

My Life Learning

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.

My Life Learning is part of the wider My Life charity. It provides education and support for learners aged 16 to 25 with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include moderate to severe learning difficulties, autism spectrum condition, speech, language and communication needs, and emotional difficulties. Learners attend lessons in a variety of subjects, such as English, mathematics, animal care, life skills, art, catering, information and communication technology and horticulture. Learners have access to an extensive, 10-acre site and farm that supports their learning. At the time of the visit, 20 learners were enrolled at the college.

Due to the COVID-19 national restrictions, leaders organised learners into three tutor groups according to their needs, abilities and interests. Learners remain in these 'bubble' groups throughout the day for all of their lessons and social activities. Until very recently, learners have been unable to attend any work experience placements. This has hindered learners' development of work-related skills.

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 have yet to define the curriculum rationale for each group of learners. The curriculum focuses on different subjects containing isolated activities that do not link together to help learners develop and build on their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. Leaders use qualifications as a focus for the curriculum. They do not link qualifications to learners' future ambitions. For example, not all learners want to work in animal care. Consequently, leaders have not developed an ambitious, well-structured and coherent curriculum.

Leaders do not evaluate the quality of the curriculum effectively enough to accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. However, through work scrutiny and lesson observations, leaders identified recently that the standard of teaching does not match the high expectations that they have for their learners. Poorly performing tutors have now left the organisation. Leaders have implemented quality improvement actions, for example raising the standard of tutors' feedback to learners. They have recently employed specialist staff to support learners' speech, language and communication needs. However, initiatives are too new to have had the intended impact.

Leaders identify staff development needs as they arise. Tutors attend appropriate training and development activities to support learners' diagnoses, such as Down's Syndrome and epilepsy. However, tutors do not apply the training in their teaching to better support individual learners and their specific needs. Tutors apply the training they receive in behaviour management to skilfully de-escalate situations arising with learners. Learners are unable to attend lessons in a few subject areas due to staff sickness. This is disadvantaging learners who hope to gain employment in that industry sector.

Governors do not have enough relevant experience of post-16 education. Consequently, they do not challenge leaders about important aspects of an adult-focused curriculum. Governors too readily accept what leaders and managers say in their reports and discussions. They do not focus sufficiently on whether the curriculum provides learners with the knowledge and skills that they need for further learning, independence and employment.

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**

Tutors do not use the personalised targets developed from learners' education, health and care plans to tailor learning to individual learners' needs. They do not plan the curriculum in a logical way to enable learners to build on prior learning. Most activities do not link from one lesson to the next. For example, in mathematics, learners learn about budgeting one week and move on to time and distance the next. Tutors do not link what learners study across different lessons to reinforce learning, such as money management skills that they cover in mathematics and in life skills lessons.

Tutors and learning support assistants do not provide helpful feedback to learners on how to improve their knowledge and skills. Most feedback is overly positive. It praises learners for taking part in activities even when learners' participation and skills development are limited. In a few lessons, learning support assistants intervene too quickly when learners struggle to complete tasks, for example when sweeping out animal pens.

Work experience placements remain limited. A few learners volunteer in a local community garden. However, activities are not purposeful enough to develop learners' horticultural knowledge and skills. Tutors do not plan activities for learners prior to arriving at the site or link them to learners' future plans. Staff instruct learners to use the incorrect tools for the work they are doing, such as using a hoe to remove clods of earth from a path. The very few learners who have meaningful work experience develop new skills and assume high levels of responsibility, for example saddling up and harnessing horses ready for riders.

My Life Learning's careers guidance strategy does not include specific actions for post-16 learners. Leaders acknowledge that they have significant work to do to ensure that the curriculum meets learners' future work interests and independence needs.

In a few lessons, learners develop effective communication and language skills, for example in English. They discuss confidently the fun fair ride they have designed. They write down a range of words to describe their ride, such as mysterious.

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

Inspectors identified a number of safeguarding concerns during the visit. Public footpaths run adjacent to the site. Current fences would not prevent a learner from leaving the site or unauthorised visitors gaining access. Chalets that are sometimes used for crisis accommodation for external service users are on the same site, as is an equestrian centre, veterinary practice and café. These facilities are open to the general public with no secure demarcation between them and the provider.

Leaders and governors have introduced some measures to protect learners, such as security gates at the front entrance and closed-circuit television cameras across the site. Leaders showed inspectors their plans to further improve site security. However, they have not yet started to implement them.

Learners say that they feel safe. They feel comfortable about sharing their concerns with staff. Records of disclosures and concerns about learners' safety are comprehensive and include follow-up actions.

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