

Academy of Play and Child Psychotherapy Limited

Monitoring visit report

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| Unique reference number: | 2741623 |
| Name of lead inspector: | Ann Monaghan, His Majesty's Inspector |
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| Type of provider: | Independent learning provider |
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and/or the apprenticeship levy. 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.

The Academy of Play and Child Psychotherapy Limited began trading in 1998. It offers commercial specialist training courses to the play therapy and therapeutic sector in the UK and in various other countries. In 2022, it also began to offer apprenticeship provision. It is the only provider currently offering the level 7 play therapist apprenticeship. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 43 apprentices, all of whom were over the age of 19. A few apprentices study English and/or mathematics qualifications as part of their apprenticeship. Apprentices work in primary schools, special schools, NHS settings or for local authorities in Lancashire, Merton or Sussex.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Reasonable progress

Leaders offer a highly specialist provision to meet the increasing need for play therapists to work with children with therapeutic support needs. The level 7 play therapist apprenticeship offers routes into professional careers within primary and specialist schools, local authority provision and the NHS.

Leaders work closely with employers to ensure they recruit apprentices with integrity. All apprentices have appropriate prior knowledge and experience. They benefit from a thorough onboarding process, which includes detailed information sessions with their employer. However, leaders recognise that they need to improve the ongoing communication with employers, including holding timely progress review meetings for all apprentices, so that employers are fully involved in planning and reviewing learning.

Apprentices benefit from very well-organised and high-quality off-the-job learning. This helps them to make progress rapidly and develop confidence in their abilities. Many employers value the significant contribution their apprentices make in their workplace, even from a very early stage of their learning. Employers support their

apprentices well. They ensure that on-the-job learning opportunities enhance the knowledge and skills that apprentices learn off the job.

Leaders have implemented appropriate arrangements for the very small number of apprentices who study functional skills English and/or mathematics as part of their programme. However, they recognise that there is more to do to ensure that these arrangements are robustly monitored so that apprentices are confident and make good progress.

Leaders know their strengths and areas for improvement. They have produced a relevant quality improvement plan, which includes sensible actions for improvement. However, to date, leaders are not ambitious enough and the pace of improvement for identified actions is too slow.

Leaders are in the process of implementing governance arrangements. They recognise the urgent need for this so that they benefit from scrutiny and challenge. They have recently appointed an external governance advisor. However, this person is not yet in post.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have ensured that their staff team is highly specialist. All staff are very well qualified academically. They also bring a wealth of experience to their roles as practising play therapists. Apprentices benefit significantly from the knowledge and professional experiences of their course directors and clinical supervisors.

Course directors plan and sequence the curriculum carefully so that apprentices understand the important basic principles of effective play therapy. For example, they use the initial period of off-the-job learning to introduce apprentices to the importance of the physical environment, as well as some basic therapeutic techniques. Apprentices initially apply this learning and identify ways that they can adapt the physical resource in their workplace to make it more conducive to play therapy. They then build on their learning and thoughtfully apply the principles of play therapy in their initial individual work with younger children. For example, they start to use creative mediums, such as sand play, to facilitate emotional expression in the children.

Apprentices meet with their clinical supervisor fortnightly. Clinical supervisors plan these sessions thoroughly, and they support apprentices to reflect on their learning and experiences to date. Apprentices highly value the opportunity to review their progress and agree relevant targets to work on over the following two weeks. Although clinical supervisors update employers following each meeting, feedback

from employers and mentors is not routinely used to review progress, inform subsequent targets and refine curriculum plans.

Apprentices are highly motivated and aspire to achieve high grades. Their attendance and commitment to their studies are excellent. They become increasingly reflective and skilled practitioners over time. They work hard to produce a high standard of written work. However, staff do not provide sufficient support or feedback on the development of academic skills early enough in the programme. As a result, initial assignments are too often descriptive and lack analysis or evaluation.

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

Leaders have ensured that all staff have appropriate training to support the well-being and welfare needs of their apprentices. The designated safeguarding lead and her deputy are suitably trained. They ensure their staff team benefits from frequent updates.

Apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. In particular, they benefit from a consistent focus on their mental well-being. This is particularly important given the sensitivity of their work with children.

Leaders have an awareness of their responsibilities in accordance to the 'Prevent' duty. However, they have not developed effective links with relevant agencies across the parts of the country where their apprentices live and work. Apprentices do not have a good understanding of local risks.

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