



Freeman College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
July 2006

Provider reference
50022

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
<hr/>	
Summary of grades awarded	6
<hr/>	
Overall judgement	7
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Freeman College
Type of college:	Independent, day/residential, specialist
Head of college:	Aonghus Gordon
Address of college:	25-27 Leadmill Road Sheffield S1 3JA
Telephone number:	0114 296 5503
Fax number:	0114 213 0299
Chair of Trustees:	Aubrey King
Unique reference number:	50022
Name of reporting inspector:	Diane Stacey, HMI
Dates of inspection:	23-26 May 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Freeman College is part of the Ruskin Mill Further Education Trust (RMET) and was established as a separate college in September 2005 in the city location of Sheffield. This inspection took place in the first year of operation. The Trust has a council of management which works across their three colleges. It has two main functions; it reports to the trustees of RMET and delivers the Trusts strategic plan. Over the past 15 years there has been considerable growth undertaken by the Trust. Freeman College is the latest of the three colleges, all of which are at different stages of development and maturity. The Trust is currently undertaking reviews of their core processes: human resources, admissions and its information technology strategy. Trustees and the council of management are very aware of the importance of designating core functions where local differences can be celebrated.
2. Freeman College's guiding principles are formed from the work of Rudolf Steiner, William Morris and John Ruskin, which includes a holistic approach to all aspects of education. The curriculum incorporates a wide range of learning opportunities under the title of the Ruskin Mill Orientation Course (RMOC). It is primarily based on craft activities where the learner is fully involved in all stages of the process, from raw material to finished product. Learners complete a two-year foundation course as part of the RMOC and then progress to vocational courses. One learner attends a local college of further education for a specific catering course.
3. There are currently 18 learners funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) of which 16 are male and 13 are residential. Five learners live locally and attend daily. Eight learners are aged between 16 and 18 years of age and ten are aged over 19 years of age. There is one learner from a minority ethnic background. The Trust plans to increase the capacity significantly for learner placements at Freeman College by 2011.
4. The college's mission is to provide opportunities for high quality specialist further education in the context of creative communities, cultural initiatives and commercial regeneration. RMET colleges enable young people with learning difficulties to engage in activities and social interaction that will help them to maximise their potential for autonomy and employability.

Scope of the inspection

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits and data on enrolments and learners' achievements. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further

- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: grade 3

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

6. This is a satisfactory college. Learners' achievements are satisfactory overall. All learners make significant gains in personal, social and communication skills and in improving their self-confidence and behaviour. Access to external awards has yet to be fully implemented. There are no differences between the achievements of different groups of learners. Target setting is sometimes imprecise and monitoring of progress is inconsistent. It is not always possible to accurately identify learners' achievements.
7. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Most lessons are satisfactory or better. Strategies to manage and modify behaviour are planned effectively around learners' experience and interests. Teaching resources are good and all learning takes place in realistic and effective contexts. Pre-entry assessment is thorough but the college is yet to develop a formal system of baseline assessment. Arrangements to assess and support literacy, numeracy and communication are not yet fully implemented. In a small number of sessions the level and deployment of support was insufficient.
8. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. The very good range of practical subjects and activities and the good range of extended curriculum activities take full account of the needs and interests of learners. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is good and the college is compliant with relevant equalities legislation. Staff know their learners well and relationships are well developed and valued. The college is successful in supporting learners with behaviour management difficulties.
9. Guidance and support are good overall. Regular meetings between the learner and key staff contribute effectively to the progress that learners make in their personal, social and emotional development. Arrangements for responding swiftly to learners' immediate intensive support are good. The college has developed productive links with the local Connexions partnership. Transition planning is under-developed.
10. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Strategic planning is thorough and operational management is satisfactory. Quality assurance policies and procedures at a strategic level are satisfactory. The college is in its first year of operation and has not yet implemented a quality assurance cycle. The self-assessment report is descriptive and lacks evaluation. There are insufficient numbers of staff who hold either teaching or skills for life qualifications. Comprehensive procedures are in place to promote the safety, well being and protection of learners. Links with stakeholders are outstanding. The learning environment and facilities are good. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

