

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

T 07834 391871  
[ajones@dfes.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:ajones@dfes.wanadoo.co.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mel Chadwick  
Vice Principal  
Winstanley College  
Winstanley Road  
Billinge  
Wigan  
WN5 7XF

Dear Mel

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff during my visit on 26 January 2009 to look at success factors in promoting equality and improving the outcomes for learners that have mental health difficulties.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: meetings with college staff, meetings with students, meetings with external partners and scrutiny of documentation.

The quality of provision to promote equalities for learners with mental health difficulties (MHD) is outstanding.

Features of good practice and success factors observed

Strong leadership and management to embed equality and diversity into the curriculum and the college community

- Strong leadership and management within the college include strong partnerships with external partners such as with Connexions and Wigan Council mental health team. Staff are empowered to adapt the curriculum and to personalise it to support learners with MHD. Leadership for this area of work is strong, with clear goals and strategic vision. The holistic well-being of learners is paramount. Senior managers recognised that there was a need to provide specialist support for learners with MHD and the college now has a specialist tutor. Staff training in equality and diversity is mandatory. Staff are

well supported and developed and all staff have received training to work with learners with MHD. Leaders and managers are aware of the need for specialist facilities such as withdrawal and quiet rooms for learners with MHD and these are available at the college for all learners to use. There are daily whole staff meetings to allow for discussion around students who may be causing concern. A counsellor is available in the college. Three key documents provide information and guidance for staff when working with students. There is flexibility of entry requirements due to extenuating circumstances which includes MHD. For example, one learner with MHD was invited to study at the college with 30 points rather than the required 52.

Excellent use of data for tracking and monitoring positive outcomes for learners

- The collection and monitoring of data used by the college is excellent. Data is analysed to a very high level and learners who have MHD are closely tracked and monitored throughout their programme to identify support required. Learner tracking links very closely to the review process and also to key points during the programme. The college monitors achievement and progression rates by race, gender and different disabilities and health needs. Of the 34 learners with MHD successfully completing their studies in 2007/2008, 26 have progressed to higher education with three taking a gap year before taking up a place at University.

Outstanding success rates for learners with mental health difficulties

- The college is second in the league table for A' level results in all colleges. In 2007/2008 success rates for learners with disabilities, difficulties and health problems were 94% and 95% for learners not identified as having learning disabilities, difficulties and health problems. At the time of the survey, retention stands at 98%. Learners with MHD are able to complete their programmes over three years rather than two and some take three AS levels rather than 4.

Effective support for learners with mental health difficulties to achieve their full potential

- The college has a range of support strategies in place including home visits if necessary to support learners with MHD. Tutors are vigilant, and careful monitoring of learners usually picks up indicators of MHD. The learner is then referred to a specialist tutor. The college has employed a specialist tutor to work with learners with MHD. She works with the Additional Learning Support Manager and Progression and Welfare Manager who together complement each other's specialist areas. The curriculum is personalised to meet the needs of the learners. Regular reviews and target setting for progress support learners effectively. There is negotiation between specialist tutors and

learners regarding the minimum level of attendance at sessions. Four learners are currently participating in a mental health project funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) which means that if they are unable to attend sessions at the college, they are able to use laptop computers to engage in the session virtually.

#### Areas for development

##### The development of the =2U website

The college has developed an equality and diversity website that is currently populated with a range of resources to support equality and diversity. It also includes video clips from You Tube. However, the college needs to develop the learner experience section to personalise the site to the college and the learners.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in the college.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local LSC and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones  
Additional Inspector