

Downs View Life Skills College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	146089
Name of lead inspector:	Viki Faulkner, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Downs View Life Skills College was inspected in May 2023. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement. The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Downs View Life Skills College (DVLSC) is an independent specialist college that was established in 2018. It was formerly part of Downs View School and College. DVLSC provides specialist education and support for young people aged 19 to 24 years of age. All learners study at entry level or below. The provision focuses on preparing them for independent living and/or employment. There are currently 32 learners attending the college. Learners have significant and complex learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autism. All students have education, health and care plans.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to improve governance arrangements so that trustees provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge to leaders and hold them to account for learners' behaviour and attitudes and safeguarding arrangements.

Significant progress

Leaders have taken highly effective action to strengthen governance. As a result, trustees provide clear and effective oversight of safeguarding. The new, highly experienced, safeguarding trustee meets frequently with leaders and managers to review staff records and procedures. Trustees provide appropriate challenge where they identify areas for improvement. For example, where historic information was missing from staff records, trustees questioned this. Leaders acted swiftly to update the records. Trustees make sure that leaders check that the staff they recruit are suitable to work with vulnerable adults.

Trustees provide effective scrutiny and constructive challenge to leaders at board meetings. Leaders produce high-quality board papers and financial reports which are made available a week in advance of meetings. As a result, trustees now have time to read papers and ask useful questions for clarification. Trustees benefit from helpful finance training which has improved their understanding of the college accounts. As a result, they feel confident to ask challenging questions. For example,

they challenged leaders about priority areas for spending before agreeing to a plan to refurbish aging parts of the site to improve resources for learners.

Trustees visit the college often to meet with staff and learners and visit lessons. This ensures they stay well-informed. Trustees recently reviewed the new behaviour and touch policies. They found these policies were being implemented effectively in classrooms. They also established that these are well understood by learners and staff. They shared this positive feedback at board meetings, reassuring the rest of the board.

What progress have leaders made to ensure that teachers and learning support assistants promote appropriate behaviours and reinforce healthy relationships, enabling learners to develop the professional boundaries that will help keep them safe at work and in the community.

Significant progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have put in place policies to ensure that learners' behaviour and the use of touch is managed very effectively. Leaders and managers have carefully identified how individual learners behave. They use this knowledge to put in place detailed behaviour support plans and touch profiles which are used well by staff to support learners. Staff understand the needs of their learners very well. They calmly manage individual learners' behaviours so that they do not disrupt learning. They use touch as a communication tool to make sure learners can achieve the tasks in the session. As a result, the environment in classrooms is calm and well-focused.

Staff intervene quickly and effectively to redirect any unwanted behaviours. They promote positive behaviours well, helping learners to develop professional boundaries. For example, learners who take visitors by both hands and are reluctant to let go are quickly reminded 'remember, we shake hands with one hand'. They understand this prompt and let go of their hands.

Leaders and managers track incidents of challenging behaviours well. The new behaviour lead analyses these records carefully to identify trends. Where they identify trends, they use this information to identify areas of improvement. For example, where learners demonstrate escalating incidents of unwanted behaviour linked to periods of illness, staff quickly adapt the behaviour management plans. They provide extra quiet 'time-out' which leads to significant reduction in aggressive behaviours.

What progress have leaders made to ensure that teachers and learning support assistants plan learning so that learners are sufficiently supported to process information.

Significant progress

Since the previous visit, leaders have taken rapid and highly effective steps to ensure that learners are now sufficiently supported to process information. They have appointed new staff, such as the behaviour lead and systematic instruction lead. These staff provide highly effective training for teachers and learning support assistants. As a result, staff now know how to break down tasks for learners to improve their understanding very well. They apply this learning in their teaching practice confidently. They use clear explanations to break down tasks carefully and help learners understand. They allow lots of time between giving an instruction and expecting a response. This enables learners to process instructions carefully and respond appropriately.

Teachers and learning support assistants work together to plan sessions effectively. Teachers make sure that learning support assistants understand lesson plans and are clear about their role in delivering them. As a result, learners enjoy consistent support to develop their understanding. Staff make sure learners have many opportunities to process information and apply their learning. For example, they provide time and physical stimulation appropriately to enable learners to reach out and point when making choices or answering questions. Staff use layering of repeated learning very well using familiar routines. This helps learners to practise skills such as tooth brushing and cooking. As a result, they learn and can remember how to use these skills in future.

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