



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report

Meldreth Manor College

Dates of inspection: 6–10 December 2004

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Meldreth Manor College
Type of college:	Independent, specialist, residential
Principal:	Eric Nash
Address of college:	Fenny Lane Meldreth Royston Herts SG8 6LG
Telephone number:	01763 268000
Fax number:	01763 268099
Chair of governors:	John Henke
Charity number:	208231
Name of reporting inspector:	Joyce Deere
Dates of inspection:	6–10 December 2004

**charity or registered business number of the company running the college*

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

Meldreth Manor College is owned by SCOPE, which is a registered national charity and company limited by guarantee. The college is situated in the village of Meldreth, near Cambridge, where it shares a site with Meldreth Manor School. Scope is in the process of separating the governance of the school and the college. The college currently has an interim advisory body, which reports to the Scope trustees. The principal reports to the assistant director of Learning for Life in Scope. The college provides for students aged 19 and over with cerebral palsy, profound and complex needs and sensory impairment. Its mission is ‘to teach and support each individual student to develop life skills that empower and prepare them to take their place in the wider community.’

There are 13 students funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and one by Education and Learning Wales (ELWa). The college has eight male students and six female students. One student is from a minority ethnic background. All of the students are residential. All of the students have such severe needs that they are likely to require significant levels of care throughout their lives. The college employs a wide range of staff including teachers, therapists, carers and nurses. The curriculum offers three distinct courses: developing choices for daily living, essential skills for greater autonomy and essential skills for greater independence. These are accredited by MENCAP.

How effective is the college?

The college’s provision is unsatisfactory. Although the care and support provided for students is good overall, the curriculum does not meet the needs of students. Provision for literacy, numeracy and communications is unsatisfactory, and for independent living skills it is very poor. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The college is not adequate to meet the needs of learners.

The college’s key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- good development of social and personal skills
- good use of the local community
- good residential support and behaviour plans

What should be improved

- the quality of teaching and learning
 - the relevance of the curriculum for the development of all aspects of
-

communication

- the capacity of the college to provide adequate alternative and augmentative communication support
- strategic planning by Scope
- quality assurance
- the implementation of the equal opportunities policy
- financial management by Scope
- governance by Scope.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Independent living skills	Very poor: The staff make good use of the local and regional community to encourage learning, but measures of progress are not reliable. Teaching is poor, and staff have insufficient knowledge of the developmental needs of the students. Care plans are effective, but specialist and additional tools to aid communication strategies are inadequate and quality assurance is ineffective.
Literacy, numeracy and communications	Unsatisfactory: Students make good progress in social and personal skills but many aspects of teaching are unsatisfactory. The provision has insufficient specialist resources to promote independent communication and does not focus sufficiently on communication within the curriculum. Management of the total communication strategy is inadequate.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. A clear mission statement has been developed and appropriate action has been taken to separate college and school provision. Since the last inspection the curriculum has been significantly developed by the college, although it needs further development. Scope has yet to agree their plans for Meldreth Manor College, and strategic planning is still unsatisfactory. Quality assurance arrangements are underdeveloped. Self-assessment is insufficiently rigorous or evaluative. Processes for staff appraisal and development are ineffective. Scope has recently written policies in line with the main requirements of equal opportunities legislation, but the policies have not yet been fully implemented. Scope has been slow to establish a new governing body responsible for overseeing and monitoring the college provision. Operational financial management is satisfactory and individual students' contracts with the LSC are monitored effectively. However, overall financial management by Scope is unsatisfactory and systems are not yet in place to define and manage budgets effectively. The college does not provide satisfactory value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college response to social inclusion is satisfactory. The balance of gender is even, and students are recruited nationally, though mainly from the south east. One student is from a minority ethnic background. Initially the students were recruited from the school, but increasingly they are being recruited from elsewhere. The college now has policies in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. However, development from Scope has been slow. The college's equal opportunities policy, showing how it will implement these Acts was completed the week before the inspection. The college has, however, conducted an accessibility audit and made improvements to the college as a result. Most of the college is accessible to wheelchair users, although kitchen areas require adaptations. The college promotes aspects of disability, but is in the early stages of the promotion of race and gender. The sexuality policy is helpful for staff in helping to support students appropriately, and bullying and harassment are not tolerated. Provision for literacy, numeracy and communications is unsatisfactory. The college's response to educational inclusion is not satisfactory as it does not have the resources to meet the individual communication needs of students, and the curriculum is not appropriate for those with the most complex needs. A few staff do not understand fully the implications of making adjustments for students with physical disabilities.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Support for students is satisfactory. Students are well supported within the residential provision and have a key worker and a personal tutor who work together closely. Care and behavioural support plans are very good and appropriately linked to thorough and comprehensive individualised risk assessments. The college has well developed procedures

