

Newfriars College

Monitoring visit report

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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 funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency 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.

Newfriars College was established as an independent specialist college in June 2018. It was formerly the sixth-form provision of Blackfriars Academy. It provides programmes for young people aged 16 to 25 from pre-entry level to level 2. Learners have moderate to complex/profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners can choose between a vocational (further education or employment) pathway, and pathways focusing on independence or supported living – depending on their needs and abilities. The college has a wide catchment area with learners attending from four local authorities in Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Shropshire. At the time of the monitoring visit, 166 learners attended the college.

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 recently redesigned the curriculum to ensure that it reflects the diverse needs and ambitions of their learners. The curriculum focuses on learners' education, health and care (EHC) plan targets and their preparation for adulthood. Each pathway has a clear intended outcome. For the vocational pathway, leaders take account of local and regional priorities, for example the visitor economy (hospitality and catering) and 'agri-aero' (horticulture and wildlife, and motor vehicle).

The majority of teaching staff have occupational competence at an appropriate level. Most teachers have a teaching qualification. However, while the staff development programme provides training in some aspects of special educational needs, such as in behaviour support and communication aids, very few teachers hold qualifications in special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, teachers do not personalise learning sufficiently to enable learners to follow challenging programmes adapted to their individual abilities and planned outcomes.

Leaders created a new middle-management structure recently to ensure that the new curriculum is implemented, supported and managed effectively. They introduced a mentoring programme for new teachers in September. They are piloting a recording and monitoring application, 'evidence for learning', to monitor learners' progress over time. However, these initiatives are very new, and their impact is not fully evident.

Leaders have established a range of external opportunities for learners to develop their employability and communication skills. For example, they introduced 'project search' which provides high-quality supported internships for learners that lead to permanent employment. Leaders and managers work with over 40 employers and community organisations to provide high-quality work experience placements and community activities for learners in subjects that are relevant to their career plans.

Leaders and managers use high-needs funding appropriately. However, a few resources such as communication aids, identified as necessary in learners' EHC plans, are not always provided.

Learners benefit from impartial careers information, advice and guidance that link to their EHC plan outcomes. The college's newly appointed specialist helps learners to make informed choices about their next steps.

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**

Learners improve their independence and communication skills. For example, they learn to speak confidently to people they do not know and to travel independently. In 2018/19, three quarters of the small number of learners who left the college went into employment, education or voluntary work. Learners make new friends. They demonstrate positive behaviour around the college and in activities.

Learners on supported internships benefit from well-structured and managed programmes. They can explain what new skills and knowledge they gain during their internship, including knowing about their rights and responsibilities as employees. They achieve industry-standard qualifications such as in weed control with a knapsack sprayer.

Learners benefit from a wide range of relevant internal and external enrichment activities that help them to apply the skills they learn. For example, they run events to raise money for charities and support disadvantaged people in the community. They recently performed the pantomime 'Beauty and the Beast' for an external

audience. Learners benefit from residential trips, including overseas, that develop their independence further.

In classroom-based activities, a few teachers plan learning in a logical order that builds on learners' previous knowledge. This helps learners to remember what they learn over time. For example, learners could explain clearly how the charity bag-packing activity in a local supermarket linked to what they had learned in their lessons. However, too often the purpose of learning activities and how effectively they develop learners' knowledge, skills and behaviours over time are unclear. Most are not sufficiently personalised to raise learners' ambitions of what they are each capable of achieving.

The majority of learners access additional support from nursing, physiotherapy, clinical psychology, and speech and language specialists. This support is woven effectively into their programmes of learning, for example learners in postural beds take part in physiotherapy activities in music lessons. However, teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively in lessons to help learners develop greater independence or make more progress over time.

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

Leaders and managers have implemented appropriate arrangements for safeguarding learners. Staff receive training regularly in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Members of the designated safeguarding team are well qualified. Leaders and managers carry out appropriate checks in staff recruitment.

Staff have good relationships with external agencies. They make referrals and seek advice quickly and effectively.

Learners develop a good understanding of safeguarding through their personal, social, health and economics lessons. Learners tell us that they feel safe at the college and know what to do if they have a concern about themselves or others. However, learners do not have a sufficient understanding of the risks relating to radicalisation and extremism.

Staff encourage learners who find it difficult to express their concerns to use a 'worry box' to help them overcome their anxieties about talking about their problems. A member of the safeguarding team will then discuss their concern sensitively with them.

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