

The Active Learning Trust Limited

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

From autumn 2019, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to independent specialist colleges newly Education and Skills Funding Agency-funded from August 2018 onwards. 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.

Active Learning Trust LINC Limited (ALTLL) has provided a dedicated and purpose-built centre at Highfields Ely Academy for learners aged 19–25. The provision is for learners in this age group who have severe learning difficulties (SLD) to profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). At the time of the monitoring visit, 11 learners were enrolled on one of two full time programmes, according to their needs, and were all working towards entry level one. The learners have a wide range of disabilities, including chromosomal disorders, severe developmental delay, cerebral palsy and epilepsy. The majority are non-verbal and are wheelchair users. Most learners attend the Ely centre daily but a small minority of learners attend off-site placements provided by an alternative education provider, a social enterprise firm and a social care provider on one or two days per week.

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

Leaders have introduced provision for learners with SLD and PMLD aged 19 to 25 to remedy the lack of such provision locally. Learners from several specialist schools now progress to ALTLL. Leaders plan collaboratively with these schools to ensure that places are available for learners who are likely to progress.

Leaders have appointed suitably skilled and experienced teachers and support staff. Most teachers have teaching qualifications and significant experience of working with learners with substantial learning needs. Leaders make effective use of high needs funding to provide a range of specialists to support learners, including an occupational therapist, music therapist and communications specialist. These specialists provide timely training to other staff in how to best meet the needs of

learners. Consequently, teachers and support staff have developed a shared understanding of learners' needs and how to best meet these.

Leaders have effective oversight of the quality of provision provided at Ely. Through their well-developed quality assurance processes, leaders identified key areas for improvement in the monitoring of the providers who offer placements to learners. For example, they identified the need to improve contractual arrangements with monitoring of and communication with these providers. Actions have been taken to effectively remedy many of the identified areas for improvement. For example, contractual arrangements are now adequate. However, further improvements are needed to ensure that placement staff enable learners to make optimal progress against their learning goals and education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes.

Governors have effective oversight of safeguarding and health and safety matters. They oversee the pre-19 as well as the post-19 curriculum provision. However, governors are still developing their understanding of the differences between the curriculum provision types. For example, for the post-19 curriculum, they have not challenged leaders to focus on the development of learners' next steps from the start of their programmes.

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 designed a suitable programme to enable learners with SLD and PMLD to successfully access learning. However, when learners join the programme, leaders do not identify in sufficient detail what a learner's preferred next steps are. As a result, leaders do not know how long learners will need to study to achieve their preferences. Consequently, teachers cannot identify and focus on the specific learning outcomes that would best support learners in achieving their goals.

Leaders and teachers identify learners' starting points effectively. Teachers attend most annual reviews of EHC plans for learners about to move on to a programme at ALTLL. Teachers use this information to formulate detailed profiles before learners start their programme. These include information about learners' communication preferences, specific EHC plan targets and important medical information. Consequently, learners are on the appropriate level of course and teachers receive the necessary information to effectively develop their personal and social skills.

Teachers develop learners' English, mathematics and digital skills appropriately. For most, this entails improving their use of communication aids, and their pre-reading

and very early number skills. Activities include body tapping and exposure to phonics, body rhythms, music, movement and sensory stories.

Teachers and support staff track daily the learning goals and EHC plan outcomes that learners achieve. They share this information with parents and carers. Where learners make less than expected progress, teachers make appropriate interventions. Consequently, learners make swift progress in achieving EHC plan outcomes. For example, learners are supported to move to alternative communication aids if their communication development is not as expected, enabling learners to swiftly improve their communication skills and so to become more independent.

Where appropriate, leaders have commissioned stimulating opportunities for learners to attend placements to develop their social interactions and independence. However, leaders do not capture timely or detailed information about the impact these placements have on learners' achievement of their learning goals and EHC plan outcomes.

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

Leaders have implemented appropriate arrangements for safeguarding learners. Staff receive training regularly in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Members of the large, designated safeguarding team are well qualified. Leaders follow effective safer recruitment practices. They conduct comprehensive checks on staff before they start work.

Staff are trained appropriately to support learners with aggressive or violent behaviours. Staff successfully de-escalate most incidents. Staff with more advanced training respond promptly if required.

Staff and parents understand when learners are happy and when they have concerns, including those who are non-verbal. Staff and parents are confident that learners feel safe. Staff are vigilant in remedying any concerns that arise regarding the safety of learners during their travel to and from the provision, for example if a learner arrives without a chest safety plate fitted. Appropriate arrangements are in place to safeguard learners during personal care.

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