11. The college's capacity to improve is good. Freeman College was established in September 2005. It has not yet completed a full year of operation. The council of management is clear about what needs to be done to improve the performance of the college. Standards of learners' work are high. Strategies for behavioural, social and personal skills development of learners are good. All staff are committed to the ethos of the college and developing learners through realistic practical activities. Quality assurance and self-assessment procedures at a college level are still being developed. However, strategic quality assurance action plans are good. The quality of teaching is variable and skills for life provision, is underdeveloped. The self-assessment report whilst accurate in some instances did not identify all the areas for improvement identified by inspectors.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

This was the first inspection for Freeman College and therefore, no judgements could be made about the effectiveness of steps taken to promote improvement since the last inspection.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good development of personal and social skills
- good standard of work
- realistic and very effective use of learning contexts and resources
- very good range of practical courses and activities
- good behaviour management and personal support
- outstanding collaboration with stakeholders
- clear strategic vision and management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the management of the skills for life provision
- the monitoring and recording of achievements and progress
- the planning for transition
- the arrangements for quality improvement
- the self-assessment process
- the recording of incidents and complaints.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Satisfactory: grade 3

12. Learners' achievements are satisfactory overall. There are no differences between the achievements of different groups of learners. In the short time that all learners have been enrolled at the college, the majority have developed good standards of skills in practical craft activities. These include: work with pewter, copper, metal forging, jewellery, horticulture and building projects as well as drama. The college has recently introduced external accreditation through the Open College Network (OCN). However, there have been no achievements yet as they are currently in the pilot phase. They are planned to be fully implemented for the next academic year. The college is aware that target setting is insufficiently detailed and that there is insufficient identification of and progression with literacy and numeracy skills development. Plans are in place to improve this provision and introduce external accreditation.
13. There is good development of learners' personal, social and communications skills and in their behaviour and ability to work alongside others. Opportunities to develop these skills are provided through both their day programme activities as well as the extended curriculum programme. On specific courses, such as story telling and drama, learners develop social skills and self-confidence. Learners clearly enjoy their time at college and get involved in local community activities. Some learners help out at the college's theatre when local community groups' performances take place, whilst others enjoy attending these performances.
14. Punctuality and attendance are good. The retention rate is in line with other specialist colleges. Attendance and punctuality are monitored effectively. All learners have enrolled during this academic year with the majority starting when the college opened in September 2005. Two learners are due to leave the college in July, the remainder will continue with their studies.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

15. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The majority of the lessons observed were satisfactory or better. In the better lessons, teachers use effective strategies to manage and modify behaviour and plan the lesson activities on learners experience and interests. For example, in drama, learners were exploring past experiences of feeling vulnerable and isolated and in forged metalwork they were making artefacts related to religious belief or hobbies.
16. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that learners have an individually designed learning programme which allows them to explore a

variety of land and craft activities. This provides realistic and effective learning contexts and resources in the craft workshops, gardens, woodland and kitchens. Craft workshops such as pewter, copper and forged metal, are particularly well resourced and support the production of good quality industry standard artefacts. An effective range of health education support is offered to learners including sexuality, diet and nutrition and behaviour management. Learners demonstrate a good awareness of healthy eating.

