

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: **Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders (Manchester)**
Date of visit: **23 September 2008**

Context

Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders (Manchester) is an independent specialist residential and day college on a shared site with the school. Learners have severe and complex learning difficulties combined with significant communication difficulties which include very limited or no oral language. The age profile is rising in line with inclusion. From September 2007 the college has catered for 19+ learners only. Currently 46 learners are funded by the Learning and Skills Council and four learners are from other funding sources. Learners follow an individualised vocational pathways programme that develops communication, skills for life (literacy and numeracy), life skills, vocational skills, and creative studies. The teaching and residential accommodation is on one site; the college makes use of the residential units for teaching. Significant improvements to the college buildings have recently taken place. The primary aim of the college is to develop communication systems to enable learners to make choices and decisions for themselves about their lifestyles and their future. The college was last inspected in March 2007 and all aspects of the provision were good with a high capacity for improvement.

Achievement and standards

What improvements have been made to better ensure the consistency of target-setting and recording of progress across the college?	Reasonable progress
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The implementation of the framework for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) continues to develop at a good pace and is being used constructively to review and develop assessment, planning, recording and reporting systems for all learners. Since the previous monitoring visit the college has placed an increased focus on improving the quality of target-setting and recording learners' progress across the curriculum. Targets are effectively monitored by the head of the college and the quality improvement manager and modified through this process. Specific and focused training sessions are held for personal tutors and are being planned for learning support assistants. The quality of medium-term targets across the college is satisfactory but improving over time. Staff are setting increasingly

specific and measurable targets for all learners and the process is more inclusive with shared targets between the residential houses and the college.

The average success rate for individual learning plan targets for 2006/07 was 56%. A target of 70% success rate has been set for 2007/08 but outcomes have yet to be fully evaluated. Learners make good progress overall and particularly in communication and social skills. They are supported to transfer skills into a range of relevant and real life situations. Learners with multi-sensory impairment make particularly good progress. The college now routinely collects and analyses achievement data. The self-assessment report uses five years' of moderated annual assessment data for key skills and personal and social skills, to demonstrate clearly that learners are progressing well.

Quality of provision

How well has the college developed its learner involvement strategy?	Reasonable progress
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The college has placed a high priority on developing ways to involve all learners in their education and future life. The change in strategic focus towards person-centred planning has created a culture where all learners, regardless of their level of disability, are enabled to make decisions and to contribute to college life. Since the previous inspection the college has successfully maintained and developed an ethos of dignity and respect for all. Learners actively participate in the twice yearly review meetings; from planning and participating in the review to evaluating the outcomes. This approach is being adopted across the provision with the aim of encouraging learners to be increasingly involved in planning for their own future. The college has established a student council with representatives from each class group. Learners have helped to make decisions about developing areas of the college such as the lunchtime catering facilities, when they contributed their views on a new menu. Person-centred approaches have enabled staff to involve learners in assessment processes to better capture their views. However, the college is aware of the need to develop an overall formal 'learner involvement strategy' in order to more effectively monitor and evaluate these approaches.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in using an accurate management information system to develop and improve quality assurance processes?	Reasonable progress
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Work is well advanced for the implementation of the new bespoke management information system which will be used across all the college, school and residences. A significant amount of work and planning has gone into ensuring that the system

should be fully operational within the next two months. The management information system is central to the development of quality improvement systems such as RARPA; targets are being scrutinised by managers through this process. Improved recording and tracking of progress has led to better recognition of individuals' small steps of learning. As a consequence of regular monitoring and improved target-setting tutors' confidence has improved. Staff are more able to demonstrate learner progress and are clear about managers' expectations.

Monitoring systems are well embedded within the college and successfully used to clearly identify and resolve areas for improvement. The college has recently begun to collate and analyse a comprehensive range of equality and diversity data. However, no equality and diversity committee is in place and no nominated person has overall responsibility for this area. Cultural awareness is delivered through special events planned within the curriculum but the college is aware of the need for improved monitoring to evaluate the success of this approach. Quality improvement processes include tutors having formal observations twice a year and peer informal observations also take place throughout the year. The results of teaching and learning observations are used effectively to target both individual training and cross-college themes such as classroom management and the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Well-received training for all staff has been crucial in promoting good teaching practice. Teaching resources and the learning environment have improved significantly over the past year.

What progress has been made to improve strategic planning and governance?	Reasonable progress
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Strategic planning and governance have improved. Significant management and organisational changes have taken place within the past year. From November 2008 the name of the parent charity will change to that of 'The Seashell Trust'. The college will be known as 'The Royal College, Manchester' and the school will be 'The Royal School, Manchester'. These changes better represent the work of the organisation which caters for learners with a wide spectrum of disability, not just those who are deaf. Plans are being developed to work with mental health practitioners. Succession planning has also been established for the role of chief executive of the organisation as the current post-holder intends to retire in the summer of 2009. Governance of the college has been strengthened and from October 2008 there will be dedicated college governors, although the chair and vice-chair will be responsible for both college and school.

How well does the recently improved accommodation meet the needs of all learners?	Significant progress
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The refurbished and new accommodation has been successfully designed to meet the diverse needs of all learners. The refurbished block in college includes high

quality teaching bases, specialist teaching rooms, a well resourced computer suite and individual therapeutic rooms. The acoustic and visual environment has been successfully planned to support a low arousal approach specifically for those students with behavioural difficulties. These improvements in the learning environment are highly valued by staff and learners. Plans are in place to further develop the building to include a common room for the learners.

How well has the college responded to guidelines on safe recruitment practices and safeguarding?	Reasonable progress
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The college has taken effective action to meet guidelines on safe recruitment practices and safeguarding. A single central record of vetting and recruitment checks is comprehensive and regularly monitored. Staff and volunteers are appropriately checked through the Criminal Records Bureau. Staff and governors have received timely safeguarding training as appropriate.