

White Rocks Farm

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Emma Leavey, His Majesty's Inspector

Inspection date(s): 16 and 17 November 2022

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Underriver
Sevenoaks
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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.

White Rocks Farm is an independent specialist college based on a farm with two closely located sites. The farm has a range of classroom, workshop and outside facilities where students can learn through practical activities in addition to their theory-based sessions. White Rocks Farm provides education programmes for young people aged between 16 and 24 years who have varying special educational needs, such as autistic spectrum condition, social and emotional mental health conditions, and complex needs, as well as a range of physical conditions. The college started to offer this provision in 2020 and has developed a range of courses in land-based vocations, as well as woodwork, art, cookery and vehicle maintenance courses. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 64 students on programme. All students study functional skills mathematics and English as part of their programmes.

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, managers, and governors have clear strategic intent for the provision to provide a safe space where young people can build trust and friendships, and develop their interests and strengths. They work successfully with local authorities to develop the curriculum and identify opportunities for young people to work in their local area. Leaders and staff have planned a curriculum carefully and skilfully to provide a comprehensive array of learning opportunities that prepare students for adulthood, independence, further learning and work, if appropriate.

Leaders use high needs funding effectively to ensure that young people are safe and develop the new knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful in adult life. For example, students benefit from therapeutic interventions with the animals on the farm which help them to manage their own mental health.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum links well to the outcomes identified on their education and health care plans (EHCPs). Students' plans are highly relevant to their age, prior attainment, aspirations and interests. Leaders review these goals in a timely manner so that all parties involved know about the progression that students make. Leaders monitor students' progression beyond the college carefully to evaluate the impact and contribute to their future planning.

Leaders use a range of useful activities to evaluate the quality of the education. As a result, they know their strengths and weaknesses. Leaders take meaningful appropriate actions to improve the experience and progress of students. For example, they have recently improved the way that they recognise and record progress and achievement for students so that they can plan their next steps effectively.

Leaders benefit from appropriately experienced governors who have oversight of the development of resources and the safety of students. Leaders have recently added a governor to oversee the quality of education, but it is too early to see the impact of this appointment.

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 ensured that staff are suitably qualified to provide high-quality training and support. Many staff are current practicing specialists in their fields and share their expertise very well through activities that students enjoy. For example, specialist staff in equine care teach students how to care for horses on a day-to-day basis so that they can progress to more complex tasks, such as halter-breaking ponies.

Instructors and support staff present information and concepts clearly. They use a wide range of highly appropriate resources and different contexts which help students to remember their learning and remain engaged. For example, staff teach students in land-based qualifications to understand different types of wood qualities which they then apply when choosing wood for building resources such as fence posts.

Support staff provide integrated and seamless support to students during and outside of lessons to work with individuals or groups of students and ensure they understand their learning. They encourage students to take risks and try new challenges. As a result, students gain confidence and are often delighted with what they can now do.

In the most effective teaching sessions, instructors use questioning and assessment highly effectively for learning and to check on students' progress. They skilfully probe

students to reflect on previous lessons, which helps them to recall and apply their learning. However, in other sessions, instructors do not use questioning to help students develop their independent learning skills effectively. As a result, students cannot make the rapid progress in all subjects that they study.

Leaders and staff monitor students' progress towards their EHCP targets. However, leaders do not ensure that the smaller milestones in vocational learning and personal development are explicitly monitored so that students and staff can identify achievements and set incremental ongoing targets.

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

Leaders have created a very strong culture of safeguarding. The appropriately trained designated safeguarding lead keeps meticulous records, completes thorough individualised risk assessments, monitors concerns very closely, and has clear reporting mechanisms in place which keep students safe.

Leaders have ensured that they meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. They have risk assessed the curriculum, the setting carefully. Leaders have a good understanding of risks of radicalisation and extremism in their location and in those students' lives.

Students feel safe when at the college and most know how to stay safe. They know how to report concerns and trust staff to take forward any of their concerns.

Leaders carry out appropriate pre-employment checks on staff. However, as many staff are already known to them, they do not seek references to assure themselves of all prospective staff's backgrounds and safety in working with young people.

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