

St Martin's Centre (St Rose's School)

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 139250

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Last day of inspection: 4 March 2015

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

St Martin's Centre is an independent specialist college of further education for young adults (19–25) with physical and learning disabilities. Established in 2013 by the trustees (The English Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Siena), the college began taking students in September 2013. It is a Catholic College, which welcomes students from all faiths and none. The students all have physical disabilities and communication difficulties, most have severe or profound learning difficulties and complex medical needs. At present all students work at or below level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework.

Students come from Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire, and Bristol. Some students are fortnightly residential, others are day students with access to the respite services provided by St Martin's. At the time of the monitoring visit, no students had completed their programmes.

Themes

Outcomes

How successful is the college in enabling all students to achieve their learning goals, prepare for adult life and progress on to suitable and sustainable destinations? How well do education, residential and therapeutic staff work together to improve the outcomes for individual students?

Students make good progress towards achieving their learning goals. Students with significant communication difficulties make very good use of specialist technology to communicate. For example, students with little or no verbal communication and severely restricted physical movement are learning to control computers, communicate and interact with their environment using eye-tracking systems. Others are becoming very skilled at using the specialist software on their tablet computers to make choices, give information and hold discussions.

The good collaboration between education, therapeutic and residential staff improves the outcomes for students. Following detailed and comprehensive assessments of students' skills, speech therapists devise individual programmes to develop and improve communication. Education and residential staff implement these programmes effectively with guidance from the specialists. The use of massage to help students relax and improve their muscle tone increases their ability to maintain concentration and learn effectively.

Students develop good independence skills, relative to their starting points. Residential students benefit from some staff having a dual residential and

educational role, enabling them to reinforce learning in and out of college. Where appropriate, students take greater responsibility for their actions and have more involvement in their care and daily living activities.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

How well do assessments ensure that students' starting points are clearly identified, and that learning plans are sufficiently personalised and challenging? How effective is the recording, reviewing and planning of learning?

Staff conduct detailed and thorough initial assessments of students' skills and educational standards. The assessments provide a clear picture of the needs of each individual, and identify their primary learning goals. The more detailed goals in the person-centred learning plans are generally appropriate and achievable. However, some goals lack detail and are hard to measure, for instance those which state that the student will be involved in their own exercise programme, or will develop skills for everyday life, including managing their own money and cooking.

The external work placements and attendance at other colleges are highly valued by students, broadening their horizons and exposing them to a wider world many had not previously experienced. For example, one student with a passionate interest in politics is extending his knowledge by attending the politics A-level class at a local sixth form college; a second is learning about horticulture at a local school; and a third student is developing good customer service and team-working skills through her placement in a local charity shop. In a minority of cases, staff do not record the achievements made by students in these settings sufficiently well, and do not closely link these achievements to progress records in individual plans.

The management and direction of teaching assistants require further development. Teaching assistants are skilled, have good experience and are sensitive to the needs of students. However, teachers do not always make clear in lesson plans and other documentation what is expected or required of the teaching assistants.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

How well do leaders and managers ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are of a high standard and meet the diverse needs of students? How effective is curriculum planning in meeting the current and future needs of students? How effective are safeguarding arrangements?

Leaders and managers have high expectations and reinforce high standards throughout the college. The college teachers are relatively new to their roles and are developing their skills with support from the head of learning. Managers' observations of teaching and learning are detailed, developmental, and have an appropriate emphasis on the experience of individual students.

The college culture of promoting dignity and self-worth for all students is apparent in all activities. The involvement of students in decision making across the college is developing well. Students are becoming more confident in contributing ideas and suggestions to life at St Martin's. The curriculum uses the local and wider communities effectively to give students experience of the locality, provide stimulation and prepare them for when they leave St Martin's. A very small minority of learning activities are not sufficiently age appropriate to support the transition into adult life.

Safeguarding meets statutory requirements. Safeguarding incidents or concerns are recorded and discussed appropriately at management team meetings. Since the college opened, no major safeguarding incidents or concerns have been reported. E-safety awareness training for students is appropriate for their individual needs. Staff benefit from good, regular, formal and informal training. As the needs of students become more complex, managers are providing specialist training or guidance activities for staff. For example, an increasing number of students have swallowing difficulties that can have a significant impact on learning and health. The successful management of this condition, known as dysphagia, increases the likelihood of students achieving their potential.

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