

LifeBridge ASEND

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

LifeBridge ASEND was inspected in June 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

The college provides education and support for learners who have moderate to severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities including autism spectrum disorder, hearing impairment, visual impairment and other health needs. At the time of the visit 36 learners aged between 19 and 25 years attended the college, 35 of whom were in scope for the monitoring visit.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made to ensure they have high expectations through the implementation of a challenging curriculum? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have an ambitious vision for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The curriculum focuses on developing learners' social, emotional and employability skills. Leaders have high expectations for learners to become more independent and gain employment. Of those learners who left in 2018/19, the large majority went into paid employment or volunteering work.

Leaders and managers have made reasonable progress in implementing a challenging curriculum. In English, mathematics and personal development, managers and tutors have developed and implemented individualised programmes that build on learners' existing skills and knowledge. For example, learners develop their handwriting skills and use more complex sentences in their written work. Learners are set ambitious and challenging targets that lead to qualifications where appropriate.

Improvements in the curriculum are less evident in vocational classes and in enrichment classes than they are in English, mathematics and personal development classes. Leaders and managers have only recently introduced a revised vocational curriculum. Their intention is to ensure that learners are better equipped to progress to employment in their chosen vocational subject. It is too soon to judge the success of this new curriculum in enabling learners to know more and remember more. Leaders and managers have correctly identified that the enrichment curriculum does not always meet the needs of learners. A minority of topics were chosen because the tutor enjoyed the subject or was confident in it. At the time of the visit leaders and managers had not taken action to improve the enrichment curriculum.

What progress has been made to ensure that trustees and senior managers have effective strategic oversight of the quality of education?

Reasonable progress

Trustees, leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have made reasonable progress in rectifying the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Leaders, managers and trustees have an accurate understanding of the quality of education. Trustees challenge managers to tackle weaknesses in the quality of education such as the content of the curriculum and timetabling. Most tutors plan activities in lessons that are age appropriate and logically build upon what was covered in previous lessons. This results in learners knowing more and remembering more. Staff take part in and benefit from professional development and training such as in managing challenging behaviour. Leaders have identified weaknesses in teaching practice for individual staff but have yet to put in place specific action plans or professional development to help these tutors to improve.

Trustees have formalised the roles and responsibilities of the board of trustees. However, they have not recruited new members to the board who are wholly independent of the provider. Trustees recognised that they were too involved in managing aspects of the provision. For example, sourcing new premises to meet the planned growth in learner numbers. Trustees have recently recruited an additional leader at LifeBridge ASEND with the intention of speeding up the rate at which improvements are made. The impact of this appointment is not yet evident.

What progress have teachers made in providing a challenging curriculum in classroom-based activities?

Reasonable progress

Most tutors challenge learners to build on their existing knowledge and skills to improve what they know and can do. Tutors use the outcomes of assessments of learners' starting points to accurately identify the English and mathematical skills which learners need to improve. Learners work towards challenging targets in English and mathematics based on their prior learning. Tutors use a range of resources and activities to support learners to achieve their individual targets. For example, learners use money management and budgeting skills successfully when shopping. In vocational lessons, tutors do not plan sufficiently well to ensure that learners can improve the specific English skills they need to focus on. Most tutors make good use of education, health and care plans to plan activities that will enable learners to become more self-reliant. For example, as a key step to getting a job, where appropriate, learners' targets include the skills and knowledge to enable them to travel independently. Tutors review learners' targets frequently and set new goals so that learners build on the skills they have gained. For example, once learners know how to format a simple document electronically, they then learn how to format a range of documents such as posters and curriculum vitae. Learning support workers provide appropriate support to help learners work independently.

During the monitoring visit learners developed their understanding of British values. In most lessons visited, tutors used demanding activities and skilful questioning to help learners know more and remember more about this topic. For example, learners linked what they remembered about British values to a recent shopping trip. They knew that a cyclist had observed the law by riding on the road and not on the pavement. However, a few learners did not participate fully in lessons and tutors did not take the necessary steps to remedy this.

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