

Willow Green CIO

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

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to independent specialist colleges newly funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. 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.

Willow Green CIO is an independent specialist college that was established in September 2021. Originally based at Green Lane Community Special School in Warrington, the provider moved to separate premises in Warrington in September 2022. At the time of the monitoring visit, 16 learners were enrolled on two pathways: employability skills and work skills. Two learners were studying on an intensive programme to develop their life skills and communication skills in preparation for work. Learners study on programmes from entry level 2 up to level 1. Learners with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including autism spectrum disorder, severe learning difficulty and Jacobsen syndrome, attend the provider. All learners study at Willow Green CIO for five days per week.

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 and managers use high-needs funding effectively for most learners. They ensure that learners are taught in small groups to help staff meet their individual learning needs, and employ well-qualified learning support staff to provide learners with extra assistance. However, in a few instances, learners who have more complex needs do not receive the specific therapies they need to develop their communication or movement. A few learners do not receive personalised support to develop their communication skills and are reliant on staff to interpret their needs. As a result, these learners do not develop their independence skills quickly enough.

Leaders and managers have a clear and aspirational rationale for a curriculum that will support learners into employment. They recognise the need for a bespoke service in the local area. Leaders and managers work with stakeholders such as local

employers, feeder schools and the local authority to design a curriculum that meets the needs of learners preparing for the workplace.

Leaders, managers and governors do not have an effective oversight of the quality of education or the progress that learners make. They do not conduct reviews of the quality of teaching and learning or the progress made by learners against their education, health and care (EHC) plan targets. As a result, leaders, managers and governors are largely unaware of issues of underperformance and, consequently, are unable to improve weaknesses swiftly.

The members of the board of governors are well qualified and most have experience of working with learners and children with SEND. Governors do not routinely challenge or hold senior leaders to account for the quality of the provision. They place too much emphasis on the quality of physical resources, such as premises, rather than the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the quality of education. The self-assessment report prepared by leaders and presented to governors is overly positive. Governors rightly recognise this and have plans to rectify this at future meetings.

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

Most tutors do not manage learning effectively. On the work skills pathway, tutors do not use assessment of learners' starting points to plan teaching or to personalise learning for individuals accurately. As a result, tutors do not plan high-quality learning that challenges learners to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours or achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.

Most tutors do not monitor learners' progress against EHC plan targets well enough. Consequently, tutors cannot accurately identify the progress that learners make. Conversely, tutors teaching on the employability skills pathway set learners specific targets that they monitor to identify incremental progress and achievement. As a result, learners build on their knowledge and skills over time.

The feedback that support staff provide to learners following assessments is generic, which means that tutors are unable to use this information when planning personalised learning programmes for learners. Leaders and tutors do not have a clear oversight of what learners can and cannot do and what they need to do to improve. As a result, the progress that learners make is not accurately evaluated.

Learners do not receive relationships or sex education. The curriculum includes topics such as healthy lifestyles, diet and exercise but does not include any reference

to healthy relationships. Consequently, learners are not being sufficiently prepared for adulthood.

Tutors and staff place high priority on preparing learners for meaningful employment. They work hard to ensure that learners understand their own skills and qualities. Learners on the employability pathway benefit from frequent tutorials to discuss the standard of their work and the progress they are making towards their individual targets and long-term goals. As a result, learners develop confidence and are keen to move into the workplace.

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

Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and managers have well-documented risk assessments and seizure plans that are thorough and fit for purpose. However, a few aspects of administration and record-keeping are underdeveloped, such as administration of medicines. While this is not an immediate risk to learners, leaders and managers rightly recognise the importance of accurate record-keeping. Administration and record-keeping errors were corrected before the end of the inspection.

The designated safeguarding lead and the governor responsible for safeguarding are experienced in their roles and have been trained to an appropriate level.

Staff use effective behaviour management strategies and receive specialist training to ensure that they keep learners safe while on site. Staff produce behaviour plans in an accessible format so that learners take responsibility for their own de-escalation strategies.

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