

# The Deaf Academy

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Tina Pagett, His Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Address:</b>	1 Douglas Avenue Exmouth EX8 2AU

# Monitoring visit: main findings

## Context and focus of visit

The Deaf Academy was inspected in March 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

The Deaf Academy includes a school for pupils aged five to 18 and a college for learners aged 18 and over. Both the school and college are based in a purpose-built site in Exmouth. The vast majority of learners are profoundly deaf and use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language. Many learners have additional needs which are barriers to learning. All learners have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and study individual programmes. The college offers day and residential provisions. At the time of the visit, 13 learners aged 19 to 25 years attend the college.

## Themes

**What progress have leaders made to ensure that staff receive appropriate training to plan and implement an ambitious and effective curriculum to meet the needs of learners, including those with specific and more-complex needs?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have undertaken significant activity, working with a range of external specialists to review the provision, curriculum and processes. Leaders have crucially acknowledged the wider special educational needs (SEN) of learners beyond their deafness, and this has influenced a restructure of the leadership team and a review of the curriculum. There is a newly appointed head of school in addition to the head of post-16. This enables the two leaders to focus on the different needs of children and adults. Leaders have also invested in new posts with recruitment of specialist SEN staff for a more balanced and specialist team to better meet the needs of learners, including those with more complex needs.

Leaders have rightly carried out a full review of EHC plans to inform changes to the admissions and initial assessment of learners. They recognise that this, along with the implementation of a curriculum offer that is more personalised, will improve the experiences and outcomes of learners. Currently, leaders are focused on a 16 to 19 curriculum and a post-19 curriculum. However, moving forward, leaders recognise it is important that the curriculum and associated pathways are broad, including

opportunities for learners to learn essential work skills through work-based programmes, for example supported internships. This will ensure that the curriculum enables learners to make the aspirational progress of which they are capable at the time that is right for them.

Leaders and governors have invested well in tailored training for staff to improve the quality of education for learners. Leaders have carried out an audit of staff's knowledge and skills to better inform their individual training needs. This is ongoing and is developing staff's confidence. For example, tutors have accessed specific subject training, membership of appropriate professional bodies, webinars and access to external training to support them to implement the curriculum.

Leaders have acted effectively on feedback from the last inspection and commissioned work to review the timetable to enable therapies to form part of the curriculum. Therapists are starting to work in class alongside staff and learners, this is improving staff awareness and increasing access for learners to therapies to better support their learning and development. Leaders have recently implemented an individual education plan alongside an individual therapies plan (ITP) to better identify the needs of learners with more complex needs and their starting points and to support staff with strategies to meet individual learner needs. This is new and still evolving.

<p><b>What steps have leaders, managers and staff taken to assess learners' starting points effectively, monitor learners' progress and plan learning that is individualised to develop learners' skills, knowledge and behaviours?</b></p>	<p><b>Reasonable progress</b></p>
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Leaders and managers have taken effective steps to identify learners' starting points across the curriculum. Baseline assessments are used by teachers and therapists to inform individual education and therapy plans that align well with individualised needs of most learners. Teachers use baseline and ongoing assessment well to identify appropriate qualifications or accredited units for learners studying core subjects in English, mathematics and BSL. Through ongoing assessment of learners, teachers have recognised that achieving full qualifications in some subjects is not attainable. As such, they have introduced unit-based accreditation that is relevant and meaningful to individual learners to better support them in achieving their planned outcomes.

Teachers and therapists make good use of video and photographic evidence to supplement assessments to help learners understand their progress and areas for improvement. For example, the therapy team have introduced a baseline assessment tool to develop an ITP for learners with needs identified in their EHC plans. Staff support learners to frequently reflect on their individual progress and update plans based on frequent assessment and feedback. The implementation of ITPs is in the early stages and not yet used throughout the curriculum, for example in independent living.

Teachers provide frequent feedback to learners about their progress. However, written records and electronic records are not routinely dated; therefore the rate of progress is unclear. Electronic records show how learners apply their learning to different contexts. For example, a learner who is working to recognise healthy options in food choices is practising making healthy choices across the week. However, in some lessons, teachers do not assess the depth of learners' understanding. For example, although learners can identify food groups and sort into healthy or unhealthy, the teacher does not extend their knowledge on the impact of unhealthy choices; therefore, learners' progress is restricted to sorting rather than developing understanding of benefits and consequences of choices. In these instances, assessment of knowledge is limited.

**What actions have leaders taken to ensure they provide a curriculum that meets the educational and therapeutic support to which they are entitled and as detailed in their EHC plans? Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken swift action to improve the alignment of the curriculum to the needs and aspirations of learners. As a result, the curriculum has four core areas: preparation for employment, community inclusion, independent living and good health. Leaders have also ensured that there is a clear therapeutic contribution to the curriculum, with individual and group strategies that help learners extend their communication, social skills, motor skills and independence and preparation for work. ITPs are used effectively by teachers to structure learning to meet individual needs.

The strengthened management team monitor the quality of the curriculum well. Teachers value receiving prompt feedback after observations so that they can take action where necessary and adjust their teaching and curriculum plans to better meet the needs of learners. Leaders have developed the continuing professional development offer to include opportunities for specialist staff to deliver internal training to colleagues to support consistent delivery of learning across the curriculum. For example, a recent personal, social and health education day included four workshops about pertinent topics, including privacy of information, online sexual exploitation, hate crime and radicalisation.

Staff and learners are positive about the development of a more adult curriculum to better meet learners' individual aspirations. For example, they learn information that helps them reframe their understanding of their rights and responsibilities as adults rather than children. However, staff recognise that further development is needed to ensure that learners have the opportunity to apply their knowledge. For example, transition planning is limited to the end of the academic year and students' aspirations for progression to work are heavily influenced by the wishes of families. As a result, learners are not clear about their progression opportunities or their decision-making rights. A few learners expressed the desire for a greater focus on adult learning to prepare them fully for adult life.

**How do leaders and governors ensure that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks from harm?**

**Reasonable progress**

Following the previous inspection, leaders and governors moved quickly to review safeguarding arrangements on site. They implemented a robust risk assessment, along with changes to how children and young people mix on site. Leaders have made improvements to safeguarding training for staff, including weekly sessions and frequent one-minute updates on focused topics. Staff receive training on safeguarding children and adults, and leaders are developing a separate safeguarding policy for adults.

Governors have supported the leadership team to make considerable changes to improve the experiences of learners. They have fully considered the need for their adult learners to learn new knowledge, skills and behaviours and participate in a range of developmental activities in a setting where they can be young adults away from the school environment. Staff report seeing a positive impact of children and young people mixing in a more appropriate environment with peers, for example less adult supervision for young adults is supporting greater independence. Learners recognise the recent changes and appreciate the opportunity to be young adults.

Leaders and governors have made a significant investment in the purchase of a new building that will offer separate education for post-19 learners and expand their residential offer. They have moved at pace and plan to open the centre in September 2023. It will be important for leaders to consider the flexibility of this provision to enable learners to access programmes and pathways at the appropriate time for them to meet their individual needs.

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