

Lifeworks College

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

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Name of lead inspector:	Lowenna Bradley, 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

Lifeworks College was inspected in October 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 resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Lifeworks College is an independent specialist college based in Dartington, Devon. It is part of a group managed by Lifeworks Charity Limited. The college offers study programmes for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. At the time of the visit, there were 21 students aged between 16 and 24 studying at the college. Most students have moderate or severe learning difficulties, including speech, language and communication difficulties, autism and social and emotional difficulties. All students have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to train staff to use information about students' starting points effectively, to plan and teach high-quality individual learning programmes? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have ensured that all staff working with students receive very effective training that has a positive impact on students. Leaders train staff to use a range of methods and information effectively, to understand what students already know and can do. Managers and tutors use this information well to ensure that students now study individual programmes that are appropriately challenging and include the correct level of qualifications.

Leaders and managers have focused staff training on how to use the information within students' EHC plans, and students' aspirations, to set useful and ambitious targets. Tutors now confidently set challenging incremental targets in consultation with students. Tutors and students review and update targets formally each term, and informally more frequently. This ensures that students constantly work towards meaningful goals.

Tutors and support staff use targets well to help individual students to work on the areas that are most important for them to make progress towards their next steps. For example, students may be challenged to complete specific tasks on their own, without prompting, in their work placements. This supports students to become more independent at work and better prepared for their futures. Students rightly feel involved in this process and in doing so, they take greater responsibility for their learning.

Leaders provide tutors and support staff with dedicated time each week to discuss students' progress and share the strategies that work well with each. This increased communication enables staff to share important information, improve student support and inform future teaching.

Staff at all levels of the organisation rightly value the investment that leaders have made in their training. Staff now have a shared ownership and understanding of the role they have in supporting students in their learning and progression to their next steps. As a result, staff are proud to work for the college.

What progress has been made to challenge and support students to complete work to the best of their abilities and help them to move on to their next stage of education, employment or further training? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have reviewed carefully what they teach students in order to ensure that they prepare students well for their future lives. They have developed five pathways that provide a range of starting points for students. Each pathway provides incremental steps that support students to move into supported living, independent living or employment. Leaders check what students already know and can do thoroughly and use this information to place them on the right programmes. As a result, each student is challenged and supported well towards their next stage of education, training or employment.

Leaders and managers have designed a curriculum that focuses significantly on developing students' employability skills. Dedicated job coaches ensure that students studying each pathway access high-quality relevant placements. Staff have high expectations for students and support them to work towards gaining sustained employment in the future.

Leaders have developed positive and effective partnerships with several employers, to offer students placements linked to their interests. These include retail and catering placements. Students studying supported internships make positive steps towards becoming employed as a result of their work placement experiences. Tutors set students specific targets to help them at work, for example to improve their communication by answering questions more concisely. Students develop a range of skills that employers want. As a result, employers are already considering offering employment at the end of their supported internships.

Tutors set students effective targets that relate to all areas of their EHC plans. They choose carefully targets linked to well-being, living healthy lives, and being active citizens. This in turn is supported by well-designed curriculums that allow students to work towards their individual targets in each of these areas. For example, students are set physical targets to increase levels of physical activity and develop their motor

skills. This helps them to increase their stamina, so they are able to participate in work placements, such as fast-food restaurants.

What progress has been made to improve the coordination and provision of routine specialist therapy assessments and support? Reasonable progress

Leaders have taken effective actions to identify individual students' therapeutic needs, based on the EHC plans and information received from students, parents and carers, staff and other professionals. Leaders use this range of information well, to arrange for therapies to take place. Leaders make appropriate referrals to the local authority for specialist therapies such as speech and language therapy (SALT) and occupational therapy. They identify these needs either through the requirements of the EHC plan or through their thorough initial and ongoing assessments of students' needs. At times, there is a delay between referral and the start of therapeutic intervention. However, leaders are proactive in following up on referrals to ensure that this delay is minimised.

Leaders have introduced training for specific staff in SALT to help to increase their specialist knowledge and support within the college. However, this training is still ongoing and the impact of this is yet to reach its full potential.

Leaders have designed a range of additional broader therapies they offer to students linked to their individual needs and to support the implementation of the wider curriculum. These include therapy to support students with social and communication needs, sound therapy to support students with emotional regulation, and art therapy to support students' emotional well-being.

Leaders have a clear oversight of each students' therapeutic needs. This information is shared with staff working with students, so they know how the therapies are used to support students. Leaders now coordinate the feedback from all therapists and ensure that this is communicated to tutors and support staff. This helps staff to use the strategies from therapies within the college, and to encourage their use at home. For example, tutors and support staff help students to use the breathing techniques they learn in therapies, to help to regulate their feelings of anxiety and anger. As a result, students increase their level of interaction and can access learning for longer periods of time.

What progress have leaders and trustees made in using accurate information about students' progress and the quality of education to help them make sustained improvements? Significant progress

Leaders and managers carry out a range of useful activities that provide them with accurate information about the strengths in the provision and the areas to improve. Leaders now conduct frequent informal visits to lessons that include speaking to students about their targets and looking at the work they have produced. Leaders

have provided staff with comprehensive training on the importance of developmental targets for students. They check the impact this has, by reviewing documents that record and monitor students' targets and achievements. Leaders evaluate the quality of targets set and check that they are reviewed frequently to ensure they remain sufficiently challenging.

Leaders provide trustees with valuable training so that they understand the development of new processes to recognise and record progress and achievement of students. As a result, trustees are well informed, and use their knowledge to sample first-hand student progress tracking documents. This helps them to understand the work that underpins the data and reports presented to them.

Trustees scrutinise the reports they receive from leaders and ask pertinent questions to understand the progress that is being made towards quality improvements. Trustees now visit lessons jointly with managers and discuss the strengths, weaknesses and challenges that they see. Since September, trustees have invited students to present to the college governance committee. This enables trustees to hear about students' experiences first-hand and to see the impact of the curriculum.

Trustees scrutinise the plans that leaders make for quality improvements and challenge leaders effectively on the remedial actions taken. Leaders and trustees focus rightly their attention on the impact of their actions on students. Trustees support and help leaders effectively to make rapid positive improvements.

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