

Inspection of Rotherham Opportunities College

Inspection dates:

6 to 8 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Rotherham Opportunities College is an independent specialist college. It provides education and support for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities who require specialist individualised programmes. The college operates from two sites in Rotherham. At the time of the inspection, there were 41 students enrolled on education programmes. Students follow one of five pathways. Six students were on the opportunity pathway, nine were on the bridging programme, 11 were on the employability programme, five were on the work ready programme, and there were 10 students on the internship programme, working with one of three employers.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students benefit from learning in an inclusive and calm learning environment where they are encouraged to engage and are often pushed beyond their comfort zone. Students respond by being aspirational and trying their best. They actively participate in the various activities offered to them, such as 'sing and sign', the Christmas pantomime, gardening and volunteering activities in the local community. They know that these activities will help them to gain future employment.

Staff know their students well and use individual support plans effectively to enable students to participate fully in learning. Support workers use negotiation strategies to gain cooperation from students who are feeling anxious. Staff also positively support parents and care givers in managing students' behaviour at home, conducting home visits and making referrals for extra support.

Students demonstrate very good behaviour and positive attitudes towards their learning, both in and out of the classroom. They take pride in their work and produce work of a good standard. They enjoy their time at college and are happy to share their experiences.

Students display high levels of respect when interacting with their peers and listen attentively to their teachers and job coaches. They are respectful of staff and visitors. Students are clear about what is expected of them and know that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.

Students attend well and arrive on time for their lessons. As students progress through the different programmes that the college offers, working towards work readiness, their attendance increases significantly.

Students feel safe at college and in the workplace. They know who to contact if they have any concerns and understand that staff will take action to ensure that they are safe and that their well-being is of paramount importance.

Too often, tutors set targets for students that are not specific enough and lack detail. This means that the progress that students make is not measured effectively, and teachers and managers do not have a clear oversight of what students can and cannot do, which limits their ability to intervene when students are not progressing quickly enough. As a result, too many students do not make rapid enough progress.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the monitoring visit, leaders have worked hard to improve many aspects of teaching and the support that they provide to their students, parents and carers. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by newly appointed managers. Together, they have challenged and supported staff in designing and developing a

curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of young people. They have also relocated to a more accessible building that is more conducive to learning. However, some of the procedures and practices implemented are still in their infancy, so it is too early to see the full impact.

In most instances, governors and directors do not focus their attention well enough on challenging leaders about the progress that students make and the quality of teaching and learning. Too often, meetings focus only on business matters, such as finance and accommodation. However, newly appointed governors with specialist interests and knowledge are beginning to provide effective support for leaders in improving their practices, such as in relation to safeguarding. Leaders have plans to increase the recruitment of new governors.

Leaders and managers have designed an inclusive curriculum that enables students to develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. There is a key focus on developing students' independence, confidence and self-esteem so they are well prepared for adulthood and employment.

Leaders and managers employ staff who care and want to work with students with high needs. Staff now benefit from an effective programme of training, which includes safeguarding, 'Prevent' duty, autism awareness, behaviour management, moving and handling, and Makaton. They gain a better understanding of how to write and develop the curriculum, set goals for students and track students' progress. Staff have the opportunity to improve and reflect on their own practice, which includes spending time with an educational psychologist to help them understand how they can help students and improve their own knowledge further. Staff are proud to work at Rotherham Opportunities College.

Leaders and managers have recently strengthened their processes to assure themselves of the quality of teaching and support offered to students. This includes having professional conversations with teaching staff to question them over the progress that students make and how they are using this information to inform planning. However, the monitoring of students' progress lacks rigour and consistency. Leaders rightly recognise this and have implemented new tracking systems, but it is too early to see the impact of these.

On the internship programme, staff use a variety of teaching and learning strategies to develop and reinforce students' knowledge and skills. Students on this programme develop key knowledge and skills, which they apply very effectively in the workplace. For example, job coaches use step-by-step demonstrations and topical discussions to develop students' understanding of how to clean work surfaces thoroughly using different cleaning products.

Support for communication is a high priority. Input from the recently appointed speech and language therapist is having a positive effect on the development of staff understanding of therapeutic and communication strategies. However, too often, staff do not use this understanding consistently when teaching.

Students receive a structured and varied programme of personal development topics, which they enjoy. They know the precautions to take to stay safe online. For example, they know not to disclose personal information to strangers or to send explicit images. Students recognise what 'mate crime' and 'hate crime' are and are confident that such activities are not tolerated in college. However, students do not have a well-informed understanding of the risks posed by extremist groups or about consent and how to have and maintain healthy relationships beyond friendship.

Staff make good use of learning resources to promote learning and engagement in lessons. Students benefit from using their own computers, and classrooms have interactive whiteboards that are utilised well.

Students on work experience benefit from frequent feedback from their manager and support staff, who discuss the standard of their work and their progress towards achieving their targets and long-term goals. Students feel encouraged to work more effectively following discussions with staff.

Students benefit from informative careers advice and guidance that enables them to understand the opportunities available, including further study and employment. As a result, most students are able to make informed choices about their next steps. They receive advice and guidance from a dedicated careers guidance officer and supported interns. They also receive frequent information from their job coaches about the job opportunities available to them at their current and other local employers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have developed a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that take account of legislation and guidelines. These policies have been adapted into an easy-to-read format that enables students to understand what college staff will do to keep them safe.

Leaders and managers have a very clear and effective structure for managing safeguarding concerns. When concerns are raised, staff take rigorous and swift actions to record them and follow them up appropriately. They seek support from external agencies, such as social workers, medical staff and therapists, when required, to ensure that students are safe.

Leaders and managers adhere strictly to safe recruitment procedures. Staff hold current Disclosure and Barring Service checks, and managers check staff certificates and the eligibility to work in the country. Once staff are in place, they receive appropriate mandatory training and follow college safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty procedures thoroughly.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that directors and governors provide effective challenge and support for leaders and managers about the progress that students make and the quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that tutors accurately identify what students can and cannot do and set appropriate targets that support students' progress and enables them to make as rapid progress as possible.
- Ensure that the different therapeutic services offered are included in curriculum design and implementation.
- Continue to develop effective oversight of the quality of education in order to track students' progress accurately.
- Ensure that students benefit from learning about local risks and understand what is meant by consent and healthy relationships.

Provider details

Unique reference number	147317
Address	Myplace Rotherham St Ann's Road Rotherham S65 1PH
Contact number	01709 242585
Website	www.theroc.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Dr Perdita Mousley
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of employability and project search, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Hayley Lomas, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rachel Angus	His Majesty's Inspector
Neil Clark	Ofsted Inspector
Angie Fisher	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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