

# Royal College Manchester

## Focused monitoring visit report

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Unique reference number: 106166

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Last day of inspection: 23 March 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Royal College Manchester (RCM) is an independent specialist residential and day college located near Manchester. It is part of the Seashell Trust and was previously called Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders (Manchester). Learners have severe and complex learning difficulties combined with significant communication difficulties which include very limited or no oral language. The primary aim of the college is to develop communication systems to enable learners to make choices and decisions about their lifestyles and their future. Learners follow an individualised vocational pathways programme that develops communication, Skills for Life (literacy and numeracy), life skills, vocational skills, and creative studies. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) currently funds 46 learners at the college.

The college was last inspected in March 2007 and all aspects of the provision were good, including capacity for improvement. Since the last visit, the Trust has a new Chief Executive/Principal, in post from September 2009. There is now a separate management team for the college. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in implementing the improvement plan and in improving the rigour of self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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The development plan for 2009/10 links well to the self-assessment report and demonstrates effective progress. The college board of governors, established in November 2009, includes board members who enhance the college's ability to develop partnerships and improve provision for learners. A new college management team improves multi-disciplinary working and communication. Reporting to governors is good and action planning is a standing item for the board to monitor. Governors are active in the college as observers of teaching and learning. The board commissions projects to move the college forward; for example, establishing a framework for learning using foundation learning and exploring better ways of using technology to promote learning.

At the last inspection, the college had three key areas for improvement. Good progress is evident in all areas. However, the self-assessment report (SAR) recognises that there is still more to do in relation to setting and monitoring individual learner targets. The college recognises that it was over-reliant on internal validation of the SAR. It now uses its good partnership with the North West Independent Specialist College Network to validate the self-assessment processes and report. The college is also working to improve self-assessment at team level.

## Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in improving outcomes for learners since the last visit? Reasonable progress

The college monitors the performance of different groups of learners effectively. Learners continue to make good progress in their communication and in self-management of their behaviour. The number of accredited units achieved by learners increased from 31 units in 2007 to 42 units in 2009. In 2009, 60% of learners achieved units in appropriate external accreditation in comparison with 14% in 2007. Over the past two years, 77% of learners achieved their long-term goals. A review of this data identified the need for development of an appropriate entry level curriculum. In the current year, 19 learners are undertaking the newly introduced entry level qualifications in life skills. The college is enhancing the range of opportunities for learners to develop vocational skills both on site and in external work placements. Currently, 22 learners are accessing 14 external work placements. This is a small increase on 2008/09.

The college now has a structured process in place to moderate the assessment of the progress of learners against their targets. The SAR identifies the need to improve the consistency of targets through ongoing monitoring and staff development. In the current year, the modified application form and initial assessment process better support the clear identification of learners' destination goals.

## Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in developing a more rigorous lesson observation scheme to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

The college is making reasonable progress in promoting a more rigorous observation scheme. The number of observers has now increased. Observers have undertaken training with the North West Independent Specialist College network. In the paired observations undertaken during the monitoring visit, inspectors agreed with observers' judgments. Teachers graded as satisfactory during lesson observations now have a clear action plan for improvement. The improved grade profile in autumn 2009/10 indicates an increase in the number of lessons graded good or better.

Residential settings are now included in the observation scheme. Feedback from a recent moderation exercise has resulted in a clearer focus and evaluation of specific areas for improvement. This provides evidence to support action planning. Staff report that observation feedback increases their awareness of how to better promote learning. The observation scheme highlights the professional development needs identified in the SAR. For example, the need to develop improved links between long and medium-term goals and short-term planning. Peer observations, though informal, enable the identification and sharing of good practice.

## Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in strengthening the processes for safeguarding learners?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in strengthening its processes to safeguard learners. Monitoring and maintenance of the single central record are effective. The college has a very clear strategic focus on improving the staff recruitment process. All managers have completed training on safer recruitment. A recent brochure sent to all staff applicants is specific and detailed on the safeguarding requirements within the college. Regular training takes place for all staff on aspects of safeguarding including Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) and specific training on alerting designated staff to any safeguarding concerns. More recently, staff briefings have taken place on the requirements of the independent safeguarding authority (ISA).

An experienced safeguarding officer oversees the strengthened processes for reporting safeguarding issues. Several processes are in place for individuals to raise concerns and discuss issues. Well-established links with the local safeguarding board support advice, guidance and training. A safeguarding team now meets monthly to review current safeguarding issues. More recently a senior group was set up to develop this area strategically. Managers have recently had training on carrying out investigations. A parents' awareness session has taken place to ensure that they understand the process and how to use it.

What progress has the college made in embedding equality and diversity across the curriculum?

Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in embedding equality and diversity. An appropriate single equality scheme is now in place with a detailed action plan. An equality and diversity working group now provides a strategic overview and oversees the implementation of the action plan. The college is currently completing a review of all policies prior to carrying out assessments of their impact on equality and diversity. A review of the extent to which the equality strands are reflected in the curriculum has been carried out with teaching staff and strengths and areas for improvement have been identified. Equality champions are now in place to promote equality and diversity in the curriculum. A teacher now has additional time to coordinate this curriculum work.

In the current term, two training sessions have enabled staff to share practical ideas and their concerns about integrating opportunities for promoting equality and diversity in lesson planning. Staff have regular updates on equality and diversity. A range of activities to promote equality have taken place including a Bhangra night, a celebration of relationships and a Divali café. A men's group meets weekly with a focus on health and well-being as well as developing leisure opportunities. It is anticipated that a women's group will start before Easter.

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