17. Overall lesson plans and schemes of work contain insufficient information about planned activities and tasks. The link between individual targets and lesson activities is not always clear and opportunities are sometimes lost to contextualise and re-enforce targets in some lessons. In a minority of lessons, the level of support was insufficient and not always effectively deployed or managed. Some of the targets recorded in individual learning plans are too broad or imprecise to capture small learning steps. The monitoring of progress is inconsistent and sometimes ineffective.
18. Pre-placement assessment is satisfactory and informs the development of individual learning plans. There is currently no formal system of baseline assessment but the first few months of transition have been used effectively as an informal assessment and learning period.
19. The identification of literacy, numeracy, communication and language support needs is insufficient and incomplete. Although learners complete an initial assessment, no diagnostic assessments are undertaken. Skills for life are insufficiently embedded across the curriculum and staff have not undertaken the required subject specific training. The college is aware that further improvements need to be made.
20. There are a very good range of practical subjects and activities. Horticulture is to be extended next year with the recent acquisition of a sizable garden site in the grounds of a local hotel. The college has also successfully negotiated with Sheffield City Council to establish forestry activities for its learners. Renovations to a large building, owned by the Trust, in the town centre are currently underway to provide a wider range of activities for learners. The college has developed effective links with a local further education college. There is a good range of planned extended curriculum activities with many activities arranged through the residences. There are currently no learners on external work placements with local employers although this is being planned. Learners do however, gain valuable work experience in the college's Merlin theatre café when local community productions take place. They are also involved in a variety of internal college and residential work. Overall, there is good attention to health and safety. Although there are risk assessments for facilities and activities there are no individual risk assessments for learners in place.
21. Guidance and support for learners is good. Learners value the support provided by the college. During the first two terms the priority has been to

provide learners with a secure and safe environment in which to live and work. The college has been successful in this and the learners' wellbeing is truly at the heart of all the college's activities. Staff use well planned strategies that address the behavioural difficulties of learners. Regular meetings take place between learners, personal tutors and house parents. This support contributes effectively to the progress learners make in their personal, social and emotional development. House parents provide significant support across the extended curriculum. However, co-ordination of the extended curriculum and its links to individual learning plans and the formal curriculum are underdeveloped.

22. Arrangements for responding to learners' needs for immediate intensive one to one support are good. Staff know their learners well and are skilled at helping them to manage their own behaviour. Links with parents and carers are good. Provision for speech and language therapy has been improved and will be fully operational in September 2006. A recently appointed speech and language therapist is available for one day per week and it is planned for her to be involved in the initial assessment of learners in the summer term. Transition arrangements for the two learners leaving in July 2006, are satisfactory. However, overall planning for transition is underdeveloped. Policy and procedures for transition programmes are currently being developed by RMET for dissemination across all colleges. Links with the local Connexions service and other agencies to assist learners with the next stages of their lives have recently been established.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: grade 3

23. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Trustees have a clear vision and support the Trust well. The council of management combines entrepreneurship, project management and a strong value system. This has inspired staff to overcome the many difficulties that setting up a new college creates. Operational management is satisfactory and is shared by a team of three managers who work in close co-operation. RMET is undertaking a review of roles and responsibilities. It is intended that this review will better define management roles and provide greater clarity of role, function and accountability.
24. The vision and mission of the college and educational trust is well understood and shared by all staff. The operational managers have worked tirelessly to ensure learners are safe and ready to learn. The education planning cycle is a useful framework that focuses on the experience of the learner and the key processes of the curriculum but it is not yet fully understood by all staff or implemented consistently across the college.
25. Strategic planning is thorough. A new management information system has been installed to track learners' progress but it is not yet fully operational. Quality assurance policies and procedures at a strategic level are satisfactory. The college has not yet fully implemented a quality assurance cycle that is

coherent or integrates programme review, self-assessment, observation of teaching and accountability. The college's teacher observation scheme is embryonic and it is too soon to judge its impact on learners. The self-assessment report is descriptive and lacks evaluation and does not identify all of the areas for improvement identified by inspectors. Self-assessment processes are management led and not widely understood by staff. There are detailed improvement plans to address areas of identified weakness. These plans are in the early stages of dissemination.

26. The two week induction of staff is very effective. Additional staff development activities have enabled tutors to develop their roles. However, there are insufficient numbers of staff who hold either teaching or skills for life qualifications. There is no strategic plan in relation to skills for life development.
27. Comprehensive procedures are in place to promote the safety, well being and protection of learners. The college meets the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Equality and diversity are promoted well within the curriculum. The recording of incidents and complaints is a weakness. Procedures for the reporting of serious incidents to the Learning and Skills Council are not always followed.
28. Links with stakeholders are outstanding. External partnerships and projects are well managed. Trustees are well informed and involved in the monitoring of developments of the college and Trust. The learning environment and facilities at Freeman College are good. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.