for child and adult protection. Transition arrangements for students have improved but are still in the early stages of development. Induction arrangements are effective and there is a good ratio of support staff to students in lessons. The quality of support provided by support workers is variable. Insufficient time is allocated for specialist therapeutic interventions. Tutorial arrangements have only recently been implemented, but guidelines for staff to follow are good.

Students' view of the college

Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- going on the bus
- the food
- discos
- speech therapist
- their bedrooms
- making friends
- the staff
- going out to visit places
- living in the flat.

What they feel could be improved

- shopping.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole

Achievement and standards

1. All of the students are aged between 19 and 25. Since the previous inspection the college has introduced a new curriculum, which started formally in September 2004. It is not possible to evaluate the achievements of students who have been in the college for two or more years. Recording of progress is not adequately related to students' starting points, so it is not possible to evaluate progress over time. However, students' files indicate that many of the current students have made progress in developing social and personal skills and their general behaviour has improved. Aggressive and self-harming activity has reduced as students become more socially confident. Students are more confident in the using the local community.

2. Student destinations for the past two years show that most have moved to residential homes. Of the ten leavers, one returned home and nine moved to residential care. This is what would be expected, given the complexity of need of the students, all of whom will require significant support for the rest of their lives. The college is working towards encouraging greater autonomy for students, enabling them to direct levels of care. The information about destinations does not show whether this has been successful. Rates of retention are good and at over 95 %, in line with other specialist colleges. Attendance during the week of inspection was good at 96 %, and in line with other specialist colleges.

Quality of teaching, training and learning

3. Teaching and learning have not improved significantly since the previous inspection. Much is unsatisfactory and does not meet the needs of the students. In some instances teachers prepare the same activity for all students, and use language that is too complex for them; for example, using 'require' rather than 'need'. The communication methods are not always appropriate. Switches to aid communication are frequently not placed in the most accessible place for the students, and much time is taken while the students try to reach them.

4. In the better teaching, however, there is good use of sensory stimuli and humour to motivate and interest learners and preparation is based on individual students' needs. Teachers interpret students' non-verbal responses sensitively and when working with students who use speech to communicate, have effective ways of helping them develop their expressive skills. In a lesson in the community, one student had her voice output communication aid programmed to ask for tickets to bowl, whilst another student had identified appropriate symbols to request a beef burger from the waitress.

5. Since the previous inspection the college has achieved significant locational separation from the school. The college has very recently acquired its own building with four teaching rooms, an office and a meeting room. However, the process of separation is not yet complete and the college continues to share specialist facilities with the school. Access to specialist facilities is not sufficient. Students from the college are only timetabled for the

hydrotherapy pool once a fortnight and for the sound technology room once a week. The facilities for Information, Communications Technology (ICT) are good, and it is possible for students to have personal interactive programmes developed for them, based on their personal interests. However, little use is made of these facilities in teaching, apart from one timetabled session a week. The environment has little visual stimulus on the walls to reflect students' interests or experiences.

