

InFocus College

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

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Name of lead inspector:	Joanna Walters, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Address:	Topsham Road Countess Wear Exeter Devon EX2 6HA

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

InFocus College (InFocus) was previously inspected in November 2018 when it was then called WESC foundation. 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.

InFocus is a specialist college located in Exeter. It provides education and training to young people aged 16 to 25 years who have visual impairments and other special educational needs and/or disabilities, including complex medical, physical and health conditions.

The college is part of the InFocus Charity that provides services, including a school, a day centre and accommodation services. InFocus hires out a variety of rooms on its college campus to external businesses.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 36 learners, each with an education and health care (EHC) plan and high needs. Learners study a curriculum that aims to build their skills and knowledge so they can lead more independent lives.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made to provide teachers and support staff with ongoing training and development to improve their teaching knowledge and skills?

Reasonable progress

At the beginning of September 2020, leaders and managers introduced a well-considered curriculum for learners. This curriculum aims to equip learners with the skills and knowledge to gain independence and build friendships and relationships. It encourages learners to be healthy and learn how to become employed. It teaches them about community inclusion. Most teachers implement the curriculum consistently and maintain a high-quality education for learners.

Leaders and managers have put in place a range of useful staff training opportunities since September 2020. For example, leaders have provided detailed training for new staff in relation to the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding and manual handling. Therapists provide effective training sessions during new staff induction. Much of the training is rightly on relevant topics, such as English, autism awareness and behaviour management. However, there is limited wider training on how teachers can incorporate therapeutic strategies into lessons. As a result, teachers do not always incorporate what they have learned into their teaching. For example, they lack the skills needed to teach learners who have a visual impairment. Consequently, the quality of teaching learners receive varies too much across the college.

Leaders have implemented a planned cycle of lesson observations, which they use well to assess the skills of teachers and support staff. Following observations, leaders give staff detailed feedback on aspects of teaching they need to improve and are identifying broader themes for improvement.

How much progress have leaders made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality learning programmes that support them on their journey to independence, employment, or further education?

Reasonable progress

Although the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has had a significant impact on staff, curriculum delivery and learners, governors and leaders have taken positive actions since the previous inspection to improve the quality of education at the college. This work is still in progress. Governors bring a wide range of appropriate skills and expertise to the board. They use their expertise effectively to challenge college leaders and hold them to account.

Leaders incorporate exciting learning opportunities as part of the curriculum, so that learners can explore and develop their independence, talents, and interests. These include activities such as swimming, choir groups, cooking, and radio presenting. Learners enjoy these programmes and through them develop skills that help them live more independent lives. For example, they learn how to prepare meals using a microwave. However, COVID-19 and management time taken to recruit new staff has slowed the impact of the new curriculum on learners' knowledge and skills.

Teachers are not yet implementing a high-quality, individualised curriculum for each learner. At the start of their learning programme, teachers and therapists effectively identify what learners already know and can do in terms of English, mathematics, personal health, and the skills needed for work. They use this information, with learners' EHC Plans, to decide appropriate year end targets. These build towards learners achieving their EHCP outcomes. The curriculum is not yet fully embedded and, as a result, these outcomes are not yet being achieved.

Leaders have recently put in place an effective system which will allow teachers and support staff to track learners' progress against their EHC plan outcomes compared to their starting points. However, the system is not used fully by all staff and it is too early to identify its impact on what learners know and can do.

How much progress have leaders made to ensure learners are informed about their next steps into further education, training, employment or independent or supported living?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have made reasonable progress in ensuring learners are informed about their next steps, once they complete their course. Planning for learners' transition begins at their annual review meetings and is linked clearly to

learners' and their parents' aspirations. Leaders and managers maintain a close oversight of the plans for learners who are leaving the college at the end of the academic year.

Nonetheless, leaders recognise that the arrangements for all learners to receive unbiased careers advice and guidance require improvement. Leaders have recently appointed an external careers service, which has so far provided advice and guidance to just under half of learners. As a result, these learners have a better awareness of the opportunities available to them.

Teachers and support staff prepare learners well for their next steps. Teachers and support staff teach a curriculum that has a good emphasis on the skills and knowledge learners need to be active in their local community, live more independently and gain employment. Learners have been prepared well for independent living by doing residential placements at the college.

Leaders and managers ensure that annual review meetings prepare learners well for their next steps. Reviews are well attended by learners, parents, local authority and support staff, therapists, and independent advocates. During the COVID-19 pandemic, reviews were held remotely.

How much progress have leaders made to ensure safeguarding is still effective?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have maintained a positive culture of safeguarding at the college. Leaders have produced useful guidance on learners' care and well-being, safeguarding, intimate care and manual handling. Staff follow this guidance and provide high-quality care and support. Learners are safeguarded and supported well during their learning.

Staff treat learners with high levels of respect and dignity. Staff have a supportive attitude towards learners, and their safety and well-being are a priority. Staff create a calm environment, and learners' behaviour is good. Learners feel safe and they know which staff to speak to if they need help and support. As part of their curriculum, learners develop essential knowledge and skills on how to keep safe, including road and internet safety.

Leaders and managers have clear processes and procedures to manage safeguarding concerns. Staff have received effective training, which has equipped them with the skills and knowledge to manage learners' safeguarding concerns confidently and effectively.

Leaders have basic safeguarding control measures in place for when external businesses hire and use facilities that are part of the college campus, such as classrooms and the swimming pool. However, leaders have not sufficiently considered all the potential risks to learners arising from external visitors when they are on site. Leaders must implement additional control measures swiftly to further safeguard learners at all times.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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