

Report summary

Best practice in safeguarding in colleges

The framework for the inspection of further education and skills, which has been used for the inspection of colleges from September 2009, has a strong emphasis on keeping learners safe. Two judgements are made: first about how safe learners feel as part of evaluating outcomes for learners; and second, the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, as part of the leadership and management judgement. This survey of best practice is based on visits to 14 of the 15 colleges that received an outstanding grade for the leadership and management of their safeguarding arrangements in 2009/10. In almost all of these colleges, the grade awarded to learners' feelings about safety was also outstanding. The colleges awarded outstanding grades included four general further education colleges, five sixth form colleges, five independent specialist colleges catering for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and one land-based further education college.

The key features that contributed to each college's outstanding provision were replicated in almost all the colleges visited. All the colleges had given the highest priority to ensuring that their safeguarding provision was of high quality and supported learning. Senior managers had taken a strong lead, with responsibility and accountability for safeguarding arrangements identified clearly and at a senior level. Managers' scrutiny of safeguarding practices was thorough, with frequent and purposeful monitoring and reporting. Good-quality training resulted in a workforce that was confident and well equipped to promote safeguarding in a sensible and proportionate way. Safeguarding expertise had been developed well in key managers, including through work with a wide range of external organisations.

Staff knew learners well and made effective use of risk assessments to keep learners safe. The curriculum was used well to promote safety, in part by exposing learners to the risks that they were likely to encounter in their working lives and educating them about how to deal with them, as well as increasing their knowledge of safety matters. Education about internet safety had been given high priority with recognition of the need to keep reviewing this aspect in the light of ever-changing technology. A 'zero tolerance' approach to lapses in safety precautions was reinforced effectively at all levels of management. Site security arrangements at all the colleges had received careful consideration and were effective while maintaining

an open and friendly environment. Safe practices were promoted well in lessons and other learning settings. Arrangements for security checks on staff were robust and comprehensive. Managers used a range of information sources well to keep up to date with legislative changes.

Learners in all the colleges visited spoke highly of the commitment of staff to ensure their safety and of how much they valued this. Individual learners gave good examples of how staff had helped them to develop a better awareness of their own safety. Learners generally had a good understanding of what constituted safeguarding in its broadest sense. They reinforced the view that safeguarding was promoted effectively in their colleges. However, it was noticeable that formal consultation of learners about safeguarding arrangements was a less strong feature than other aspects. Safeguarding provision was evaluated accurately and effectively through self-assessment, although there was a tendency for this to be based on compliance with legal requirements and records of the safeguarding provision that was in place, rather than a clear evaluation of the impact of actions taken to ensure learners' safety.

Key findings

- The most notable feature of all the colleges visited was how each had developed, prioritised and embedded a culture of putting learners' safety first and developing responsibility in learners. By making the best use of every educational opportunity, learners took responsibility for their own and others' safety.
- The promotion of safeguarding was led well by principals and senior managers, with strong support from governors and trustees. Equally, the culture had permeated all parts of the college's workforce. A sound policy basis and good awareness of legislative requirements underpinned the culture.
- Thorough safeguarding training for all staff along with key managers' highly developed expert knowledge were key features of colleges' strategies to safeguard learners. Training coverage extended from support staff, such as cleaners and security guards, to governors and designated officers.
- Colleges also ensured that safeguarding arrangements were fully in place where learners worked on employers' premises as part of their courses.
- Managers and teachers had identified vulnerable groups of learners who needed extra care to ensure their safety, and made sure that providing this care was a priority. Recording systems were used effectively to hold important information about individual learners which, although bound by confidentiality in some cases, were easily accessible and kept current.
- Strong and extensive collaboration had taken place with a wide range of external agencies to support safeguarding. The range included many highly specialised organisations such as those with expertise in supporting learners with complex learning difficulties or in areas such as road safety.

- The curriculum was used highly effectively to make learners think and act more safely. High quality resources were available to teachers to lead lessons on safety topics and the coverage was relevant, topical, and often delivered by specialists.
- Colleges used a range of effective approaches to ensure that learners developed a sound knowledge of safe use of the internet, and monitored developments in this fast changing area.
- Safe working practices were promoted well in lessons and in other ways, for example through practical work in realistic work environments such as kitchens or stable yards. Thorough risk assessments were an essential component of this best practice. In a number of cases, learners took an active part in undertaking risk assessments, which also served as a highly effective preparation for their future work.
- A 'zero-tolerance' approach to lapses in enforcing safe practices was widespread and reinforced through lesson observations and regular scrutiny of working practices by managers.
- Site security arrangements varied from college to college, but all were based on risk assessments of the potential harm related to each site. For several colleges, this included assessing the risks at a number of different sites. Adaptations to existing accommodation or design features in new buildings had been carefully planned to encompass safety features.
- Security staff were used in most colleges. In particular, their role had been carefully designed to provide friendly but firm safety advice and protection arrangements alongside high levels of customer service.
- Arrangements to undertake appropriate security checks on staff were rigorous and exemplary in their thoroughness. Managers responsible showed a high level of awareness of more recent legal requirements, such as making referrals to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. Single central records held in each college were accurate and comprehensive, and clear senior management overview and accountability had been identified. In many cases, records were linked to other data systems which held relevant additional information about staff, such as training records.
- Recruitment procedures included checks on potential employees' attitudes to children, young people and vulnerable adults. Job descriptions included essential characteristics of positive attitudes towards safeguarding.

Main report published 11 April 2011
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100239

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No. 100239