6. Significant improvements have been made to the residential accommodation, which is located above the teaching areas. One of the student flats has been fully refurbished with single study bedrooms and shared bathroom facilities. These are fully adapted, with overhead tracking. However, the kitchen has yet to be made accessible to wheelchair users. A second flat is in the process of similar refurbishment. There is a lift access to the residential accommodation, although turning space for wheelchairs is severely restricted. Improvements have been made to the campus following a disability audit, but much remains to be done. The college has a strong focus on health and safety, with very good individual risk assessments for students. However, occasional lapses in health and safety were observed in classes during inspection.

7. Although there is now better locational separation of the college from the school, most members of staff are shared with the school. All members of the teaching staff have a teaching qualification, and most of the care staff with promoted posts have care qualifications at level 3 or above. Residential social workers receive high-quality in-house training. However, the college currently uses a number of temporary agency staff, who are not always experienced. Support staff do not always make a useful contribution to students' learning. Teaching staff do not have sufficient literacy and numeracy experience and training. The post of occupational therapist is currently vacant. The speech and language therapist and physiotherapist are well qualified and experienced. Most of the physiotherapy is carried out by an assistant. The therapists are shared with the school and current staffing levels are not sufficient for the needs of the college students. There is no bank or library of adaptive equipment for students to borrow. The college does not have the capacity to provide the specialist and additional tools to aid communication to enable all students to fulfil their potential and find a 'voice'.

8. The processes for assessment have improved since the previous inspection. The initial assessment and baseline assessments are carried out by a multi-disciplinary team, including the speech and language therapist, the physiotherapist, and a multi-sensory assessment where appropriate. The assessments are based on previous information about students, observations, structured activities in groups and individual sessions. Multi-sensory assessments are very good, with detailed guidance for staff working with students. However, the educational component of the assessment is not satisfactory for many students. There is insufficient assessment of students' cognitive abilities and development, and the assessment of assistive technology does not always result in the most appropriate use of equipment for students to enable them to communicate effectively. The baseline does not record what students can do to build on those skills. Initial assessments of literacy, numeracy and speech and language are appropriate for many students, but not adequate for those with the most complex needs. The overall emphasis of assessment is focused on meeting the requirements

of the award, rather than on the individual needs of the student. The care and support assessments carried out by the residential staff are detailed, and the consequent student support plans are very good, with helpful guidance that focuses on respecting the dignity and privacy of students.

9. Since the previous inspection, the system for recording and monitoring progress has been revised, and is now based on targets developed to meet the requirements of the award followed by all students. Progress has been made in recording progress on a weekly basis, and reporting is becoming more concrete. However, the system for monitoring and recording progress is too cumbersome. A key component is the 'signing off' of activities related to individual targets. On occasions these result in more than one hundred entries related to one target. Targets are retained for long periods. The college recognises that the system needs to be refined further.

10. The students' final reviews before leaving the college have insufficient information. Progress over the year in relation to four or five targets is reported but, without a context these are meaningless. No mention is made of other aspects of students' achievements and the skills they have developed. The effectiveness of specialist interventions and additional tools to aid communication needs are not indicated. There is little reference to students' starting point, so it is not possible to evaluate the progress they make over time.

11. The curriculum that has been implemented by the college, following the previous inspection, is not appropriately used to meet the needs of students, particularly those with the most complex needs. There is too much focus on meeting the requirements of the accreditation. The main emphasis in teaching and learning is on completing tasks rather than analysing and focusing on the individual needs of students. The lack of an inclusive approach is evident in those lessons where groups are taught as a whole. The activities for students focus very much on the completion of domestic and daily living activities, with insufficient emphasis on the development of communication. At the previous inspection, the work of therapists in dance, drama and movement were seen as a strength and offered opportunities for students to develop expressive skills in different contexts. These activities are no longer offered to students, and music technology is only offered once a week. The use of the local community has improved since the previous inspection and the activity is more purposeful. The formal enrichment programme is limited in its range, but students are offered a wide range of informal activities by the residential staff in the evenings and at weekends. There are plans to increase the range of options in the enrichment programme.

