

Lifebridge ASEND

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

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Name of lead inspector:	Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Armadale Road Bolton Greater Manchester BL3 4TP

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Lifebridge ASEND was inspected in January 2020. 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 addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Leaders have worked closely with parents and carers, employers and the local authority throughout the period of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic to support learners who were unable to attend the college because they were extremely clinically vulnerable.

Since the previous inspection, Lifebridge ASEND has moved premises. The college is now located close to the centre of Bolton, in Greater Manchester. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 34 learners, all with an education, health and care plan and for whom the college receives high-needs funding. Learners follow either the pathway to employment programme or the pathway to independence programme.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How well do leaders and managers use the outcomes from learners' assessments and education, health and care plans to plan challenging learning goals so that learners can achieve their long-term goals and ambitions?

Reasonable progress

The new leadership team has reviewed how the outcomes from learners' assessments and education, health and care plans are used to plan learners' programmes. Assessments of learners' starting points are now focused on two pathways, employability and independence. For example, assessments on the independence pathway include activities such as using appropriate oral and physical greetings, preparing drinks and meals, tying shoelaces, and personal care. Learners on employability pathways complete assessments of their skills for the workplace, for example developing the skills that learners need to move into jobs or volunteering in industries such as retail, catering or hospitality. Leaders and teachers now use the results of learners' assessments effectively to plan challenging and personalised learning programmes that help learners achieve their long-term goals and aspirations.

At the time of the previous inspection, the previous leadership team had prioritised the teaching of enrichment activities, such as French, to the detriment of the development of essential skills, such as English and mathematics. Learners' chosen pathways now incorporate the development of English and mathematics, which effectively support their skills for employment and for developing their independence.

Teachers review and set learners challenging learning goals every six weeks. Learners and their personal tutors review progress towards achieving learning goals every week. Teachers, teaching assistants, and parents and carers contribute to the monitoring and reviewing of learning goals by using, for example, photographs and written feedback. Learners monitor their own goals, such as when they review their performance after swimming classes. They identify which aspects of their goals they have achieved, what they did to achieve the goal and what they will move on to next.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that staff benefit from specific disability awareness training so that staff can provide learners with the support strategies they need to make the best possible progress? **Reasonable progress**

Staff report that, at the time of the previous inspection, they did not fully understand the individual needs of their learners and did not personalise support to meet these needs. Following the previous inspection, leaders worked swiftly and closely with staff to develop and implement a wide range of specific disability awareness training. Staff have benefited from training, including supporting learners who have epilepsy, visual and hearing impairments, Irlen syndrome and autism spectrum disorders. They now apply this learning in their teaching. For example, when learners expressed concerns about staff highlighting their visual impairments in lessons, staff used strategies such as enlarging the print on resources for all learners rather than just for the learners who have visual impairments.

Staff now provide learners with the support strategies they need to enable them to achieve their short-, medium- and long-term goals. For example, learners who experience difficulties in expressing feelings complete activities about 'What makes me who I am?' to explore feelings and emotions. Learners explain to staff which of their individual targets they are working towards. When learners become emotional during lessons, they are supported effectively by staff who listen to them and give them time and safe spaces to moderate their behaviour.

Leaders have plans in place for further specific disability training when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, for example supporting adults with Down's syndrome in employment.

To what extent have leaders strengthened the board of trustees so that it can provide support and effectively challenge leaders to improve the quality of education for learners?

Significant progress

Governance arrangements have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The board of trustees reviewed their roles and have now brought in new governors with more relevant experience. For example, they recently appointed a governor who has experience of working in and with the local community. The skills and experience of the new governor complements the roles and skills of existing trustees.

Following the previous inspection, trustees swiftly appointed a new leadership team. This has been instrumental in achieving improvements to the quality of learners' education. Trustees understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college because senior leaders give them frequent and accurate updates. For example, senior leaders provide trustees with six-weekly reports about learners' achievements and the progress they are making towards their goals. Trustees meet frequently with senior leaders. They set them clear and measurable targets for improvement, and they hold leaders to account for their actions and achievements.

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Store Street
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