

Victoria College

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector:	Sharon Dowling, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Bell Hill Northfield Birmingham West Midlands B31 1LD

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From autumn 2019, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to independent specialist colleges newly Education and Skills Funding Agency (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.

Victoria College is an independent specialist college based in Birmingham and has been directly funded by the ESFA since 2018. The college currently has 28 learners aged 19 to 25 with profound and complex learning difficulties. The curriculum is based on preparation for adulthood and includes employment, independent living, community inclusion and health. Learners have access to hydrotherapy, rebound therapy, speech and language therapy, dance and sports. The college has nursing provision on site to meet the medical needs of learners.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

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 are currently in a transition period from formal qualifications to a fully personalised curriculum linked to independent living, enterprise and well-being. In planning the new curriculum, they have not ensured that the revised provision is designed to fully prepare learners for adulthood, and content is often not age-appropriate.

Leaders and staff are caring and invested in the well-being of their learners, but leaders have not yet found the appropriate balance between care and education. They do not link learners' baseline assessment clearly enough to their educational development needs to allow them to reach their full potential.

Leaders have been slow to invest in the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment practice. They have recently appointed a lead teacher to support the development of teaching and learning, including classroom observations and quality

assurance, to ensure consistency in monitoring learners' progress. However, it is not always evident how leaders use this to inform improvements.

Leaders have a process for transition and career guidance to support learners when they leave the college, but this takes place too late in the programme, and largely focuses on supporting families to access funding to allow learners to move on into social care. Transition discussions and career guidance do not inform early action plans for learners; as a result, teachers do not plan to develop specific skills to help learners to achieve their progression goals.

The board of trustees consists of appropriately experienced members. Members use their professional networks to support leadership in issues regarding care and finance. The board has recently appointed a member experienced in post-16 education and skills; however, the new member only attends the annual general meeting and, as such, is not able to have regular oversight of the provision.

Trustees do not receive sufficiently detailed information on learners' progress to enable them to challenge leaders effectively on the educational development of learners and to influence improvements.

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**

Teachers and teaching assistants manage the behaviour of learners well in classroom settings, enabling them to remain in lessons and participate in a meaningful way. However, programmes are not sufficiently personalised and aspirational for each learner to enable them to make progress to the best of their ability.

Learners' starting points are assessed using previous achievement and a baseline assessment. Teachers do not routinely use these to develop long-term goals. Too few teachers include learners' medium- and long-term goals in the planning and teaching of sessions, or regularly record learners' progress against them. Where the more effective learning sessions take place, they have purposeful activity, during which learners also develop a range of transferable skills such as language development in music therapy. However, in other sessions, this is too often not the case.

Teachers do not always set sufficiently challenging targets for learners to achieve in classes and these are not reviewed frequently enough. They are often not written in easily accessible language and are not shared with parents. Learners are with the same teacher throughout their time at the college to provide them with a consistent

experience. Because the quality of teaching varies for different groups, some learners are making better progress than others irrespective of their potential.

Information showing any progress for the current year and showing how teachers are preparing learners for their next steps is not easily accessible. This would allow staff to share progress and change goals. While moderation identifies some useful actions to try with learners, this is not implemented in the learners' plans.

Resources are often not age-appropriate, for example Roald Dahl books and children's songs such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star', and do not prepare learners for adulthood. The community enrichment programme is not sufficiently ambitious, consisting mainly of trips to the park or visitor talks which do not link clearly to learners' objectives.

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

Leaders have had difficulty in navigating the legislation and guidance for safeguarding young people at college. Although they have ensured that staff understand their responsibilities to keep learners safe and well, this is not consistently reflected in their policies and procedures. At the time of the new provider monitoring visit, leaders had not yet implemented a 'Prevent' duty policy, risk assessment or action plan.

Teaching assistants, medical staff and support staff support learners well. Staff who provide support – including personal care – are well trained to ensure that they can support learners with their personal care needs in a safe way. Staff can identify changes to learners' well-being and safety, and they report these quickly to managers and nursing teams. Managers record and monitor concerns and refer to external agencies when required.

Leaders bring in health experts to ensure that learners' medical and well-being needs are identified and planned for. Nursing and physiotherapy staff develop a comprehensive understanding of learners' health needs. They work closely and effectively with families to provide the support young people and families need to access external medical services to support their healthcare needs.

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