12. The college recognises that the ability to communicate is the key to progress for its students. However, there is insufficient time during the week for students to develop their skills through the use of AAC. Opportunities for students to develop their 'social sight' vocabulary on the site are limited and social sight signs around the college are often placed in positions that are not easy for students to see. ICT skills are insufficiently developed by teachers, despite the very good opportunities that are provided by the specialist staff to customise programmes to meet students' individual interests.

13. Support for students is satisfactory overall. Support arrangements are effectively planned and managed within the residential provision. The ratio of support staff to students in lessons is good. There is an effective policy for personal support, which is provided by personal tutors and key workers, who work together closely to oversee and implement the care and individual learning plans. The quality of support provided within lessons is variable. Some support workers are effective, whilst others contribute very little to the development of students' communication skills. Support workers have insufficient training in identifying and recording student achievements.

14. Arrangements for formal tutorials have only recently been implemented. It is too soon to assess their effectiveness in supporting students. However, personal tutors are provided with useful guidelines to conduct tutorials. For example, tutors are instructed during tutorials to refer to the students' long-term goals and to ask students if they have any issues concerning health and safety.

15. Care plans are good and provide detailed and comprehensive information. For example, members of staff were instructed to encourage a student to move her foot forward to press a switch, and to wear shoes rather than trainers for her to do this successfully. Other information is provided in a picture format which clearly demonstrates the student's correct night-time positioning in bed to minimise the risk of hip dislocation. There are very good 'positive behaviour' support plans. These clearly identify steps to be taken by staff to avoid the occurrence of inappropriate behaviours and incidents. Staff are given useful strategies to follow. For example, members of staff are advised to give a student the choice of not being placed next to students who make sudden loud-pitched noises. The college has thorough adult protection policies. Risk assessments are thorough and appropriately matched to individual students' needs. However, despite this thoroughness, and very clear guidelines, examples of inappropriate manipulation of students' hands were observed in two settings during the inspection, which were not challenged by other members of staff.

16. Students are effectively inducted into college life and are provided with a useful personalised handbook to assist them in the admission process. The handbook contains pictures of staff, and symbols which denote activities, accommodation and communication aids. Students construct their handbook by including their own pictures of their room and friends. Also included is the name and picture of the college's adult protection officer. Students are encouraged to raise issues of concern with their personal tutor or key worker, and through their involvement in the college forum or flat meetings. The induction process lasts six weeks during which students establish daily living routines, make contact with key people, and sample enrichment activities. There is clear guidance given to personal tutors in completing the induction booklet which successfully builds up useful knowledge and information about the students.

17. Specialist interventions from therapists are limited. The physiotherapist and speech and language therapist contribute valuable advice to teachers about strategies to use during lessons. However there is insufficient time allocated to provide individualised specialist and therapeutic support to meet the needs of students.

18. Support for students' transition from the college has improved. The transition plans identify a timeline for the completion of important documents and holding of key meetings. Key workers, together with students and parents, visit prospective work placements. The local Connexions service has assigned a personal advisor to liaise regularly with key-workers and the extended curriculum co-ordinator. This is a new initiative and is still in the early stages of development. Although there are plans to provide an advocacy service for students, this has yet to be arranged.

Leadership and management

19. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. A mission statement has been developed since the last inspection to give a distinct purpose, and appropriate focus for college provision. Also, effective action has been taken to separate the school and college accommodation, and some improvements have been made to the college site. Management roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and new appointments have been made. Further management restructuring is planned. Some important key staff, such as the speech and language therapist, lead physiotherapist, and teaching staff still work across both the school and college, and the college has insufficient specialist time allocation. Since the last inspection the college has made significant changes to the curriculum, but these are not working effectively. The admissions policy has been reviewed, and the college is focusing more clearly on matching prospective students' needs. However, curriculum management is unsatisfactory, and there is insufficient evaluation of the curriculum. Social care planning and management are good.

