

# Freeman College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 132002

**Name of lead inspector:** Elaine Clinton HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 23 May 2012

**Type of provider:** Independent specialist college

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## **Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Freeman College is an independent specialist college situated in the centre of Sheffield. The college is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust. It provides up to 100 placements for full-time residential students and day education for non-residential students. All students, who are aged from 16 to 25, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college provides a holistic approach to all aspects of education through arts, crafts, commerce, agriculture, skills for living, nutrition, and the environment. Freeman College contracts with the Education Funding Agency to provide programmes in foundation learning.

The college was last inspected in May 2010. Outcomes for learners, quality of provision, and leadership and management were judged to be good. Safeguarding was judged to be outstanding and equality and diversity satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

<b>What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the last inspection?</b>	<b>Reasonable Progress</b>
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The college’s self-assessment report is accurate and analytical, providing a good insight into the college’s strengths and areas for improvement. The new structure for staff meetings provides a useful process to ensure that all staff are more closely involved in, and responsible for, monitoring and reviewing progress against all aspects of the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. The use of data to support judgements is more secure because managers have a better understanding of how to use this information. Targets are more specific and meaningful to staff. Data analysis, evaluation and target-setting for equality and diversity are now established. Senior managers ensure that they receive regular reports of students’ participation and achievement and monitor actions taken to address any issues. The college is currently reviewing the way it analyses the recruitment of staff and students to ensure more consistency in reporting and subsequent action planning. Teaching and support staff are developing students’ understanding of diversity through reflecting on daily living and learning, the impact of which is included in the regular equality and diversity reports. As a result of this, all staff are clearer about their role in achieving targets and they talk knowledgeably about the progress being made towards their achievement.

#### **Outcomes for learners**

<b>What progress has been made in improving outcomes and students’ progress through the better setting and using of learning targets in lessons?</b>	<b>Significant Progress</b>
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The college has very effectively introduced a range of new foundation and higher-level programmes, which are successfully enabling more students to achieve qualifications and progress. Targets are used more effectively at all stages of the students' experience. A new, more rigorous interview process has an excellent focus on the longer-term goals and ambitions for students, with a specific emphasis on starting with the end aspiration clearly in sight. As a consequence of this, and a much more rigorous induction, targets are more personal, individual and meaningful to students. Very good use is made of targets to plan and reinforce learning in the classroom and also in residential settings. Individual action plans clearly identify what a learner needs to do to achieve and highlight any potential barriers to learning and how these may be overcome. Increasing numbers of students are achieving their full qualification or learning goals and all students achieve some level of success. Increasing numbers of students are achieving qualifications at entry level and foundation level. Many students were able to talk about the impact the college is having on helping them to achieve their long- and short-term goals.

### Quality of Provision

**What progress has been made in improving the integration of literacy and numeracy to ensure students make better progress in these subjects? What progress has been made in ensuring that the observation of teaching and learning is bringing about improvements in literacy and numeracy integration?**

**Reasonable Progress**

Assessment of students' literacy and numeracy ability levels is now central to their admission assessment. Feedback from detailed observations of students during their first three days at college is providing staff with more specific information of the literacy and numeracy needs and abilities of new students. This detailed assessment, supported by a new core-skills feedback form, is helping staff to plan lessons that more effectively support the development of literacy and numeracy. Importantly, it is ensuring that support, and teaching and learning are meeting the needs of students from the start of the programme. Staff training is enabling teachers to have a better understanding of the skills of students who are working at entry level and, consequently, they are able to plan and develop more specific lessons.

Arrangements to observe teaching and learning have been refined and now place a greater emphasis on students' experiences. They are providing staff with clearer information on what they need to do to improve, with a specific emphasis on the embedding of literacy and numeracy in all learning. The college is currently in the process of developing peer observations with other colleges to increase the rigour and accuracy of the observation process.

## **Leadership and Management**

**What progress has been made to ensure comprehensive and sustained succession planning, develop collaborative and partnership working to benefit students, and secure good value for money?**

**Significant Progress**

Organisational developments are subject to careful budgetary analysis and an excellent understanding of local and national needs and priorities. Staff are actively encouraged to seek promotion, gain qualifications and access further learning opportunities from within the college. The changes resulting from the forthcoming retirement of the current principal are being carefully managed through the appointment of a principal designate who is actively leading the college, supported by the current principal. The impact of recent changes in government and funding priorities on the college is being managed particularly successfully. The focus is on managing change from a position of strength and on the benefits that further change will bring. Frequent and honest communication is keeping staff fully informed and involved in the changes. It is very evident that the commitment to continuous improvement is a high priority for all staff. The high regard in which the college is held in the community is very effectively enabling it to continue to develop and change. For example, it is working with the local authority to develop shared provision and is supporting increasing numbers of students to access learning both in the college and in the wider non-specialist further education sector.

**What progress has been made in maintaining and further improving safeguarding arrangements that were judged to be outstanding at the last inspection?**

**Significant Progress**

The college has taken significant action to ensure that safeguarding arrangements remain outstanding. The appointment of a learning disabilities nurse in the last 12 months has significantly strengthened safeguarding arrangements. Their central location and role in the college provides students with an excellent source of discussion and support. The college has rightly recognised the importance not only of keeping its students safe but of ensuring that they are clear about the possible impact of some of their actions. Consequently, numerous sessions, themed weeks and integrated activities continually reinforce personal responsibility. Outstanding support is given to students who are uncertain about their sexuality, enabling them to make safe and secure decisions. Excellent, long-standing partnerships with the local police and other organisations provide prompt support where concerns are raised by students about actions that have implications either for their own safety or for the safety of others. Extremely thorough current risk assessments continue to ensure the safety of staff, students, host families and visitors.

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