

# Derwen College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 133173

**Name of lead inspector:** Susan Preece HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 19 January 2010

**Type of provider:** Independent specialist college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Derwen College is an independent residential further education college set on a large campus located in the village of Gobowan, two miles from Oswestry. The college provides further education for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most of who are aged between 19 – 25 years. Learners are enrolled from all parts of England and Wales; 206 are funded by the Learning and Skills Council and 49 are funded by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) Welsh Assembly Government.

The college was judged to be outstanding at the previous inspection in May 2006 and was awarded Beacon status in June 2007. The college's mission states that 'Derwen College is committed to promoting, through personalised learning, the vocational, educational, personal and social development of young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities'. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

**What is the provider's capacity to make and sustain improvements? How effective is self-assessment and improvement planning?**

**Significant progress**

The process of self-assessment is thorough and very well managed. The detailed self-assessment report (SAR), which is well aligned to the new common inspection framework, is written clearly with judgements based on data and robust evidence. The college has one overall quality improvement plan with clear action points, performance measures, targets and clearly identified staff responsibilities. Senior managers regularly monitor the effectiveness of the quality improvement plan. The college has made significant progress in addressing the key issues identified in the last SAR. The management team and governors demonstrate a very good capacity for improvement. The comprehensive quality cycle, including curriculum reviews and teaching and learning observations programme, promotes improvement at each stage of planning. The rigorous observation programme is an integral part of the quality cycle. Opportunities for learners to gain national awards have increased since the previous inspection especially on entry level courses. There is a high level of attainment in non-accredited learning, especially in communication and independent living skills. The SAR judges that teaching and learning are good and the college has

developed comprehensive plans to bring about further improvement. There has been significant progress in the embedding of functional skills throughout the curriculum.

**Outcomes for learners**

<b>How well is the college continuing to improve outcomes for learners since the last visit?</b>	<b>Significant progress</b>
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Learners achieve well at Derwen. The college exceeds its target for learners’ external accreditation with 91% of learners gaining full or unit awards. Very good use is made of a variety of accreditation opportunities to ensure that learners of all abilities gain appropriate awards. Progression routes are good: in 2009 65% of leavers gained employment; this represents a 7% improvement from 2008. Destination data is used effectively to improve provision. For example, following an analysis of data that showed many learners find employment in catering, the college has increased vocational opportunities by establishing a third catering outlet, Tiffins café, which is used by the public. The college has recently improved its facilities on-site to provide a wider range of work experience opportunities such as an extensive greenhouse and a farm shop, this has enabled learners to continue work when the weather is poor. These excellent facilities are well used to provide more able learners with paid employment at the weekends. Very good use is made of the Bradbury Centre to extend information technology skills. Learners receive very good preparation for employment and independent living, and where relevant, this valuable work is accredited. A wide range of multi-disciplinary assessment outcomes are successfully used to identify learners who need extra support and to provide interventions such as behavioural therapies and focus groups. The college has comprehensive systems for developing and tracking the impact of these interventions.

**Quality of provision**

<b>How well has the college developed its learner involvement strategy?</b>	<b>Significant progress</b>
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There is a comprehensive learner involvement strategy and action plan. This includes clear aims, responsibilities and an analysis of learner involvement to date. Staff use the technology in the Bradbury Centre well in order to inform learners about the results of surveys, student council meetings and union meetings. Learners are encouraged to use the Derwen blog to find out about and comment on college policies and initiatives such as the disability equality scheme. They are fully involved in the college’s decision making processes such the health and safety committee, staff recruitment, improving teaching and learning and helping new learners settle into college life. Learners involved in the student council and the national union of students (NUS) develop a very good understanding of the democratic process and

understand secret ballots, confidentiality and financial management. These learners use e-mail to set agendas and organise meetings. Meetings are well recorded both written and in a Makaton format. Learners commented that they were very proud to be on the student council and members of the NUS. Learners' views are regularly collected and well used to bring about significant impact on the development of the college's provision.

**Leadership and Management**

**How well has the college responded to its legislative requirements with regard to equality and diversity legislation?**

**Significant progress**

The self-assessment process accurately identifies that the college has made significant progress with regard to improvements in the promotion of equality and diversity. All staff have received training in this area. Learner achievements are well monitored according to gender, disability and ethnicity and there is no difference according to groups. Equality impact assessments, together with associated action plans, are well managed. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed. Recruitment policies and practice are successful in encouraging learners from a wide range of backgrounds; 10% are of minority ethnic heritage. The ethnicity profile of the college workforce (7.3%) exceeds that of the local community (under 2% at the last census). Staff include relevant activities and material in their work with learners and equality and diversity issues are incorporated effectively into session plans. Learners are well represented on the equality and diversity committee and they have recently produced a questionnaire and video about access, the outcome of which will be analysed by the learners and result in an action plan to inform the student council. The college has devised a new Makaton symbol for equality and diversity. This has been successfully used to increase awareness of equality and diversity issues for all learners.

**How effectively does the provider monitor the effectiveness of its arrangements to promote health and safety?**

**Significant progress**

Arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of procedures to promote health and safety are very good. The college has a very good record of monitoring risk through the health and safety committee, with an annual audit by an external adviser and regular feedback and analysis of accidents. Job and person specifications appropriately include health and safety elements. There are excellent links with a range of external organisations. Learners and staff are provided with a high level of health and safety training. Over 87% of leavers gain a recognised qualification in health and safety, most achieving a level 1 award. Detailed, comprehensive individual and generic risk assessments are conducted at all levels of the learners

programme. Nominated health and safety staff are relevantly qualified to a high level; for example 94% have achieved a level 3 award and the external advisor and trainer has achieved a level 6 qualification from the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH). The college places a strong emphasis on the promotion of health and safety throughout the curriculum. The safeguarding of all learners is given high priority and all staff are regularly well trained and the range of vetting and recruitment information is collated and effectively monitored.

**How well does the college cater for learners' individual language needs, including learners with English as an additional language and those for who Welsh is the first language?**

**Significant progress**

The college continues to make significant progress for the 20% of learners who are Welsh speaking and/or who live in Wales. There is a Welsh club which gives learners very good access to the Welsh language and culture. This club is also attended by a few English learners. Projects include famous Welsh people and the introduction of signage to the residential settings. Learners can use their Welsh language skills with Welsh speaking staff who are clearly identified by photographs in reception and by badges. However, despite very good access to information from the internet, some learners report that they have limited access to books, magazines and newspapers in the Welsh language.

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