

Lifeworks College

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	142065
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Lescaze Shinners Bridge Dartington Devon TQ9 6JD

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Lifeworks College (Dartington) is an independent specialist college offering study programmes over 36 weeks for learners who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). At the time of the visit, 13 students aged between 16 and 25 years attended the college. The majority of learners have moderate or specific learning difficulties such as autism or behavioural and emotional difficulties. All students attend at least one work placement in an employer's setting, including participating in supported internships, accompanied by a college learning support assistant.

Lifeworks College was previously inspected by Ofsted in February 2016 and its overall effectiveness was judged to be good. The inspection report was not published, as although the college was approved by the Department for Education to educate and train students with education, health and care plans, it was funded by Devon County Council. In August 2018, the Education and Skills Funding Agency became the funding body for the college's high needs provision. Under this funding arrangement, the college was due for a new provider monitoring visit during summer 2020, but this did not happen due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

This was an announced safeguarding monitoring visit, following concerns that had been reported to Ofsted and which remain under investigation by another agency. The purpose of the visit was to assess whether the safeguarding arrangements at the college are effective. Inspectors' judgements were informed by actions taken by the provider's leaders and managers in response to the concerns that had been reported to Ofsted, alongside other evidence available at the time of the visit.

Ofsted is aware of the challenges that COVID-19 is currently posing to those we inspect. During this visit, inspectors considered the impact of any measures being taken by the college to slow the spread of coronavirus. This included the effect such measures might have had or be having on students' attendance, and on staffing arrangements.

Themes

How do leaders and managers ensure that they comply with the relevant safeguarding requirements, and how effectively do they apply safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that all students are kept safe?

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders comply with relevant safeguarding requirements and understand clearly potential risks for individual students. In collaboration with students, their families and local authority agencies, they identify students' existing understanding of safeguarding and their additional support needs. Leaders and staff use this information to produce highly individualised risk assessments.

Senior leaders recognised clearly the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on students and their families. They took appropriate remedial actions, such as ensuring that the most vulnerable students were able to continue attending college on a part-time basis. As a result, students felt well-prepared for their return to full-time study and were less anxious about the virus.

Human resources managers have developed a rigorous staff recruitment process. They ensure that all checks and references have been received and checked before confirming new employees in post. All staff and trustees have had a recent disclosure and barring service (DBS) check, and are signed up to the annual DBS renewal service.

All staff undertake appropriate online safeguarding training annually. Managers check staff's knowledge of safeguarding during weekly meetings. For example, they discuss theoretical and relevant student-related scenarios and the possible actions they could take. Consequently, staff feel more confident about how to deal with a situation if and when it occurs. Designated safeguarding officers understand the local risks which vulnerable students face in their communities. They use this information to inform the curriculum.

Trustees have a secure overview of safeguarding at the college. They receive sufficiently frequent reports from managers about incidents, actions and referrals. Around half of the trustees have relevant specialist knowledge and experience, which they use to review and challenge senior leaders' strategies and decision-making.

Senior leaders have updated almost all policies to reflect current safeguarding practice. However, the complaints policy has not yet been written using language that students can understand. Therefore, they do not know when and/or how to make a complaint.

How effectively do staff respond to safeguarding concerns? Reasonable progress

Staff understand when and how to refer students if they have concerns about their well-being or welfare. The designated safeguarding lead responds promptly to any concerns raised, and where necessary works with external agencies to put actions in place to keep students safe.

Students and their parents have good professional relationships with staff. Staff work closely with parents to maintain students' safety outside college.

Managers ensure that students behave well at college and on work placements. They encourage students to reflect on their behaviour and help them learn to improve it. Staff deal with incidents sensitively and without the need for physical intervention. They reflect on and learn how incidents might have been handled better.

Managers have good arrangements in place to check and monitor work placements. These include detailed risk assessments, unannounced visits to staff and students and providing employers with relevant safeguarding information. However, leaders do not provide all employers with safeguarding training.

Staff plan training that helps students understand how to stay safe. For example, how to use the internet safely and how to travel independently. Students feel safe at college. They speak confidently about knowing how to stay safe in relation to the current pandemic. However, students do not always have access to an independent advocate to talk to about their own health and well-being concerns.

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