

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: St Elizabeth's College

Date of visit: 15 January 2008

Context

St Elizabeth's College is located at Much Hadham near Bishop's Stortford in east Hertfordshire. The college enrolls learners with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities with the aim of developing skills to support independent living. The college has grown rapidly since it opened four years ago. Currently there are 37 students aged between 19 and 25 years enrolled at the college and all are tenants of Housing Associations in either Much Hadham or Bishop's Stortford. There is an even gender mix with 19 female and 18 male students. All 37 learners are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Achievement and standards

Do learners continue to make good progress in social enterprise activities and in external work placements?	Significant progress
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Learners continue to make good progress in social enterprise activities and in external work placements. There is improved recording of students' progress in these activities although a few recent initiatives have yet to be fully embedded.

The role of a work placement coordinator has been introduced from September 2007. Since then a range of new business contacts have been formed and the number of opportunities available to students in relation to external work placements has at least doubled. The uptake of work placements has also increased from 15% of the total cohort in 2006/7 to 35% in 2007/08. New placement opportunities include a local village jewellery store, which is shortly to open another branch within Bishop Stortford doubling the retail placements available to 16. Although still developing, significant improvements have been made to the ongoing assessment of work placements. After a trial phase in the autumn term, from January all students are required to keep a week-by-week diary on their own progress and views of the experience. In addition, formal assessment is undertaken by the coordinator through regular formal meetings with the learner and through discussions with the employer. Learning targets are now continually reviewed for relevance. The increase in the rigour of this assessment has enabled the college to more effectively meet the needs of each individual learner.

The profile of recording learning from social enterprise sessions has been raised successfully amongst staff. Discrete sessions are now planned into the whole college timetable and sessions are led by social enterprise staff. Targets for social enterprise lessons are increasingly explicit and progress in lessons is more routinely recorded. As a result, tutors can track and record progress on learners' individual development plans more effectively.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in utilising information and communication technology (ICT) resources within lessons to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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At the last annual assessment visit in June 2007, it was too early to judge whether the investment made in ICT resources was impacting on the quality of learning activities. The college has not fully evaluated the impact of ICT within teaching and learning but there is evidence that the use of technology is having a positive impact in many lessons. For example, the college's lesson observation process records where technology is used effectively to support learning and shows that in approximately 70% of lessons observed the quality of learning resources impacted directly on learning. Other examples include a DVD project undertaken by students to produce a personal record of their time at college, which they will be able to edit through new editing software.

A link developed with a local secondary school, still at an early stage, has enabled some groups of learners to access a fully equipped computer learning base on a weekly basis since September.

What progress has been made in developing a more balanced curriculum?	Reasonable progress
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A range of improvements have been made to ensure there is a more structured approach to timetabling. Plans are in place to enable some students to work towards nationally accredited units in a 'practical life and work skills' qualification by the end of this year. Due to the further increase in learner numbers this year specialist therapeutic support has been increased from 1 to 3 days per week. A drama therapy session, located in Bishop's Stortford has been introduced this academic year, as has the use of a specialist dance tutor. The range of sports and games available has also increased. Social enterprise sessions are now discretely scheduled and opportunities for work placements have increased significantly.

Leadership and management

How has the college's response to promoting equality and diversity improved?	Insufficient progress
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There has been some progress in ensuring the promotion of equality and diversity however the formal monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum and in some cases across the college is insufficiently robust.

The college's equality and diversity group has recently expanded to include greater numbers of staff and students and has a more representative profile of attendees, including a governor. The group now has clear terms of reference and objectives with an increased strategic focus.

There is an appropriate equal opportunities policy but no subsequent action plan by which to monitor implementation and impact of actions taken to promote equality, including within the curriculum and in teaching and learning. Performance by different groups of learners is analysed by managers and reported to governors. The college has a disability equality scheme in place and is monitoring implementation through the equality and diversity group. In November 2007 the college achieved investors in people (IIP) status, a key objective within the scheme. However, the implementation plan is not sufficiently specific or clear with regard to targets and measurement of progress.

There are some examples of good practice in promoting aspects of equality of opportunity such as the growing number of community projects which help to raise learners' cultural awareness and the free gym membership for all students who live in Bishop Stortford to ensure they are not disadvantaged by location.

What progress has been made in developing the process of self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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The process of self-assessment is improving but the college recognises there is still some way to go before it is fully embedded. The principal, along with his leadership team, are beginning to monitor and record performance data more effectively and measure progress using comparative data. However, this work is still at an early stage. Improving quality assurance systems are beginning to enable managers to make a better assessment of the quality of provision.

Learners' views about the college are gathered through questionnaires and interviews and used as part of the self-evaluation process. The college is in the early stages of involving all staff within the process. Steps have been taken through training to engage all staff in reflecting on the college's overall strengths and areas for improvement and in reporting their views on the five 'Every Child (Person) Matters' themes. Staff are aware of the college's five key targets and support its vision.

The leadership team recognise that further work is needed in developing self assessment and are taking a step-change approach. The 2008 draft self-assessment report plans to incorporate the college's judgements on being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. The present self-assessment report does not explicitly evaluate certain key judgements such as its overall effectiveness and its capacity to make further improvements. The college's development plan is clear and links closely to its self-assessment. It is evaluated regularly by the leadership team.