20. Strategic planning is unsatisfactory. Since the last inspection, Scope directors have been working more closely with the college and have established a project team to review and plan the future developments and resource requirements of the college. The principal is included within the team and also involved in Scope's recently formed 'Learning for Life' Committee. Although identified in the last inspection report as an issue, Scope's plans for the college have yet to be agreed and implemented. This slow progress and delay has been a major problem in the planning for the future needs of prospective applicants. The three-year development plan for 2003–06 identifies appropriate objectives and actions to be taken in order to improve college provision. Whilst important issues, such as the separation of college and school provision, have started to be addressed, other objectives such as the need for a co-ordinated system of quality assurance by May 2004, and partnership working with local general FE colleges during 2003–04, have not been achieved.

21. Quality assurance is underdeveloped. A quality assurance monitoring document has been produced which clearly identifies quality standards, and the month in which key processes and activities should be monitored. However, this was only introduced in September 2004 and has not been fully implemented. Information and evidence are not sufficiently collated or evaluated to inform whether standards are being met to improve performance. For example, lesson plans are not routinely monitored or evaluated to identify what improvements need to be made to curriculum activities. Lesson observations are conducted once a term by the education manager and external consultants have also made

some observations. However, these are ineffective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The grades given are overly generous and do not adequately compare with the observation grades awarded during inspection. Targets to improve performance are not devised and agreed.

22. Self-assessment is insufficiently rigorous and evaluative. The latest full self-assessment review and development plan was completed in March 2004. The self-assessment process appropriately involves governors, college staff, feedback from parents, and some basic information about student attendance, retention rates, progression and achievement. However, management information systems are inadequate and do not provide sufficient evidence to base judgements made within the self-assessment report. A recent update to the report shows improved grades as a result of progress made within curriculum areas. These grades do not correspond to the judgments made during inspection. The updated report identifies further improvements to be taken to improve provision, but no action plan has been devised for their implementation.

23. The college has recently completed policy documents that meet the requirements of equal opportunities and diversity legislation. Scope has been slow to develop its race relations policy to comply with the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. The college's own policy, completed the week before the inspection, has not been fully implemented, although members of staff have received training in the implications of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and SENDA, and staff awareness has been raised. Reference is made to the college's legal responsibilities within the staff handbook. However, members of staff were observed during the inspection manipulating students' hands inappropriately, contrary to very clear college guidelines. The governing body understands its responsibilities in terms of equal opportunities and diversity, but staff and student applications are not monitored nor is policy implementation evaluated. Following a premises audit, appropriate action has been taken to improve the accessibility of the premises. There is limited attention paid to equal opportunities and diversity issues within formal curriculum activities. The college's policy with regard to students' relationships and sexuality provides very clear guidance to staff, but makes no mention of issues relating to sexual orientation. The policies and procedures in relation to harassment and bullying, and the protection of vulnerable adults are satisfactory. Although complaints are responded to, the college has not submitted termly reports to the governing body.

24. Overseeing and monitoring of the provision by governors remain unsatisfactory. Articles and instruments of government have been drawn up. Scope's approval to separate the governing body into two distinct groups for college and school provision, although now agreed, has not yet been implemented.. The college has recently appointed an interim advisory body which consists of two people with management and FE experience. They work closely with managers and pay regular visits to informally monitor the quality of provision.

25. Processes for staff appraisal and development are ineffective. Staff have received a range of internal and external training, and a staff development and training plan identifies training and development issues for September 2004 to July 2005, linked to the post

inspection action plan. However, the plan lacks coherence and does not relate adequately to the outcomes of staff appraisal. Appraisal formats cover all aspects of performance so that staff together with the appraiser, can evaluate their own performance, agree development targets and identify training required. However not all staff have been appraised. Of those who have, the quality of appraisal documents varies. Those completed for residential staff are detailed, and clearly identify development targets for staff to improve performance linked to training: appraisal forms completed for teaching staff are poor in comparison and contain little analysis and information for ongoing development.

