

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Orchard Hill
Date of visit: 23 May 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in developing the systems to track and monitor learners' progress?

- Since the last annual assessment visit (AAV) the college has done a significant amount of work in moving to a computer-based system for recording progress. Much time has been spent in attempting to make adaptations to a commercially-based product. However, the college has found that it is insufficiently flexible and does not provide the individual focus they need. They are now in the process of developing their own systems which enable them to produce more effective records and is more accessible for staff. Significant amounts of staff training have been carried out, and the college is hoping to implement the new system in time for the new academic year.

Quality of education and training

To what extent has the college adapted its curriculum to meet the changing needs of the learners?

- The college makes satisfactory progress in adapting its curriculum to meet the changing needs of the learners. Learner numbers have increased and a wider range of needs are being met. These include the needs of learners on the autistic spectrum, many with significantly challenging behaviour as well as some learners, who are cognitively more able than the college's current cohort.
- The college curriculum has been recently reviewed and restructured with a greater emphasis on skills development to support progression into work and into the community. Curriculum areas have been rationalised into a cohesive framework with clear links into modular courses to support

learners' individual interests and aspirations. Individualised session planning ensures a more consistent learner centred curriculum and helps teaching assistants to make a more informed contribution to learning sessions. The college recognises the need to further improve the rigour of assessment to support learner centred approaches. Planning for progression has now been introduced into the second year of the full time programme and opportunities to undertake accreditation through Open College Network (OCN) are also available.

- A good range of staff development activities support curriculum development. Induction is now more thorough for new staff and there are weekly opportunities for staff to share good practice and to raise awareness of the changing needs of learners. Resources, including accommodation, are key priorities to support curriculum development. Classrooms in the main centre are well equipped and provide good learning environments. The college is aware of increasing capacity issues as the curriculum develops, and more use is being made of satellite venues alongside placements in the local community. There are increases in the number of staff including clear plans to recruit staff to manage the Carshalton vocational unit.
- The impact of the curriculum changes is insufficiently detailed and evaluated in the college's updated self-assessment report.

To what extent does specialist support continue to be provided?

- Over the past year the college has increased significantly the number of therapists. The plans for September include more rigorous and systematic pre-course assessment so that the support required starts from the beginning of term.

Leadership and management

How effective are partnerships in enabling learners to progress to more advanced provision?

- Partnerships are well used. The college works with a wide range of local and regional groups to both raise the profile of work with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and to support the progression of college learners. There is a strong focus in all partnership

work to raise awareness of the specific needs of LDD; and on productive ways to work with learners to ensure their success as they progress into new environments. A significant development for the college is the partnership with Carshalton College to set up a vocational progression unit. Capital funding has now been agreed and the unit is due to open in October 2008. There is close consultation to ensure an appropriate specification for the new accommodation and partnership arrangements include the provision of staff development and opportunities to share practice. The recent appointment of a Connexion personal advisor to work with the college offers full time learners opportunities to access advice and guidance to support progression.

How effective are the RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) arrangements in enabling managers to bring about improvements?

- The college uses the key stages of the RARPA process in relation to its planning for learners. Lesson planning is now more individualised and linked to objectives on the individual learning plan (ILP). Lesson planning has significantly improved. Achievements are recorded at the end of each lesson and summative achievements are recorded in reviews of progress. However, managers do not yet monitor the processes sufficiently in order to bring about improvements. They scrutinise aspects of the paperwork, such as ILPs and lesson plans. However gaps in the process have not been systematically identified. For example the links between the outcomes of initial assessment and the performance of the learner on programme have not been systematically identified. The outcomes of the pre-course assessment have not been brought together to form a coherent baseline from which to measure progress from the start of the programme.