

Woodpecker Court

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 147958

Name of lead inspector: Emma Leavey, His Majesty's Inspector

Inspection date(s): 14 and 15 September 2022

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.

Woodpecker Court began offering training as an independent specialist college in 2019. They provide training for young people aged 16 to 24 who may have been out of education for a period of time or who are unable to access mainstream education due to their special educational needs (SEN). Woodpecker Court is set on a farm which has a range of classroom, workshop, and outside facilities where students can learn through practical activities and more traditional teaching sessions. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 38 students in years 1 and 2 studying qualifications in English, mathematics, preparation for work and vocational subjects, such as animal care and catering at 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, managers and those responsible for governance have a very clear vision to support students to re-engage in education. Leaders ensure that high needs funding is used creatively and appropriately to provide students with the correct, tailored support to work towards their academic, vocational, personal, social and independent living goals.

Leaders have developed an advisory board of members with designated roles, who oversee areas of the provision thoroughly, such as safeguarding and curriculum development. Advisory board members have extensive knowledge in these areas and provide excellent scrutiny, challenge, and support to ensure that students receive the very best provision possible and make rapid progress towards their next steps.

Leaders and the advisory board use a range of effective methods to evaluate the quality of the provision in all areas. Leaders ensure that they regularly review students' progress and undertake their statutory requirements in a timely manner. They know their strengths well and plan actions sensibly to ensure that the provision continues to be developed and improved. For example, leaders have used the

information they have collected about student destinations to help them identify gaps in progression opportunities and are working to identify additional possible destinations.

Leaders work very effectively with the local authority, parents and carers and other education providers who refer students to the provision. For example, they challenge the local authority to ensure that students are set outcomes that will have a positive impact on their future potential.

Leaders have ensured that their chosen curriculum meets the needs of employment opportunities and further education in the surrounding areas. For example, they offer animal care qualifications in a location where there are many vacancies in land-based occupations. Leaders make sure that all students have opportunities to undertake work experience at the provider's working farm or kitchen.

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**

Leaders and teaching staff use information about students' starting points diligently to ensure that students are on the right programme to make good progress. Teaching staff use this information carefully to plan tailored and highly engaging programmes for students. They negotiate manageable and achievable short-term targets with students to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviour over time and help them progress towards the outcomes set in their education and health care plans. Teaching staff review these targets regularly and add new targets. Consequently, students re-engage in education quickly, develop positive attitudes towards learning and become ambitious about their next steps.

Highly qualified and experienced staff benefit from a wide range of inspiring and relevant training on a weekly basis. For example, learning support assistants benefit from an allocated teacher mentor and attend weekly professional development training, where they learn about classroom strategies and discuss best practice to support the students. As a result, students attend their lessons well, stay engaged throughout and make swift progress.

Leaders and teachers actively ensure that students continue to develop their literacy and numeracy skills beyond the requirement to have completed qualifications. Leaders and teachers plan a highly relevant and inventive curriculum, where students apply their knowledge to relevant vocational and life skills activities. For example, staff develop students' mathematics skills reading electric meters and learning about interest rates and budgeting. Students' literacy skills are further developed through writing newsletters and contributing to the website. Other students work on more practical projects where they apply their skills, such as building resources for the farm or objects that can be sold.

Staff use highly effective systems to monitor student progress. They adopt proactive strategies to prevent students from falling behind and, as a result, most students make good progress and achieve their goals. For example, staff meet weekly to discuss the progress students are making and plan interventions, where they feel additional support or a change in activities is needed.

Staff provide students with expert careers information, advice and guidance. Staff consider students' interests and ambitions carefully and provide them with plentiful opportunities to explore possible next steps. Staff support students very well to find placements, and prepare for applications to college or for work. Staff ensure that students benefit from a wide range of activities, which help them to move on to their next steps smoothly. For example, students who are moving into further or higher education visit the new setting with staff. Staff ensure that support teams in new settings have a good understanding of students' needs. As a result, students are successful in settings where they had previously failed.

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

Leaders have created a very strong culture of safeguarding. All staff are highly vigilant in monitoring changes to students' behaviour that may be a sign of a more significant concern. The designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) keep meticulous records, monitor low level concerns, and have clear reporting mechanisms in place to keep students safe.

The appropriately qualified DSLs ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities in keeping themselves and students safe. Leaders complete thorough risk assessments to check that students are safe on the farm. They ensure that staff and students understand how to work safely with farm and catering equipment and the animals on the farm.

Leaders and the designated advisory board member have appropriate policies and procedures in place for safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty, managing behaviour and using reasonable force. Leaders ensure that restraint is rarely used and only when necessary. Staff are suitably qualified and trained in using restraint. The DSL ensures that records of these instances are kept appropriately and that they formally reflect on each instance with the staff and student involved.

Students feel safe when at the college and recall useful training to help them stay safe. They know how to report concerns and feel that they would be heard and dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

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