

The Park College

Monitoring visit report

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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.

The Park College is an independent specialist college in the London Borough of Southwark, providing education and training for learners aged 19 to 25 who have autism spectrum disorder. It was formed in 2019 by senior leaders of the Spa Education Trust. The college offers a range of programmes from one to three years to prepare learners for independent living and employment. This academic year there is also a fourth year of training, as a few learners had their work placements interrupted due to COVID-19. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 22 full-time learners and one part-time learner. All learners have an education and health care (EHC) plan.

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

Directors and leaders responded very positively to a need identified by the local authority to provide a programme for young adults with autism spectrum disorder that prepares them for work. They have carefully considered the combination of knowledge that learners need to prepare them for jobs, and the experience they need in work settings.

Leaders and directors work well with partner organisations to provide employment settings for learners. At present, the number of employers and employment sectors is limited. Leaders and directors acknowledge that they need to expand the range of employers with whom they work in order to provide more options for learners.

Leaders and staff successfully integrate into the curriculum the need for learners to increase the skills they have for independent living with those skills they need for work. For example, in a theatre costume enterprise, learners are taught a range of business-related topics, as well as learning to wash, iron and sort clothing. Leaders make good use of guest tutors and opportunities outside college to broaden learners' experience. For example, learners take part in a social enterprise project in

partnership with a charity providing support for young homeless people.

Staff have good expertise in teaching learners with autism spectrum disorder. Leaders provide excellent, frequent staff training with a strong focus on continuously improving the teaching skills of staff. As a result, teachers mostly use a consistent approach in the methods they use to provide systematic instruction to learners. Leaders couple staff development effectively to their evaluation of staff performance.

Governance of the provision is highly effective. Directors receive comprehensive reports about the quality of training and subsequently have an honest overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They provide strong support to college leaders to ensure they have an effective approach to continuous quality improvement.

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 created a curriculum with a good focus on preparing learners for future employment. They provide useful choices so that learners can study within vocational areas that interest them, such as carpentry, catering and customer services, while improving their knowledge of core subjects, including English and mathematics. Staff make limited use of information technology with learners, which hinders learners' knowledge of how technology can be used in some of the vocational areas they study.

Staff ensure that learners have a smooth transition to the college. They carefully evaluate learners' support needs and their behaviour and communication skills. They identify accurately what support to put in place when learners start their course. Leaders make sure that learners who need therapeutic support, such as occupational, or speech and language therapy, receive it. However, they do not make assessments of these needs, nor provide the support required, early enough when learners start their programme.

Tutors use EHC plan outcomes effectively in order to teach an individualised curriculum for learners. Tutors and support staff closely monitor learners' progress through daily learning target sheets. However, at times teachers use language for targets that is too complex for learners to understand. In these instances, learners are unclear what their target means to them.

Staff are highly adept at teaching learners new practical skills. They give clear, step-by-step visual and oral instructions and break tasks down into manageable components. Learners follow the instructions closely, learn new skills and can recall and explain what they have learned.

Tutors carefully manage learners' experience of work to build their confidence and skills. They make good use of on-site activities, such as the coffee shop, before introducing learners to placements with employers, such as in cafes. Staff train learners to be independent in their decision-making. They provide effective guidance so that learners who are capable can travel independently to their work placements.

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

Directors and leaders have established a very strong safeguarding culture which is underpinned by comprehensive policies and staff training, including in relation to their obligations under the 'Prevent' duty. Staff create a very calm and welcoming environment in which learners feel safe.

Leaders and staff understand well the specific risks their learners may face, and the vulnerabilities they have. They are very attentive to low-level behavioural concerns and quickly introduce measures with learners to provide guidance to ensure that these do not escalate. Leaders have a very good overview of trends in behaviour and safeguarding concerns and report these effectively to directors.

Staff assess accurately the risks that learners face in their work placements and manage these accordingly. They pay excellent attention to learners' safety in practical training. For example, staff provide clear instructions to learners to ensure that they use tools and other equipment safely.

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