26. Operational financial management is satisfactory. Individual learners' schedules are reviewed regularly and tracked effectively to ensure support staff are appropriately deployed, but students do not receive sufficient specialist input. Overall financial management by Scope is unsatisfactory. A three year strategy to establish the budget requirements of the college has been formulated. This will involve the identification of costs and expenditure and separate budgets being prepared for the college and school provision. However, this is in the early stages of development. The college does not provide value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Independent living skills

Overall provision in this area is **Very poor (grade 5)**.

Strengths

- good use of the local and regional community
- very effective care plans.

Weaknesses

- unreliable measurement of progress
- poor teaching
- insufficient understanding of students' developmental needs
- insufficiently rigorous baseline assessment
- inappropriate communication strategies for students
- ineffective quality assurance.

Scope of provision

27. The college provides opportunities for its 14 students to develop independent living skills as an integral part of their programme. Three new courses were introduced in September 2004; essential skills for greater independence, essential skills for greater autonomy and developing choice for daily living. All students intend to progress to an environment where they are supported, but aim to become as independent as possible and be able to make known their requirements.

Achievement and standards

28. The development of independent living skills in the majority of timetabled lessons is unsatisfactory. Recording of the outcomes of learning using observation sheets is variable. Small incremental steps of learning are not established or recorded in the majority of lessons. This makes it difficult to measure achievement. Independent living skills are developed informally through activities supported by residential care staff in the evenings and during the weekends, but it is not possible to quantify progress.

Quality of education and training

29. Half of the teaching observed was unsatisfactory. In a significant number of lessons, teachers and support assistants do not have sufficient knowledge of the more complex physical and cognitive needs of students. Planning for teaching is too cumbersome with general aims for the module, the module objectives, the session aims, as well as the session aims for individual students. The individual learning programmes are also used as planning documents and are linked to the award, which is then linked to the current baseline assessment and targets.

30. In a significant minority of lessons, there is an over-emphasis on all students partaking in similar activities, despite their different levels of physical or cognitive ability. At the start of lessons, overly-complex language is used to describe the planned teaching and learning activities. In a lesson in which students were required to make a choice of tropical fruit drinks, students were given too much detailed information about the origins of the fruit, as well as confusing information about their individual learning targets. Over-directive intervention by teachers and support workers often interrupts learning, and does not allow students to benefit from their mistakes. With the more able students, teachers missed valuable opportunities to link learning to students' future lives as adults living in supported independent living accommodation. The promotion of equal opportunities and cultural diversity is limited.

31. In the better lessons, students were appropriately and thoroughly briefed and prepared for the planned learning activity. Students use the local community well. A group of students involved in accessing the wider community to eat lunch and visit a bowling alley were enthusiastic and confident of coping in a public place. One student had her voice output communication aid programmed to ask for tickets to bowl, whilst another student had identified appropriate symbols to independently request a beef burger from the waitress.

32. Staff to student ratios are good. Kitchens in the residences are not sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of students who use wheelchairs. There is insufficient specialist support to meet the complex and diverse needs of students. The use of alternative and augmentative communication is limited; there is no psychological assessment of the cognitive levels of students. A physiotherapist technician delivers the majority of physiotherapy support. Staff are frequently required to adjust the sitting posture of some students who use wheelchairs so that the students can more ably use their switch systems, or join more easily in classroom activities. This is because the switch systems have not been positioned in the most convenient place for students to use.

33. The baseline assessment is insufficiently rigorous, and does not identify the cognitive/developmental stage of students' functioning, as a basis for providing an appropriate individual programme. The monitoring of students' progress is inadequate. Complicated targets are recorded in numerical terms, which lack meaning when taken out of context. These targets are not always translated into meaningful language for students. One student's target, for example, was 'to interact, initiate or react at least once in each session to her peer group'. The outcome, where recorded, showed it had been achieved 112 times and

not achieved 24 times. It is not clear how helpful this is or how frequently targets are changed. The critical analysis of teaching and learning activities is inadequate in the majority of lessons.

