the workshops to support them to improve their practice. Joint lesson observations by inspectors with senior leaders during the monitoring visit highlighted that teaching assistants provide appropriate levels of support, allowing learners to complete activities independently.

Senior leaders have appointed an occupational therapist and an additional speech and language therapist since the inspection. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants can now focus more on developing learners' communication and independence skills. For example, learners on the independence pathway develop daily living skills such as ironing, laying a table and vacuuming in the independent living suite.

Total communication resources are in place for all learners in each classroom. These include 'now and next' cards, picture/symbol schedules, communication books and chat boards. Staff skilfully use these resources to help learners engage and participate in lessons. Makaton signing to reinforce learners' understanding is used consistently by staff across the college. This has been accelerated with the introduction of 'word of the week'.

Senior leaders and staff are currently reviewing the target-setting process. Learners' targets are limited in scope; they are not sufficiently detailed to allow learners to achieve their education, health and care plan outcomes in a step-by-step manner. The use of learners' core and subject-specific targets set by staff to plan learning in lessons is variable. For example, in lessons on 'personal space', activities used for the whole group did not always match individuals' ability levels. Learners have their personal targets printed on cards which are carried in their lanyards to help them remember what their targets are and what they should be focusing on in lessons.

Learners on the employability pathway know their personal targets well and what skills they have gained.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to review staff development needs to improve teachers' and teaching assistants' practice.
- Ensure that targets set for learners help them make progress towards achieving their goals and prepare them for adulthood and their next steps.
- Ensure that staff plan lessons that meet the individual needs of learners.

What actions have been taken to ensure that the senior leadership team has the expertise and skills to support and manage provision for learners with high needs in further education and skills?

Governors and the principal have appointed an interim co-principal with experience of working in, and as adviser to, independent colleges in the further education and skills sector. The co-principal is employed on a part-time basis. In addition to this, an experienced teacher from the school has been seconded to the post of assistant principal to provide additional teaching and leadership support. The senior leadership team now consists of the principal, co-principal and assistant principal.

Senior leaders have received support and guidance from a specialist college association. The principal has worked with consultants from the specialist college association to put in place the post-inspection action plan. The principal has joined the principals' forum in the North West to deepen his knowledge and understanding of working in the further education and skills sector and to develop relationships with leaders from other specialist colleges. Visits to successful independent specialist colleges are scheduled for the summer term to share good practice for senior leaders, teaching staff and senior teaching assistants. The principal has received training on the use of data and data systems in the further education sector. As a result, senior leaders now have a better understanding of how they can use data to understand the progress that learners are making and how to develop targets for learners.

Governors are currently seeking the appointment of a permanent experienced vice-principal.

Priorities for improvement

- Secure the appointment of a permanent vice-principal with experience of independent specialist colleges in the further education and skills sector.
- Engage with colleagues in similar settings that provide high-quality provision for learners with high needs to share good practice.
- Continue to work with and gain support from the specialist college association.

What actions have been taken to ensure performance management processes support staff to develop and improve their teaching practice?

Senior leaders propose to provide all staff with an annual formal appraisal and mid-year review. They have revised appraisal documentation and processes to ensure a focus on classroom practice, and also to inform the key performance targets set by senior leaders and the governing board. However, the new appraisal process has not yet been fully implemented.

Senior leaders have put in place a robust and comprehensive lesson observation policy and associated procedures. They formally observe teaching staff and teaching assistants to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Observers set clear actions and target dates for improvement, although senior leaders do not yet systematically monitor whether actions have been achieved by the target date. Where the standard of a staff member's work is below standard and does not improve after support, senior leaders make use of capability and disciplinary policies.

In addition to formal observations, senior leaders carry out frequent learning walks on identified themes. Senior leaders use the outcomes of the learning walks to inform weekly staff training workshops.

Senior leaders have reviewed line management responsibilities. Staff have a clear understanding of who their direct line manager is. Staff have frequent one-to-one supervision reviews with their line manager to discuss their performance. Staff value these discussions and the encouragement they receive from senior leaders to identify their individual training needs. However, not all recorded discussions focus sufficiently on improving classroom practice.

Senior leaders have very recently put in place individual mentoring support for staff who are new to teaching or who have been identified as needing to improve their practice. It is too soon to measure the impact of this individual support in bringing about rapid improvement to individuals' practice.

Priorities for improvement

- Implement the appraisal system for all staff to help them develop their skills.
- Ensure that the outcomes from learning walks, formal observations and one-to-one discussions inform individual staff members' targets for improvement.
- Evaluate the impact of the mentoring support to improve staff's practice.

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