

Fir Tree Fishery CIC

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	146039
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	The Nook Appley Bridge Shevington Wigan WN6 9JB

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 provider received a monitoring visit under these arrangements and was found to be making insufficient progress against one or more themes.

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out additional monitoring visits to new providers that were judged to be making insufficient progress against one or more themes at their previous monitoring visit and would have been due their full inspection up to or during the interim phase but have not received it because of the suspension of routine inspections. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements as outlined in the [interim phase operational note for further education and skills](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook and is focused 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, the development of personal and social skills, and skills for work. At the time of the monitoring visit, 24 learners attended the college. Around nine learners had moderate learning disabilities or autism spectrum condition. 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? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and staff are passionate about their learners. They know them individually and engage with them fully from transition into the centre and throughout their time there. Leaders want to provide opportunities that show learners that they can achieve. They use high-needs funding effectively.

Following the previous monitoring visit, leaders analysed the quality of the provision thoroughly. They took appropriate actions to rectify the majority of the weaknesses identified. While the enthusiasm to improve is clear, the impact of these actions is not yet fully evident due to the pandemic. For example, quality assurance and improvement processes are still new.

Leaders and managers reviewed the curriculum in consultation with tutors. They introduced a simplified curriculum based on two learning pathways: a route to independence and preparation for adulthood, and a route towards employment, further education or apprenticeships. Leaders offer learners additional courses to help them progress into positive destinations. However, the suitability of some of these is unclear, for example French and German.

Leaders work with external organisations and agencies to gain a clear understanding of the local labour market needs and opportunities for their learners. They intend to develop their curriculum further to include supported internships.

Leaders have recruited new staff and invested in developing both the management and teaching teams to support their new curriculum. Leaders hold tutors to account if learners do not make the progress expected of them. However, this is usually through informal discussions, with no clear actions recorded for future reference. They have redeployed tutors so that they teach to their strengths. While the aim is to maximise staff's skills and learners' experiences, the changes are still new.

Leaders tailor work experience placements to learners' needs and abilities. A few learners work independently in their placements, while others receive support from their tutors. Those who are not yet confident enough to go on a placement attend a work preparation programme to build their self-assurance.

Governors can identify the improvements that leaders have made since the previous visit. However, discussions around the quality of education at governors' meetings are limited.

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**

Staff know their learners' personal and social starting points thoroughly. They use this information to develop a meaningful range of practical activities to develop learners' positive behaviours and to prepare them for an independent adult life. However, tutors do not establish learners' academic or vocational starting points fully. All learners complete the same classroom-based work regardless of their abilities, including in English and mathematics. Questionnaires aimed at helping learners to identify their own abilities in healthy living and work-related subjects are poorly designed. They do not provide the right information to help tutors plan appropriately sequenced and tailored learning activities in these areas.

Tutors routinely embed English into practical learning activities. They expect learners to extend their vocabulary and improve their spelling and punctuation to enhance the quality of their work. On work placements, learners discuss how successfully they

apply and develop their English and mathematical skills. However, tutors do not always reinforce these skills sufficiently in classroom-based activities.

Tutors routinely break down learners' long-term goals into short-term targets. However, recording systems do not allow them to monitor the progress that learners make against those targets easily. Targets on independent work placements are more specific. Tutors review them individually with learners each week and record the progress that they make accurately.

Tutors expect higher standards in learners' written work. Their feedback on learners' work is more detailed and helpful. It provides learners with guidance on what they need to improve on as well as praise.

Most learners benefit from suitable community work placements. Learners enjoy their placements and the tasks they complete. They have a clear understanding of the expectations of behaviours and adhere to health and safety practices. Through these activities, learners develop confidence, inter-personal skills, teamwork and practical skills, for example in horticulture. However, the link between work experience, careers guidance and intended destinations is not always clear. Consequently, learners are unsure of their next steps.

Relationships between staff, learners and volunteers are positive. Staff have communicated with learners and their parents and carers effectively during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions when learners were not attending on-site sessions.

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

Leaders prioritise safeguarding and the safety of all learners and staff. They have taken significant steps to rectify the concerns raised at the previous visit. Leaders engage regularly with support agencies to ensure that they have up-to-date knowledge and relevant support for their learners. They understand fully the local threats relating to radicalisation and extremism. Leaders produce a safeguarding newsletter for parents to ensure that they understand how the centre keeps learners safe.

Risk assessments are comprehensive and thorough. They cover each individual learner and each activity that they undertake. Leaders complete risk assessments with parents and carers prior to learners starting at the centre.

Leaders have developed a comprehensive programme to support learners' and staff's mental health. They engage externally with a professional counselling service that is available to learners, staff and parents.

Learners feel safe both on and off site. Due to COVID-19, leaders have increased their emphasis on ensuring that learners understand how to keep themselves safe online.

Governors, staff and learners receive appropriate safeguarding training. Leaders monitor the quality of safeguarding training that learners receive to ensure that it is appropriate for their needs.

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