

Arden College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 131935

Name of lead inspector: Susan Preece HMI

Last day of inspection: 19 October 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: 40 Derby Road
Southport
Merseyside
PR7 0TZ

Telephone number: 01704 534 433

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Arden is one of three independent, specialist, residential further education (FE) colleges owned by Craegmoor. It is based in Southport and provides education for 54 learners, all of whom have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are 26 residential and 28 day learners; 70% are male. The main teaching accommodation is located on one site in the town centre. Arden runs a café, hairdressing salon and a horticulture department and it makes substantial use of its residential homes and the local community for teaching and learning. The range of national awards offered include catering, horticulture, conservation, hairdressing and preparing for employment. The primary goal of Arden College is to help people lead independent and fulfilled lives and its mission is to enable young people to develop the confidence and skills for the next stage in their life. The college was inspected in April 2010 and was graded satisfactory for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve and quality of provision. Outcomes for learners were judged to be good, but leadership and management were inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in using quality improvement arrangements more effectively, so that managers can identify weaknesses at an early stage and take swift action to tackle them?

Reasonable progress

Quality improvement processes are more coherent and are beginning to bring about improvements in teaching and learning. The college has set clear strategic targets and objectives and senior managers monitor them regularly. Management posts have been reviewed and staff appointed to the new positions; lines of responsibility are clearer and the new management structure provides better support for staff. Self-assessment is comprehensive and realistic. Data are routinely collated and are now being used effectively to bring about improvements. Cross-college working groups regularly review current practices in order to improve them and to share good practice. Craegmoor has demonstrated high levels of commitment to bringing about the required improvements. A director now has management oversight and she is supported by educationally based business and quality development managers. This structure has only recently been implemented and its impact has yet to be evaluated, but initial indications are positive. Financial management links with the parent company have improved significantly with the introduction of regular monthly budget reviews and yearly budget setting meetings. The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) learner contracts are more effectively and regularly monitored by the admissions coordinator.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving learners' outcomes since the last inspection?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress since the last inspection in improving achievement. Learners from all groups make good progress against targets and in achieving qualifications. There is no significant difference in performance between groups. The achievement of full awards for externally recognised qualifications has improved from 32% in 2008/09 to 61% in 2009/10. The success rate for leavers taking functional skills mathematics at entry level was 75% in 2009/10; this award was not offered in previous years. Amendments to the curriculum, continued emphasis on, and development of, recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA), and increased access to a range of external awards have resulted in improvements in learners' attainment. The achievement of targets set on individual learning plans has been maintained at 85%, similar to the previous year, and subject target achievement remains high at 91%. Learners continue to make very good progress in communication and independence skills. They have good opportunities to improve their work-related skills in realistic work environments. Destination data indicate on-going improvements. In 2009/10, of those learners leaving college, 56% went into training or FE, 31% moved onto paid or voluntary work and the remainder accessed day services.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in supporting teachers to develop stimulating and challenging lessons and to ensure that teaching has a demonstrable impact on learners' progress?

Reasonable progress

Increased training opportunities and more structured line management groups are helping teachers to use a range of strategies in lessons. The start of the college day has been significantly improved; disruption has been minimised and learning opportunities enhanced. More learners travel independently to venues such as Café Arden and the performing arts group in Leyland Road Church. The quality of tutorials is more carefully monitored so that they are now planned to match learners' needs. Teachers' pay scales have been brought into line with those of general FE colleges and this has enabled Arden to recruit more experienced and well-qualified teachers. The accuracy of the teaching and learning observation process has improved; outcomes are rigorously scrutinised both internally and with the use of external specialists. The process is now more robust to better support learners' progress and the performance management of teachers. Teachers have more opportunities to share best practice through team teaching and they receive further support and guidance from their line managers. Partnerships have developed such as those with Edge Hill University and the Learning Beacon Centre, and access to technology has improved.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the promotion of equality and diversity throughout all aspects of the curriculum? Reasonable progress

A higher priority has been given to the promotion of equality and diversity within lessons. Staff have received a significant amount of training to ensure that equality and diversity are promoted throughout the college. Learners are well supported and are appropriately encouraged to celebrate their religious beliefs. Cultural diversity is valued and promoted; the college uses the cultural calendar to celebrate events that naturally occur throughout the year such as Chinese New Year and St David's Day. Learners are encouraged to participate in a wide range of cultural activities within college and the local community. Since the last inspection, learners have visited a Buddhist Temple, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, a synagogue and another specialist college for learners with more complex needs. Involvement with the local community is helping to educate the public and raise their expectations of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff and learners are working towards gaining 'Investors in Diversity' status. An equality and diversity steering group has been established but it is much too early to judge the impact of its actions. Learners develop a greater awareness of equality and diversity through induction activities and a range of accessible policies. This is reinforced through tutorials and inclusive displays around the college.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0800 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 0800 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010