

InFocus College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

InFocus College was inspected in April 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision as requires 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.

At the time of this inspection, 36 students who have high needs were studying at the college, each with an education, health and care plan. Students study a curriculum that aims to build their skills and knowledge so they can lead more independent lives.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in implementing an ambitious and high-quality curriculum to prepare students well for adulthood? Insufficient progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have improved the curriculum model to ensure that it is better aligned to preparing students for adulthood. Leaders are focused on important themes such as independence, social, community and work skills and have a stronger emphasis on transition and work. However, the curriculum was constructed without sufficient input from employers or stakeholders. As a result, leaders cannot be assured that they have identified the right knowledge, skills and behaviours that students need to progress to their next steps of employment, education or independent living.

Leaders have not yet ensured that students benefit from high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. Learning is not always planned sufficiently and can lack purpose. Students do not benefit from planned and frequent recapping of important areas of learning. As a result, students do not remember what they have learned and are not learning new knowledge and skills during their lessons that build on their previous learning.

Leaders do not yet have sufficient oversight of the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum. Teachers and support staff are not confident in how to plan teaching, and are not adequately trained in the expectations of the new curriculum. Systems

have been recently introduced that enable leaders to review the progress that students are making. However, it is too early to see the impact of this on leaders' understanding of the quality and effectiveness of the curriculum, or on what further training the staff require.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that therapy sessions do not have an adverse impact on students' timetabled sessions? Reasonable progress

Leaders have redesigned students' timetables to minimise the impact of absence for direct therapies. Each student has one day a week to choose activities, and the therapy team works with staff to devise activities. If students need individual therapy sessions, these occur during this day. As a result, students are able to attend their therapy sessions without falling behind on key subjects.

Leaders have ensured that therapists are integrated into the classroom and work alongside teachers and students during sessions to develop their physical and communication skills. For example, the occupational therapist supports students in a cookery session to understand the aids available to them and how to use them, such as talking scales or a cup indicator.

What progress have leaders and managers made in expanding opportunities for their students to participate in enrichment activities, volunteering, or work experience? Reasonable progress

Leaders have identified the need for students to leave the college site more frequently for enrichment opportunities. They have introduced activities such as regular shopping trips and opportunities for students to get involved in art projects in the city centre. All students now have access to weekly activities that they can choose from, such as cooking, yoga or going to the sensory garden. As a result, students state that they feel more confident and can therefore meet their friends at the weekends.

Leaders have ensured that all students undertake some form of work experience. However, many students undertake internal placements and the minority that complete external placements only have a few hours per week. For students with the most complex needs, work experience can be passive and staff are not clear on the purpose of the activities that they undertake.

Staff gather feedback from employers and supervisors for each student while they are on work experience. However, staff do not use this feedback to help students to further develop their skills or plan their next steps.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that all students receive appropriate, high-quality careers advice and guidance? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection leaders have appointed a careers lead to improve careers advice for all learners. They have put new policies and procedures in place and they have engaged the support of external agencies to ensure that they are meeting expectations. As a result, students are developing a better understanding of the careers, volunteering and lifestyles available to them in the future.

Students who are ready to move onto their next steps in education, employment or independent living are given external careers guidance with trained, independent professionals. For students with more complex needs their next steps are discussed at termly reviews with professionals who can advocate for them. However, staff do not take the actions from these meetings and support the student to further explore or develop their skills and understanding.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that staff use their skills and knowledge appropriately to support students? Insufficient progress

Leaders have introduced training for enablers to ensure that they improve their understanding of the levels of support they should offer students. Enablers say this has been beneficial to their roles in care and has some relevance to the role they play in the classroom. However, leaders do not measure the changes to classroom practice as a result of the training undertaken.

Teachers have benefited from specialist training from the visual impairment teacher, which has helped them to gain a better understanding of the students they teach. They say that this has given a very helpful insight in to how to support them better in the classroom.

Leaders have not ensured that all staff receive appropriate and helpful guidance on how to teach the new curriculum. Teachers are not confident on how to plan and implement the curriculum and enablers do not have sufficient expertise to teach students within lessons.

In a few cases, enablers that are working with students with the most complex needs do not use the training that they have been provided with to maintain dignity and age-appropriate communication with students. For example, students being referred to as boys and girls while staff are referred to as adults, even though many of the students are themselves adults. This was not the case for students who had less complex needs.

Leaders undertake useful classroom visits and accurately identify areas for improvement. However, they do not use these observations to plan training sessions and ensure that teachers are meeting their high expectations.

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