

ESPA College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

ESPA College is part of Education and Services for People with Autism, a limited company with charitable status that provides a range of services for people with autism. The college provides for day and residential learners, aged 16 to 25 years, from within the region and nationally. There are currently 86 learners. The college is based across three sites in Sunderland and Newcastle. The college's mission is to provide "a high quality, autism specific, educational experience to enable students to maximise their full potential for future life, well-being and work." The organisation is currently in the process of recruiting a new principal to take over from the acting principal, who is due to leave the college in July 2012.

The college, inspected in 2010, was judged to be good, with outstanding procedures for safeguarding. This monitoring visit focuses on the aspects which were judged to be in need of further improvement.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

To what extent has the college improved the analysis of data in contributing to quality improvement action planning? **Reasonable progress**

Since the inspection, the college has taken effective measures to improve the use of data across the organisation. Staff have a clearer understanding of how to use data to evaluate the success of the provision. For example, an analysis of learners' success on courses leading to qualifications led to changes in the curriculum and the introduction of alternative courses where this was appropriate. The college has also revised its curriculum in response to analysis of the changing needs of its learners, particularly an increase in those with more complex conditions. In the current year, the college has introduced changes to the use of baseline assessment data in order to improve the setting of targets against which learners' progress can be measured. The college is aware of the need to review further the clarity of targets within the revised individual learning plans. The college has improved the use of data in quality reports. The reports now have smarter targets and clearer timescales, against which regular monitoring takes place.

Outcomes for learners

To what extent has the college sustained good outcomes for learners? **Significant progress**

Learners continue to make good progress at the college. Of the forty students who left the college in 2010/11 over 80% continued in education, training or supported employment. This includes a small number of students who gained places at

university. Success rates on accredited courses are generally high. Students make very good progress in developing their independence. Their increasing confidence enables them to take greater responsibility in practical activities and the organisation of their daily lives. Learners make progress in their understanding of appropriate behaviour and how to achieve this. They make significant gains in their ability to travel independently during their time at college. Students contribute very well to the local community through fundraising and raising awareness of autism. For example, the Autism 4 Heroes project uses performing arts to enable students to develop a range of enterprise and personal skills, which they then showcase at a range of community venues.

Quality of Provision

How much progress has the college made in evaluating the quality of tutorials?

Significant progress

Since the inspection the college has undertaken a thorough review of its tutorial processes. The views of learners, as well as staff, are used well in contributing to this process. The revised policy put in place following the review makes much clearer the purpose of tutorials and their aims and objectives. As a result of this, individual and group tutorials are now planned well to meet the specific needs of different learners. The sharing of information and good practice amongst tutors has improved significantly, and this is having a beneficial effect on the support plans in place for students. Learners' feedback on tutorials is more positive and attendance at these sessions has improved. Systems are now in place to monitor the effectiveness of tutorials. Formal observations of sessions take place as part of the college's monitoring of its teaching and learning strategy. In addition, a tutor co-ordinator post has been established on all college sites to support staff in delivering effective tutorials and also to carry out regular informal monitoring visits.

Leadership and management

What further improvements have been made to the lesson observation process since the inspection, in particular to focus on the extent to which learning has taken place?

Reasonable progress

Following the inspection, the college recognised that its lesson observation process focussed too heavily on teacher input rather than the learning taking place. Work took place with staff to agree criteria on what constitutes good or better lessons, and observations now focus more clearly on the progress students are making in the lessons. College records show that some observers are more skilled than others at recording evidence of this progress. Actions identified for improvement following observations are being followed up more systematically through professional development reviews, with re-observations taking place where necessary to gauge improvement. Joint lesson observations that took place during the monitoring visit

showed the college to have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning. The college judges over 80% of its lessons to be good or better, but recognises that in a minority of lessons learning outcomes are still not sufficiently clear.

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