

Green Labyrinth

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Name of lead inspector: Helen Flint, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Green Labyrinth was inspected in November 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Green Labyrinth is a training provider based in Swindon. It is owned by the NPTC Group of Colleges (NPTC). Forty-three young learners aged between 16 and 18, of whom 26 have high needs, are studying at entry level 3, level 1 or level 2. Green Labyrinth provides study programmes, traineeships and supported internships to prepare young learners for employment or further study.

In addition, 36 apprentices follow apprenticeships from level 2 to 5. These apprenticeships are mostly in digital marketing and information and communication technology, or are business-related.

There are also around 130 adults with learner loans studying a range of level 3 courses.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in reviewing the curriculum to prepare learners well to progress into employment, including greater experience of the workplace? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have provided more courses which better meet the differing needs of young learners in Swindon. As many of these learners find it difficult to take part in learning in larger organisations, or in large groups, managers keep group sizes small. This means learners feel at ease and safe to participate.

Senior leaders work closely with schools, charities and the local authority. Leaders use their local knowledge well to identify and provide alternative courses and apprenticeships that help prepare learners for employment, or further education and training. Since the previous inspection, leaders have usefully introduced traineeships as a route for learners to progress into apprenticeships. They have also introduced an entry-level course for learners not yet ready to study at level 1. Managers are developing suitable additional courses, for example in health and social care, to train learners for sectors where there are local skills shortages.

Leaders and managers have provided additional apprenticeship courses to give apprentices skills that lead to sustainable employment in the local area, or opportunities for further study. For example, apprentices studying level 3 information and communication technology can move on to a related level 4 apprenticeship.

Leaders have invested in the recruitment of extra staff to develop additional work placements and work experience for learners. This is at an early stage of implementation and to date few learners have placements arranged. Leaders have also recruited more teachers to increase the amount of English and mathematics teaching. Learners enjoy these subjects and are very motivated to do well in them.

Staff provide interesting additional enrichment activities that learners value highly. For example, learners participate enthusiastically in fitness sessions such as boxing. Discussions between learners and staff enable learners to speak with greater confidence about topics such as stereotyping.

What progress have leaders and managers made in assessing how well learners and apprentices gain skills, knowledge and behaviours, and providing feedback that helps them to improve? Reasonable progress

Apprenticeship staff check the progress apprentices make at regular one-to-one sessions, usually online. As a result, they have a good understanding of how apprentices' skills and knowledge are developing. Apprentices use workbooks and online resources to enhance learning effectively, and some share their knowledge and experience well with others in workshops.

Apprenticeship staff provide very useful information to employers and apprentices on the skills and knowledge that apprentices have gained. Employers use this information effectively to develop on-the-job training in the workplace for their apprentices to practise what they have learned, or to fill gaps in apprentices' knowledge.

Apprentices are using the new knowledge and skills they gain well in the workplace. For example, level 3 digital marketing apprentices design websites and manage email marketing campaigns. Employers say this has helped them to increase their business. Apprenticeship staff provide very helpful feedback to apprentices on their work and how to improve it to achieve higher grades. However, apprenticeship staff do not develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills well enough beyond the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship.

Staff providing educational programmes for young people know their learners well. They provide a useful induction which helps learners make the transition from school to their course. Newly appointed learning mentors have helped to lower learners' anxieties and improve their behaviours. Learners value the support they receive from staff and the calm environment at the learning centre which helps them feel safe.

At the start of their programmes, staff assess learners' English and mathematics skills, and their readiness for work. However, not enough staff use information from these assessments well to plan learning. Staff do not always use available

information consistently to determine the best way to teach learners with high needs, or ensure learners are on courses that challenge them enough.

Staff give learners praise and encouragement, although there is little feedback so far this term to help learners improve their written work. Teachers use a reward system to encourage positive behaviour and attitudes, which some learners value.

What progress have leaders and managers made in developing effective strategies to improve the attendance of young learners? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection leaders and managers have developed their strategies to help learners with anxieties, or social or personal barriers to learning, to attend their courses. These have met with varying degrees of success. While many learners attend regularly and often, a small proportion of learners have rarely or never attended classes.

Managers work diligently to help learners who are struggling to attend. Staff speak with learners and parents to ascertain the reasons why learners fail to attend classes and then put in place remedies. Staff meet regularly with these learners to help them develop the skills they need to attend. Those learners who cannot attend for the full timetable, for example carers or those with high levels of anxiety, have a reduced timetable or attend lessons online. Managers only apply sanctions as a last resort for learners who do not respond to other interventions. This resulted in a small number of learners having to leave last year.

Leaders have recently invested in a new system that allows managers to monitor and analyse learners' attendance, but it is too early to determine the impact of this analysis.

What progress have leaders and managers made in understanding weaknesses in their provision and taking relevant actions for improvement? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have an ambitious vision and are committed to making improvements. They have identified areas for improvement effectively, although have not addressed as many of these as they had planned due to the impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Managers have developed appropriate plans to tackle the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Senior leaders and managers scrutinise and update these plans regularly, but do not sufficiently analyse the impact of the actions they have taken.

Leaders have recognised that they need additional managers, teachers and support staff to make improvements they have planned. They restructured the organisation over the summer to enhance their education programmes for young people. This

resulted in new teams of staff for quality and careers at the beginning of the academic year.

Leaders have found it challenging to manage so much change and the introduction of many new initiatives over a relatively recent and short time span. They have identified that they need to help new staff understand their roles fully, fully establish newly introduced initiatives and ensure the correct use of processes and systems.

Managers have provided some initial training for new teachers, but this has not yet had an impact on their teaching. Managers are currently developing a training programme for these new teachers, and for teachers and assessors of adults and apprentices, to start imminently.

NPTC senior leaders sit on the Green Labyrinth board of directors and participate productively in discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Consequently, they have a sound knowledge of what needs to improve. They support and challenge Green Labyrinth senior leaders effectively. NPTC leaders provide valuable expertise and advice in areas such as human resources and recruiting, and supported Green Labyrinth leaders well during recent restructuring.

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