

Fir Tree Fishery CIC

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 ESFA-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.

Fir Tree Fishery CIC was established as an independent specialist college in September 2018. It provides young people aged 16 to 25 who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities with a unique environment to learn. Fir Tree Fishery CIC has its own accessible angling lake, polytunnel and allotment area. Learners follow programmes that consist of English and mathematics, vocational studies and the development of personal and social skills, and skills for work. At the time of the monitoring visit, 27 learners attended the college. Around seven learners had moderate learning disabilities. The remainder required support for social, emotional and/or mental health needs.

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? Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have not developed a coherent, well-designed curriculum that meets the needs and interests of learners. The difference between the curriculum for each of the three learning pathways is not defined clearly enough. For example, curriculum plans show that all learners work towards the development of similar independence, personal and social skills. The curriculum is based on a 'framework' with no identified, relevant qualifications for those who can achieve them. Learning focuses too much on random activities rather than well-thought-out learning programmes that help learners to have high aspirations for what they can achieve.

Learning activities are not planned logically or coherently. Most learners only want to do practical activities. Managers and teachers fit learning around what learners want to do and not what will benefit them and help them to succeed. For example, for one pathway, the first week related to building a shed, the next was around radicalisation and the following week about food hygiene. As a result, tutors do not build on learners' previous knowledge, skills and behaviours to help them to learn relevant new skills over time that will help them to gain meaningful employment or independence.

Leaders, managers and governors do not have a sufficient overview of the effectiveness of the curriculum or of learners' progress. For example, managers do not know which learners have achieved their English and mathematics qualifications. Leaders and managers do not focus sufficiently on quality improvement. For example, they are overgenerous in their assessment of the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders do not target the funding that they receive for high-needs learners specifically enough to support the individual learners for whom it is intended. Most of the funding is for individual support. The structure of how leaders and managers implement this support is unclear.

Staff are suitably qualified in their subject areas. However, they do not have relevant specialist qualifications or engage in staff development activities to meet the needs of individual learners with special educational needs and/or disability.

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? Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers do not provide learning programmes that are sufficiently ambitious or individualised for learners. Learners do not make rapid enough progress in developing their knowledge and skills. Teachers do not embed English and mathematical skills sufficiently in learners' vocational activities. Staff at all levels do not use learners' starting points effectively to plan learning tailored to their individual needs. Staff do not break down longer-term goals into manageable steps so that learners make good progress towards their planned outcomes over time.

Tutors do not plan sessions around individual support needs, despite over half of learners receiving high-needs funding. Consequently, learners do not make the progress at the rate they are capable of.

Tutors do not record what learners do and achieve effectively. The work in learners' files is of a poor quality. There is no logical correlation between previous qualifications and the level of qualifications that the provider has recommended. For example, a few learners are placed on an entry level 3 English qualification and a level 1 mathematics qualification when they cannot read or write. Consequently, learners are given unachievable goals. This impacts negatively on their levels of confidence and low self-esteem. Tutors' feedback is overly positive. Tutors do not indicate to learners how they can improve their work. Much of the feedback is 'good' or 'excellent' or 'you took part in this well'.

Learners do not benefit routinely from high-quality work experience. Links with employers are very limited.

Most learners develop effective personal and social skills, for example getting up on time, socialisation and talking to customers on gardening jobs or in the provider's shop.

The relationship between staff and learners is effective and supportive. Learners are respectful and communicative. Tutors are instrumental in reminding and coaching learners to engage in acceptable language and behaviour.

Learners do not have a clear understanding of what they want to do when they finish their courses. Most learners told us that they do not receive careers information, advice and guidance appropriate for their needs.

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

Risk assessments are not sufficiently rigorous to demonstrate that learners are always safe around hazards on and off the site. During the visit, leaders could not locate relevant risk assessments for specific learning activities quickly or easily. Leaders reviewed their approach to assessing risk during the visit. However, inspectors were unable to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements.

All staff receive disclosure and barring service checks. However, these were not always in place prior to staff starting their employment at the centre. Leaders could not demonstrate what arrangements they had put in place to safeguard learners while they waited for these checks to be completed. A few checks had not been received for several months following staff's appointment.

Staff, including the safeguarding team, receive appropriate safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training. However, leaders rely too much on trust that teaching staff deliver and reinforce safeguarding training regularly with learners. Consequently, learners do not gain a sufficient understanding of British values and the risks associated with radical and extremist views. They do not know how or why these are relevant to them in their learning or personal lives or, for example, under 'the rule of law', what is right and wrong and why.

Learners feel safe and know what to do if they have any concerns. Records show that the designated safeguarding team takes immediate and appropriate actions following a disclosure or referral.

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