

LINK19 College

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 Education and Skills Funding Agency-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.

LINK19 College is a small specialist post-16 institution which opened in 2018 with 22 learners. The college is based on the Gravesend campus of North Kent College. All learners are aged 19 to 25 and are in receipt of an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Learners follow a programme of extended work experience placements, vocational training and learning support programmes. At this visit there were 26 learners on pathways in construction and grounds maintenance, horticulture and animal care, hospitality, retail and catering. They were studying at entry level 1 to entry level 3. All learners study English and mathematics, some up to level 2.

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? Significant progress

Leaders have designed the curriculum thoughtfully, considering the needs of the learners, local employers and the local community. Leaders use their knowledge of local employment opportunities and the job skills needed to define the pathways that learners follow. Through consultation with employers, they have ensured that learners develop the skills and attributes employers need and want in each particular sector. The classroom-based learning complements the work placement learning and underpins or reinforces the specific skills required in the real work environment.

Leaders are ambitious for their learners and ensure that all staff focus on developing learners' potential for independent employment and living. As a result, staff gradually reduce the level of support learners receive in the classroom to encourage learners to develop their skills for independence and lessen learners' need to wait for a teacher to show them. In addition, the ratio of staff to learners, when on work placements, is gradually decreased over time so learners become less dependent on their mentors.

Leaders provide comprehensive careers information, advice and guidance which support learners to make informed decisions about their career aspirations. Learners receive effective internal support from teachers and mentors, and useful external support from impartial careers specialists, employers and workplace supervisors.

Leaders use effective methods to assure themselves of the quality of the provision, both at college and in the workplace. As a result, they have a good understanding of the strengths of the provision and the areas for development. They prioritise their efforts appropriately.

A small board of directors supports and challenges senior leaders to make effective decisions to maintain the high quality of education. Leaders have rightly identified that it would be beneficial to increase the number of board members to broaden the skills and expertise they bring to the college. For example, they are identifying and recruiting suitable local community or business leaders to enhance the impact that the board can have.

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? Significant progress

Learners swiftly gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours which they are able to use in college and in their workplace. For example, they gain skills in money management and learn how to speak to people appropriately in a work environment. They also learn new practical skills, such as baking so they can make a healthy lunch.

Learners benefit from highly appropriate work placements for their career aspirations. They are supported to work in local businesses, for example in supermarkets, retail shops, a car mechanics garage, and for local charities that work outdoors. Learners develop extremely useful skills by working on simple tasks to begin with, supported by their workplace supervisor, then progressing to more complex tasks with less supervision, growing in independence.

Learners improve their confidence through their time in college and in work placements. They enjoy their learning. Learners develop their use of language and social skills and appreciate the friends that they make at work and at college.

Staff review the expected outcomes on each learner's EHCP at the start of the year and adjust them to ensure they provide sufficient challenge for the learner and support what they are trying to achieve. Teachers plan highly individualised learning for all learners and regularly review the progress learners are making. They identify where there are gaps in learning or where a learner is not making the expected progress. Each learner has a mentor with whom they discuss their progress and

agree interventions to improve their progress and achievement. Learners and staff fill in a daily logbook which helps learners to reflect on their progress and set targets to improve their work in college and on work placements.

Employers value the progress that learners make at work and in some cases are able to offer learners paid work as a result of this progress.

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

Leaders, managers and staff promote safeguarding effectively across the organisation and ensure that learners are safe both at college and in the workplace. Safeguarding and learner well-being is a high priority for all staff.

Staff are trained to an appropriate level and are aware of the procedures to follow if they have concerns about the welfare or well-being of a learner. The designated safeguarding leads address all concerns raised swiftly and refer to external agencies as appropriate.

Learners feel safe and know who to speak to if they have any concerns, both at college and in the workplace. College staff work with employers and workplace staff to ensure they understand the needs of individual learners. Workplace staff support learners effectively to undertake their workplace roles safely.

Learners demonstrate well their knowledge and understanding of the health and safety considerations in their specific workplace setting, for example when unpacking glass in a retail store.

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