

Royal Mencap Society

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

Unique reference number:	144786
Name of lead inspector:	Sue Hasty, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Royal Mencap Society was inspected in June 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require 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.

After the previous inspection, the contract for apprenticeships was terminated. Therefore, Royal Mencap no longer runs apprenticeships.

There are 123 learners on supported internships in a range of settings, including hospitality, retail and the creative industries. There are 39 learners on study programmes. All learners have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Royal Mencap teaches courses in centres across England, including in London, Northamptonshire, Worcestershire, Yorkshire and the Midlands.

Themes

To what extent do governors provide effective scrutiny of senior leaders' progress in making the improvements needed so that the quality of education that learners receive is consistently good?

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and managers have worked purposefully to put measures in place to improve governance of the quality of education at all levels in the organisation. Following the previous inspection, they quickly set up an interim advisory group. Members of the group have suitable backgrounds. For example, advisors have experience in running supported internships for learners with learning disabilities. They also have experience in overseeing safeguarding concerns. At monthly meetings, they scrutinise effectively the information that leaders provide about the progress that learners make. Advisors challenge leaders to make the necessary improvements to the curriculum, such as employing new managers with responsibility for the quality of education across all locations. They are supporting leaders to establish a formal governing body to provide long-term oversight of the quality of education.

Leaders and governors have reviewed thoroughly the programmes they teach. They evaluated rigorously the outcomes of courses in each of the locations in which they are based. Leaders identify successful practice and share this across centres. For example, they now support effectively learners' transition from school to an

internship at a much earlier stage in the year. Consequently, a higher proportion of learners stay on the course.

Leaders sensibly took the decision to stop running programmes in a few centres. They aim to focus teaching and support in three geographical hubs in the West Midlands, London and Northamptonshire. Leaders have recruited new staff at each location, such as an employer engagement officer. Learners benefit from the support they receive to discuss their work-related goals.

Leaders and managers value the improved information they have to analyse the effectiveness of the quality of education. They meet monthly to review learners' progress. They identify appropriately where learners fall behind or do not attend and put helpful support in place. As a result, learners make appropriate progress towards their learning goals.

How effective is the careers advice and guidance that learners receive in helping them make informed decisions about their next steps? Significant progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have improved considerably the quality and timeliness of the careers advice and guidance that learners receive. They thought carefully about the questions they ask learners prior to starting their courses. For example, staff discuss learners' career goals at their initial interview. Skills coaches check with learners that their aspirations are realistic. Skills coaches also take into account the information in individual learner's EHC plans, including any medical or physical considerations. They put together a useful individual careers action plan, which they revisit at progress review meetings. Therefore, at the start of their courses, learners commit fully to getting a job by the end of their studies. Most learners have a well-defined idea about the job they would like to do when they finish their courses.

Leaders plan and teach effectively the knowledge, skills and behaviours that learners need to search for a job. Teachers help learners to write a CV and practise job interview skills. Where learners need more time to think about the type of job they want to do, they try different work experience opportunities, such as in the hospitality or information technology sectors. Learners understand clearly the help they can receive from advisors that specialise in getting jobs for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Learners benefit hugely from work experience placements with prestigious employers in areas such as the creative and hospitality industries. Employers take a highly active part in supporting learners to do well at work. They jointly review learners' job-related goals with their skills coach and set new targets that build their capabilities gradually. Learners speak excitedly about how their work experience has changed their lives. A very high proportion of learners have permanent jobs to move into when they complete the course.

To what extent have leaders improved the supported internship programme so that most learners secure positive outcomes and achieve their English and mathematics qualifications?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have made suitable improvements to the supported internship programme. They make sure that learners are appropriately prepared for their work experience placement. For example, learners working in the theatre first practise directing visitors to their event in a safe classroom environment. They learn the basics of the workplace setting so that they feel comfortable when their placement starts. Skills coaches accompany learners on their journey to work in the early stages of their placement. Learners gradually become confident to travel on the underground and on buses independently of their skills coach. They progressively take on more responsibilities at work, such as answering customer queries on the telephone.

Leaders and managers have taken relevant action to help learners develop their knowledge of English and mathematics. They have developed teachers' confidence in teaching English and mathematics. For example, leaders run training sessions on how to teach mathematical concepts and writing skills. They support staff to become professionally qualified teachers.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have set up additional lessons for teaching learners practical English and mathematics. Learners taking qualifications in these subjects attend weekly lessons in small groups and have one-to-one support. Teachers explain mathematical calculations effectively, such as how to turn fractions into percentages. When learners make errors, teachers patiently repeat step-by-step instructions until learners reach the right answer. In most instances, learners successfully complete their tasks and make appropriate progress.

Employers speak highly of the progress learners make. They have high expectations for learners to become confident, capable and competent members of staff. Parents notice how much more confident their young person has become when they converse with family and friends at social events.

How effectively do tutors identify learners' knowledge, skills and behaviours at the start of the programme so that they can develop an ambitious and individual programme for them?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have revised suitably how they assess learners' starting points at the beginning of their courses. They now consider a wider range of information and use this appropriately to set out an overview of learners' strengths and areas to improve. For example, leaders ask learners to complete a self-assessment activity. Leaders make sure that staff capture learners' hobbies, interests and job aspirations. They take account of the views of parents and carers, as well as information from

professionals, such as therapists. Additionally, staff assess learners' knowledge of English and mathematics. Leaders have trained staff in carrying out assessments, which means there is now a consistent approach across all the geographical locations in which they teach.

While staff set learners individual targets based on the information they gather, the quality of targets varies. In a few instances, staff do not relate the targets to learners' long-term goals or what they are seeking to achieve. Leaders recognise rightly that they need to do further work to ensure that staff consistently identify meticulous targets.

Leaders and managers have made improvements to the curriculum that learners follow. Leaders have now aligned the curriculum suitably to meet the individual needs of learners. Staff meet frequently with learners to review their progress. They adapt the curriculum accordingly so that teachers cover the gaps in learners' knowledge and skills.

Most employers contribute appropriately to setting and reviewing the individual, work-related targets of learners. In the hospitality and retail sectors, employers have a clear understanding of the individual needs of learners and the areas they need to focus on during the work placement. Most learners make sound progress towards achieving their goals at work.

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