

Homefield 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

Homefield College was established in 1987 to provide independent residential provision for people with autistic spectrum disorders and/or learning difficulties. The organisation became a registered charity in June 2006, following the establishment of a Board of Trustees. In 1996, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) began funding learners to attend the college on two or three-year residential courses. The main college building is on a residential estate in the large village of Sileby, which is six miles south of Loughborough. Some learning takes place in enterprise outlets, one of which is in the centre of Loughborough.

During the last nine years, Homefield College has broadened its provision to include day places. In the current year the Young Peoples Learning Authority (YPLA) funds 41 learners, of whom 24 are residential and 17 are day learners. The college's learners are young people with complex needs, including those with autistic spectrum conditions and communication and learning difficulties. A minority display challenging behaviour. The majority of learners are male, and around a third is from minority ethnic communities.

The college was inspected in 2008, and inspectors judged all aspects good. This monitoring visit focuses on the following themes.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to maintain effective self-assessment and quality improvement processes since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

Managers have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for further development. Inspectors found a good match between their findings during the visit and judgements made by the college managers. However, the overall college self-assessment report is too descriptive, and links between different aspects of the quality improvement processes are not always clear. For example, the quality improvement plan did not include a section on actions taken to improve teaching and learning. Staff discuss self-assessment at team meetings. Managers have substantive plans to develop staff confidence in the production of self-assessment reports for their own area of responsibility. Since the last inspection, improvements in reports to the board have enabled trustees to monitor more effectively the progress of actions to raise standards. In addition, the college has improved its collection and use of the views of learners, parents and carers, and other stakeholders. Students speak enthusiastically of how well staff listen to them and take account of their comments. Parents and carers are very positive about their experience of the college.

Outcomes for learners

To what extent has the college maintained good achievement of personal, communication and work skills by learners?

Reasonable progress

Students continue to make good progress at the college, particularly in the development of independent living skills and their ability to communicate with others. Students display a marked improvement in their behaviour and confidence when measured against their starting points on joining the college. They also develop greater independence in carrying out personal care, and everyday domestic tasks. As a result of this, progression into independent or supported living arrangements at the end of college programmes is good. Since the last inspection, the college has introduced more opportunities for students to develop work skills, where appropriate. Many students benefit from work placements in the college's shops and cafes, one of which includes an e-retail enterprise, and with employers. The college recognises this is an area to develop further, in particular links with national companies to help students continue in independent or supported work when they leave college and return home. Placements have allowed students to develop basic awareness in a range of areas, including office skills, food hygiene and cooking, customer service and team working. Planned changes to the curriculum for September 2011 are intended to allow students to specialise more, in line with their particular strengths and interests.

Quality of Provision

What progress has the college made to improve the monitoring of lessons since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

The college has improved the monitoring of teaching and learning since the last inspection. In 2009/10, managers identified a dip in the quality of a minority of teaching due to staff gaining promotion and their replacements being less experienced teachers. Effective action to resolve this problem has raised the standard of teaching in the current year. Managers observe teachers and support staff regularly and a programme of staff development activities focusing on teaching and learning is in place. In addition, peer observation allows staff to share best practice. Following observation of their lessons, teachers receive detailed feedback and a good level of support to help them improve further. Analysis of the overall findings from observations is shared with staff as part of the college's strategy to increase the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to maintain strong partnerships that benefit learners?

Significant progress

Since the last inspection, the college has improved further the strong links it has with a range of partners. Managers work well with the local authority, schools and funding bodies in the development of programmes to meet the needs of students. This has resulted in an increase in the number of places for day students and the acquisition of additional housing to help students progress to semi-independent living at the end of their college programme. Links with further education colleges enable Homefield to provide flexible course packages based around individual need. The college works closely with other independent specialist colleges. These links enable students to practise skills they have learned at Homefield in a less familiar environment, which helps them to understand how they can apply their skills in a variety of settings. Links with the local community are excellent and enable students to participate confidently in everyday activities including shopping and social activities such as joining a youth club. To develop further its links with employers, the college has appointed a job coach. It is too early to see the full impact of this, but work with this year's leavers is proving effective at linking them with opportunities within their home area.

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