34. The implementation of the recently introduced award framework does not meet the needs of students, particularly those with more complex needs. The main emphasis is on completing tasks rather than analysing the skills and abilities that students will require in order to successfully progress to life beyond the College. There are insufficient formal enrichment activities. However residential support staff are active in encouraging students to become involved in personal care and social activities in the evenings and at weekends.

35. The formulation of very effective, clear and comprehensive care plans successfully contribute to effective support and guidance of students in the college residences. Risk assessments are thorough and appropriately linked to potential risk for various individual activities. Communication strategies are frequently inappropriate. Insufficient use is made of alternative and augmentative communication strategies to enable students to use their 'voice' effectively to communicate their needs. Makaton is used inappropriately with students who are able to effectively use a range of symbols and/or vocalise. Social sight signs are inappropriately displayed in college; they are placed too high for students in wheelchairs to see.

Leadership and management

36. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Although there is supportive team working there is no teacher with day-to-day responsibility for the cohesion and co-ordination of the independent living skills curriculum. Quality assurance is ineffective. The formal appraisal system is established within the care team but has yet to become established in other areas of the college. The self-assessment report is insufficiently critical and does not identify key weaknesses identified by inspectors. The college identifies in its self-assessment report that internal verification procedures have not yet been implemented. The college's lesson observation scheme has not identified key weaknesses. Equality and diversity are not effectively promoted in formal taught activities. Teachers do not always enforce the college's guidelines relating to the dignity and privacy of students, and staff were not challenged when manipulating students fingers inappropriately in order to complete a task.

Literacy, numeracy and communications

Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**.

Strengths

- good progress in social and personal skills.

Weaknesses

- many unsatisfactory aspects of teaching
- insufficient resources to promote independent communication
- insufficient focus on communication within the curriculum
- inadequate management of the ‘total communication’ strategy.

Scope of provision

37. All students study literacy, numeracy and communications as part of the essential skills award and use elements from the adult pre-entry curriculum framework. Communication is addressed through a ‘total communication’ approach. Students use electronic switches and other devices to assist and augment their communication.

Achievement and standards

38. Students do not make sufficient progress in communications. They do not have sufficient access to voice output communication aids and more specialist communication support. Whilst there are some good examples of students’ using their communication aid strategies well, progress is not consistent. Progress in literacy and numeracy for those with the potential to develop these skills is slow. The achievements of students who started college before September 2004 are not possible to determine because baselines were not identified. However, students make good progress in developing social and personal skills. For example, aggressive and self-harming behaviours have reduced. Some students with more complex physical disabilities improve their ability to demonstrate what they feel or want by facial expression or by directing their eyes appropriately. Students who use speech to communicate, learn to talk in more appropriate ways.

Quality of education and training

39. Many aspects of teaching are unsatisfactory. Many teachers use the overly-complex language of the awarding body to explain targets of the lesson to them. Students do not always understand what they are trying to achieve. A few teachers use formal language that many students do not understand when giving instructions. One used the words ‘select and require’, when students are more familiar with the words ‘want and need’. Many sessions are too long for students whose physical difficulties or medication make concentration

exhausting for them. Planning does not take this into account and opportunities for frequent short breaks are not made often enough. As a result, a few students fall asleep in lessons and many disengage their attention and learn little. Many teachers are insufficiently aware of the distracting effect of high volumes of recorded sound or of competing sources of sound. In one lesson, a student with great sensitivity to unexpected loud noise was placed with her back to a loudspeaker and not warned when loud music was about to start. In another lesson, a student's voice message was continually accidentally activated, making the teacher's communications with the rest of the group hard for everyone to hear. Teachers are not all sufficiently aware of health or safety issues. Advice on the effects of the flashing lights in interactive multimedia programmes on students with medically controlled epilepsy is not obtained frequently enough.

