

Rotherham Opportunities College

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

Unique reference number:	147317
Name of lead inspector:	Hayley Lomas, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Myplace St Ann's Road Rotherham S65 1PH

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Rotherham Opportunities College was inspected in December 2022. 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.

Themes

How much progress have tutors made in increasing their understanding of what learners can and cannot do and setting appropriate targets that support learners' progress and enable them to make as rapid progress as possible?

Reasonable progress

Tutors have reviewed the starting points of all learners. They have carefully assessed what learners can and cannot do in all key areas such as communication, life skills and personal and social development, as well as in subject areas such as mathematics and English. Tutors have also used a tool to assess and record accurately the starting points of learners with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. They use the information from these assessments to agree appropriate targets for learners that are recorded in their individual learning plans. Tutors, together with therapists, are in the process of developing the assessments to enhance further the accuracy of the information that they have about learners' starting points.

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have invested in new resources to support the admission and transition process for learners joining the college. They have appointed an admissions and transitions coordinator, whose role is to work with parents, carers and other providers to gather as much information as possible about potential learners. This information ensures that learners benefit from a supportive and smooth transition that enables them to make progress from their starting points.

Tutors and support staff have benefited from valuable training from external specialists in accurately identifying starting points for learners. These specialists continue to work with tutors to develop their skills and understanding further in this area.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that a range of therapeutic services are included in curriculum design and implementation?

Significant progress

Since the last inspection, leaders have substantially increased the number of therapists that they work with so that they can provide the best support for their learners. These include physiotherapists and art, speech and language, and occupational therapists. Therapists work closely with teachers and support staff to develop a range of resources and activities to meet learners' very specific needs. For example, learners who aspire to live independently receive intensive support from the physiotherapist and occupational therapist to enable them to use walkers instead of relying on their wheelchairs and are supported to be able to make drinks for themselves and manage personal hygiene routines effectively.

Leaders have invested heavily in dedicated and well-resourced facilities to meet the needs of learners who have very specific and complex needs. The creation of a dedicated therapeutic and sensory environment that provides learners with an individual space has enabled learners to make rapid progress in a very short period of time.

Teachers work together very closely with therapists to identify meaningful targets that ensure that learners can make progress and are able to retain and remember new learning. This includes working with the speech and language therapist to enhance their communication with learners, especially those who are nonverbal.

Therapists provide effective training and guidance to staff to develop their understanding of the difficulties that learners face. They provide staff with a range of strategies, tools and techniques to enable them to support learners well. Therapists work alongside staff to model different forms of communication, and all staff are confident users of Makaton. Staff are proud of the work that they have done to embed therapies thoroughly into the curriculum and set accurate targets.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that they accurately track and report to directors and governors the progress that learners make?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have worked effectively with external professionals to review the effectiveness of the governing body, and have taken proactive measures to ensure that governors have the skills and knowledge that they need to be effective in their roles. As a result of this review, they have recruited a team of experienced, knowledgeable and committed governors who understand the challenges of supporting learners with complex needs.

New governors visit the college frequently and receive detailed information about the quality of education that learners receive, which enables them to question leaders effectively in meetings. Governors' attendance at meetings is high.

Since the last inspection, leaders have intensified their use of their monitoring system and have supported staff to use it effectively. The system enables staff at all levels to track learners' progress accurately. However, staff are still developing their understanding of the system to enable them to become more confident users.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that learners benefit from learning about local risks and understand what is meant by consent and healthy relationships? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have engaged very successfully with the local authority and other external agencies to provide training and development for staff. This training has enabled staff to understand better the local risks prevalent in the areas where learners live.

Managers have extensively modified the way that personal and social development is taught. They have designed new resources and appointed a pastoral lead and pastoral support learning coaches for each of the five learning pathways. Learners are now able to talk confidently about risks and what they would do if they had concerns.

Leaders and managers have sourced external training and support for staff on the topics of consent and healthy relationships. As a result of the rapid changes made to the personal and social development curriculum, these topics are embedded earlier in the academic year, and learners are able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

Leaders and managers have worked very closely with speech and language therapists and other special educational needs providers. They commissioned a local art and drama group to ensure that the language and resources that they use to communicate challenging topics to learners are both age-appropriate and sensitive to learners' cognitive understanding. As a result, learners are now able to demonstrate sound levels of knowledge and understanding. For example, they understand the difference between being friends with someone and being their girlfriend or boyfriend.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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