

WESC Foundation College

Progress monitoring report

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Name of lead inspector:	Tracey Zimmerman, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Topsham Road Countess Wear Exeter Devon EX2 6HA

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

WESC Foundation College (WESC) was last inspected in November 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. It was undertaken as outlined in the [operational note on visits carried out from January 2021](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook.

These visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, inspectors carried out this monitoring activity remotely. As a result, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would be the case during an on-site inspection. Therefore, this report provides a more limited level of assurance.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgement below. Inspectors did not evaluate leaders' response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020, when the provider was not open to all learners and there were no national expectations regarding remote education.

Theme

What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have dealt with many of the weaknesses identified during the previous inspection and have secure plans in place to improve the others.

Leaders quickly introduced a new curriculum after the previous inspection, with the help of an external consultant. After discussion with their students, leaders realised they needed to make additional changes, which were implemented in September 2020.

This new curriculum is broad, well structured and aspirational. It exposes students to interesting subject areas, such as family history and space. There is a clear focus on developing independence, communication skills and making personal choices. Staff consider the sequence of content and activities carefully so that students continue to develop skills and behaviours which help them in later life.

Since the previous inspection, managers' focus has been entirely on the development and implementation of the curriculum. They have chosen to focus on this over improving teaching. While teachers report good peer and management support, the development of their pedagogical skills and English and mathematical knowledge still requires improvement.

Since the start of the pandemic, staff teams have worked closely together in 'bubbles' to protect the students. Leaders and staff recognise this has helped improve learning experiences for students. For example, therapy staff suggested room layout changes to ease student anxiety. Some therapy sessions are now happening as an integral part of teaching sessions, so students are not missing out on classroom activities. Trustees and leaders recognise that they need to develop staff team working further and are reviewing the structure of the multi-disciplinary team.

Staff support around a quarter of the student population who are shielding at home. Staff provide them, and their parents and carers, with well-considered online resources. Teachers have regular contact with families to ensure that they understand how to support students. Teachers also provide handy tips which help students continue to feel part of the college. For example, they suggest which scents to use on specific days, so students have a similar experience to those in college. Staff also check on the well-being of students and their families. Parents and students feel part of the 'WESC family'.

Staff ensure they tailor their support to meet students' individual needs. Staff know their students well and support them effectively to reach their potential. Care and education staff have robust, comprehensive 'handover' meetings in the morning and after college to ensure that students are supported consistently throughout their time at WESC.

Teachers monitor the progress of students effectively through observations of any behavioural changes, their positive responses to specific learning activities and the work they produce. These are mapped effectively against termly and curriculum targets, which are linked to the student's goals and education, health and care plan. Students understand their targets for the term and staff support them to become skilled in these new concepts. Leaders regularly review the progress of students and know who has reached the expected level.

Staff were trained on behaviour management soon after the last inspection. Staff are now clear about their responsibilities and are quick to identify triggers that indicate a student may be in distress and needs additional support. Staff and students discuss

any incidents, explore what happened and put strategies in place. Leaders are rightly reviewing how data is produced about such incidents so they can identify trends in the future.

Students receive ongoing support to make decisions about their futures. They have opportunities to experience work placements, volunteering and supported internships, although much of this has paused due to the pandemic. Leaders are keen to restart this when possible.

Leaders appointed an external agency to provide careers information, advice and guidance to all of their students soon after the previous inspection. However, since the pandemic started, students have not received individual appointments.

Trustees are knowledgeable and ensure that leaders are challenged and scrutinised at each step of their improvement journey. Trustees have a clear understanding of where the college is currently, and they are supporting leaders to make swift progress on outstanding actions.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- provide teachers and support staff with ongoing training and development to improve their pedagogical knowledge and skills
- accelerate their plans to improve the teaching of English and mathematics, and evaluate the impact of new initiatives, including staff training, on learners' progress
- support staff to develop the curriculum by ensuring that all staff understand their roles in helping students to take their next steps into further education, training, employment or independent or supported living.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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