

Digital Advantage

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.

Digital Advantage is a registered charity providing industry-led programmes and employment in technical, creative and business skills for young people with autism. Digital Independent Specialist College (DISC) was established in 2022. It is based in central Manchester. DISC provides training and employment for young people aged 16 to 24 years of age with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. DISC provides supported internships to support young people to develop their digital and creative technology skills in preparation for employment. Training takes place in their city centre studio in Manchester. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 34 learners attending the college.

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? Reasonable progress

Senior leaders have successfully collaborated with key stakeholders and employers, such as Manchester City Council, to design courses that meet local skills needs. Through this work, leaders identified the need to provide training to prepare young people for working in the digital and creative media industries. They have set up supported internships for young people with EHC plans to fill a gap in the local job market. Of the small number of learners that have completed their internship, the majority have successfully moved into paid work in the industry.

Senior leaders and governors have invested heavily in the teaching and learning resources at DISC. Learners are taught in a well-equipped digital media studio. Tutors and learners have access to industry standard resources, including digital equipment, software and information technology platforms. This ensures that learners develop relevant and current skills to work in the digital and creative media sectors.

Managers, tutors and staff have extensive experience of working in the industry. Staff who are subject specialists in digital and creative media work alongside staff who are experts in working with young people with high needs. As a result, learners'

individual needs are met, and they develop the skills and behaviours they need for the workplace.

Senior leaders have worked closely with trustees to set up the governing body. The leadership team benefits from the experience that governors bring from industry, the education sector and through their lived experiences of neurodivergence. Governors are beginning to receive reports from the leadership team and are using this information to provide challenge and support.

Although senior leaders and governors have begun to review the quality of learners' experiences at DISC, they do not yet focus on the quality of teaching in all subjects. Senior leaders recognise that their quality assurance processes are in their infancy. They are working to improve this. However, it is too early to see the impact of their improvements.

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? Reasonable progress

Leaders have taken a considered approach to the design of the internship. They teach learners technical skills, such as coding, website design and games development. Tutors also teach learners the skills they will need to be successful in the workplace. They ensure that learners develop their team-working and presentation skills. Learners successfully demonstrate to employers the skills that they can contribute when at work.

Leaders have designed the curriculum to reflect real-world deadlines and projects. Learners work in small teams on project briefs. They have clear roles when working in teams, for example on the redesign of websites. Learners undertake analysis of websites and identify issues which impact on the experience of the user. They use this information to wireframe the website to improve its functionality. Learners develop an understanding of work beyond their internship and are well prepared for employment.

Recently, leaders have broadened the internship to include learners who are furthest away from education and employment. Through the pre-internship course, tutors support learners to improve their attendance and attitudes to learning in preparation for an internship. Learners quickly improve the skills they need for their next steps into work.

Tutors use baseline assessments to identify learners' starting points for their digital, English and mathematical skills. They use this information to plan individualised learning. Tutors provide helpful feedback to learners on the quality of their work. However, tutors recognise that they do not sufficiently identify all the skills that

learners have developed. They do not yet monitor the progress that learners are making, to ensure that they acquire the skills and knowledge of which they are capable.

Tutors provide helpful support for learners who need to achieve their English and mathematics qualifications during their internship. However, the teaching of English and mathematics for learners who already have these qualifications is not always well planned.

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

Senior leaders and governors with responsibility for safeguarding are appropriately trained and experienced. They have successfully put in place a referral and recording process to monitor the small number of safeguarding incidents and welfare concerns identified. Leaders and managers meet frequently to review the support they provide for learners and to seek external support when needed.

Learners have a good understanding of how to report concerns. Staff teach learners how to keep themselves safe. They rightly focus on the dangers of working in the digital and creative media industries. Staff teach learners about cyber-security, working safely when developing websites and keeping personal information secure when working online.

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