

Rotherham Opportunities College

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector:	Jacque Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Brunswick Road Broom Rotherham South Yorkshire S60 2RR

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.

Rotherham Opportunities College is an independent specialist college based in Rotherham. It provides programmes to students with high needs. At the time of the visit, there were 12 students enrolled on a bridging pathway, 10 on an employability pathway, nine on an opportunities pathway and six on a project search programme. All students are aged 19 to 25 years and have an education, health and care plan. There is no residential provision. Rotherham Opportunities College does not use any subcontractors.

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 do not have effective oversight of the quality of the provision. Although they have carried out reviews of the quality of teaching in previous years, this has not resulted in sufficient improvement. Frequent changes to the senior leadership team have had a negative impact on leaders' ability to provide effective oversight of the quality of provision.

Leaders do not have clear oversight of students' progress. They do not assure themselves that learners make expected progress in developing knowledge, skills and behaviours. Although tutors discuss the progress that students make in their sessions during staff meetings, no one provides an overview of students' progress across their whole programme.

Leaders do not ensure that teaching assistants make effective use of information that they provide about students when carrying out their roles. This means that valuable learning time is often wasted, such as when students struggle to access the support that they need to log on to computers.

Leaders have a clear rationale for their provision. They have responded to a lack of appropriate educational opportunities for students aged 19 to 25 with high needs in Rotherham. They have worked closely with the local authority to provide programmes for students who do not wish to leave the borough for their education.

Leaders provide appropriate curriculum pathways to enable students to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need as they become adults. For example, students develop their independent living skills and work-related skills through the opportunities and employability pathways.

Leaders monitor the destinations of their students on completion of their learning. They make use of this information to determine which employers and providers they need to continue to liaise with in order to ensure good progression for future students.

Leaders work with relevant partners to enhance the curriculum that they provide for students. For example, they work with Gulliver's Theme Park and with a number of community and voluntary organisations to secure work placements for students.

Leaders employ tutors who are well qualified and appropriately experienced to work with students with high needs. However, they do not make sure that tutors and teaching assistants attend training to improve their understanding of working with students with specific disabilities. Tutors do not attend training to improve their teaching skills further.

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**

Too many tutors do not identify students' knowledge, skills and behaviours at the beginning of their programme. As a result, they do not plan individual programmes that take into account students' starting points.

Too many tutors do not use the targets identified in students' education, health and care plans well enough to plan learning activities. Tutors use accreditation as a focus for the curriculum, and all students complete the same units at the same time regardless of their prior knowledge, skills and behaviours. This means that students do not benefit from an individualised learning plan that is specific to their needs.

Most tutors do not monitor or record well enough the knowledge, skills and behaviours that students develop over time. They record when students have achieved learning outcomes, but they do not identify the valuable, small steps that students make to achieve these. This means that students often do not know what they need to do next to improve further.

Tutors do not use assessment well enough to check what students have learned before moving on. Too often in lessons, tutors' learning checks are cursory, which means that tutors do not know if students have understood what they have been taught. Tutors' feedback is not sufficiently useful and does not help students to identify what they need to do to improve their work.

Although tutors accurately identify students' starting points in English and mathematics, too many do not use this information well enough to improve students' skills in these subjects. They do not provide effective enough support to students to improve their English and mathematical skills.

Most students work well together and are supportive and respectful of the staff and of their peers. However, some staff do not intervene quickly enough on the very small number of occasions when students' behaviour is inappropriate.

Students benefit from useful independent careers advice, provided by a specialist careers provider. Careers advisers attend sessions and work with students to develop careers action plans which support students to make realistic decisions about their next steps.

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

Leaders do not ensure that students know about the risks of radicalisation and extremism. They do not teach students about these dangers, even though they are aware that their students are vulnerable and potentially at risk. Consequently, students do not have any understanding of how these risks might affect them in the communities in which they live.

The designated safeguarding lead has appropriate training to be effective in her role. She is supported by a deputy, who has completed relevant training. Leaders implement appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures with a clear reporting process in place.

Staff complete essential health and safety training which enables them to administer medication safely and give personal care to students.

The designated safeguarding lead ensures that staff record safeguarding concerns, and that appropriate action is taken. However, in a few instances, checks that the concerns have been recorded as 'closed off' are not completed.

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