40. In better teaching, however, there is good use of sensory stimuli and humour to motivate and interest learners. Teachers interpret students' non-verbal responses sensitively and provide useful notes for support workers on ways to work with individual students. Teachers working with students who use speech to communicate have effective ways of helping them develop their expressive skills.

41. The college has insufficient resources to promote students' independence in communication. There are insufficient staff with specialist knowledge of voice output communication aids and speech and language therapy to meet students' needs. The bank of technological aids to give students without speech a voice is limited, and specialist resource collections for loans of equipment to try with students are rarely used. As a result, students often have to spend many weeks without such aids and time spent of learning to use them is lost. Computers in classrooms are not used sufficiently to develop literacy, numeracy or communication skills. Few teachers and no support staff have specialist literacy, numeracy and communication teaching qualifications. College staff have requested advice on suitable training in work with students at pre-entry level but do not actively pursue this themselves.

42. The assessment and recording of progress are generally satisfactory. Initial assessment of students' speech and language is detailed and forms a useful basis on which to build their programmes. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills uses the adult core curricular pre-entry level criteria satisfactorily. However, the assessments are not sufficiently detailed for those with the most complex needs. Verbal feedback by teachers in lessons focuses on positive achievements but is not clear about areas for improvement. Significant improvements to the weekly recording of progress have recently been introduced, with all teachers noting progress against communication targets. However, such records are often informed by support staff whose skills in distinguishing effort from achievement are not sufficiently developed. Termly reviews of individual learning plans focus on targets set for the college's chosen accreditation and do not always address communication, literacy or numeracy achievements sufficiently. Students' progress over their whole time in college is hard to establish for those in their second and third years owing to the absence of a secure starting point in previous years. However, written accounts of the kinds of progress students are making are becoming more concrete. They allow the reader to see more clearly how improved communication affects students' lives.

43. Literacy, numeracy and communications are not satisfactorily integrated into the curriculum. The college has a policy of moving towards a total communication approach, but many elements of this are not yet in place. There is no development plan. The timetable still emphasises practical domestic activities. Insufficient time is devoted to the selection, and trial of training in voice output communicative aids for students without a voice. One student's switch was placed in the most difficult place for him to access and remained in that place for the whole term, although all staff were aware of his difficulty in reaching it. Although students use their switches in most lessons, they receive only one specialist lesson a week that is dedicated to learning to control their devices. The college policy on signing is confusing. Staff are encouraged to sign at all times, even when speaking to students who understand speech and partly use it themselves, and to students with visual impairments. This is sometimes distracting for students who have difficulty focusing. The college site is not used well to develop students' social sight vocabulary recognition. Although teachers are beginning to help students to recognise social sight words in the community, notices in college are poorly placed for students using wheelchairs and are not consistently used to develop a sight vocabulary.

44. Support for students is satisfactory. There is a good ratio of support staff to students and a speech and language therapist contributes valuable advice to teachers on strategies to use in class, although more of her time is needed to help students make greater progress. However, support staff have had insufficient training on identifying and recording progress in lessons. Some support staff and volunteers contribute very little to students' learning. A new tutorial system has recently been implemented. Staff have been given clear guidelines for its implementation.

Leadership and management

45. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There is no strategic plan for literacy, numeracy and communication and no relevant staff development plan. Clear lines of responsibility for aspects of the programme have not been identified. Quality assurance is unsatisfactory. The self-assessment report is over-optimistic in its judgements. Teaching observations have been undertaken but are not accompanied by action plans to address weaknesses in teaching. An appraisal has been carried out with the only specialist teacher but the resulting development plan for this member of staff has no timescale attached. No checks on the quality of assessments, planning, record keeping and reviews have been undertaken. Equality of opportunity is not promoted well. The college's well designed personal relationships and sexuality policy is understood and promoted by teachers. However, a few teachers still refer to course groups as 'friends' despite the evidence in students' diaries that some of their friends come from different groups. Students are supported in celebrating the important days in their faiths but there is little evidence of the promotion of awareness of cultural diversity on a larger scale. Race and gender issues have a low profile.

Notes