

New College Worcester

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 117064

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Last day of inspection: 14 June 2012

Type of provider: Independent Specialist College

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

New College Worcester is a non-maintained, residential special school for young people aged 11 to 19. A sixth form facility caters for learners aged 16 to 19. All learners are blind or partially sighted. A minority of learners have additional needs, including hearing impairment and Asperger's Syndrome. Of the 42 learners in the sixth form, three are funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

Learners study GCE A-level subjects with the majority progressing to higher education. A small number study foundation courses. Some learners enrol at the college from mainstream schools. In January 2012, the college completely restructured its governance arrangements with the creation of a single governing body.

The college received its last full Ofsted inspection in November 2008, at which time inspectors judged the college to be good for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management. This report focuses on the themes explored during this monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has been made in using data to support quality monitoring and self-assessment processes to enable the college to measure the impact of its actions more effectively?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college recognises that it needs to use headline data better and is in the process of strengthening its quality assurance procedures. The introduction of frequent mini-audit checks of provision is underway to ensure more coherent and consistent implementation in areas such as learner target setting and lesson planning. Recent changes to the structure of the governing body have provided a clearer focus on performance monitoring. The governing body is aware that the college needs to use key performance indicators much more effectively to review its overall progress and evaluate its impact.

The college self-assessment process remains well established. The self-assessment report is detailed and is more evaluative than at the previous inspection. Some evidence within the report however is too anecdotal. While in several cases comparisons are made to improvements on the previous year, references to three-year trends across all aspects of provision are under used. As a result, it is not always easy to for the college to demonstrate fully the longer-term impact of its work and the sustainability of improvements.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving learners' outcomes including ensuring their final destinations are sustainable?

Reasonable progress

The development of learners' broader outcomes, such as gains in self-confidence and improving the levels of learners' independence, remain a positive feature of the college. The majority of learners achieve their qualifications either fully or partially, although some achievement varies by subject and across qualifications. The college's self-assessment report recognises accurately the need to improve the consistency of individual learner target setting across the provision in order to better capture and measure all aspects of learners' progress, including incidental learning.

The self-assessment report also highlights accurately the need to better track learners' destinations formally over time. On leaving the college, information on learners' intended destinations is collated routinely and shows a high proportion of learners progress successfully to either further or higher education. The tracking of learners' destinations beyond this point, in order to measure how effectively the college is preparing learners to pursue their future choices, is currently less rigorous. In order to ensure learners' destinations are sustainable, a number of well-considered initiatives have been introduced. For example, a programme of lessons has been designed to help learners develop the skills they will need to cope in mainstream environments. These sessions include increasing learners' assertiveness and coping skills and providing strategies on how best to prepare for an interview.

What progress has been made in improving AS-level outcomes since the last inspection?

Significant progress

In 2008, the progress learners made on AS programmes was well below expectations and achievement on AS-level courses was more mixed than for other courses. Since the last inspection outcomes for AS qualifications have improved notably, with most learners studying at AS-level making progress at least in line with expectations and several making much better than expected progress. Pass rates have improved from 64% in 2007/08 to 87% in 2010/11 and those achieving A to C grades improved from 24% to 48% within the same period. For the three current EFA-funded learners, most are on target to at least meet their predicted grades this year. The college however, does not yet systematically report on the progression rates of those learners who move from AS to A2 programmes or explicitly reference success rates.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in using quality assurance procedures and staff development to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

The college's staff training and development programme continues to focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment. Peer observations have been initiated recently to aid in the sharing of good practice between teachers. Since the last inspection, managers have strengthened the moderation arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Around half of all observations are now observed jointly with members of the senior or middle management team which is helping to increase the rigour of judgments made about lessons. As a result of this increased rigour, the college's data show a reduction in the overall number of lessons judged good or better from 77% to 69% but an increase in outstanding lessons from 5% to 13%.

While improvements in the college's observation arrangements are clear, not all areas of the quality monitoring processes are yet sufficiently robust. For example, in-year observation data are not compiled and analysed until the end of the academic year. Consequently, it is difficult for managers to identify and action swiftly any emerging issues, or indeed, highlight the positive impact of any training. Additionally, the college does not extract and analyse systematically the quality of teaching for learners above the age of 16 to see if there are any variations with that for younger learners. The quality and detail of observers' written records varies. While some are comprehensively written with clear justification for the grade awarded, others are less convincing given the evidence presented. Senior managers are aware processes need to be strengthened further and from September 2012 the senior leadership team is being restructured to incorporate a senior post holder with specific responsibility for teaching and learning.

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