

St Elizabeth's College

Inspection report

Provider reference 132015
Published date June 2008

Contents

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	8

Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on students and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. St Elizabeth's College is part of St Elizabeth's Centre, a charity known as the Daughters of the Cross of Liege. It is located at Much Hadham near Bishop's Stortford in rural east Hertfordshire. The college enrolls students with a range of both moderate and severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities with the aim of developing skills to support independent living. All 37 students enrolled at the college are funded by the LSC and are aged between 18 and 25 years. There is an even gender mix with 19 female and 18 male students. Some 9 of the 37 students are of minority ethnic heritage.
2. The college runs a model whereby all students are tenants of Housing Associations in either Much Hadham or Bishop's Stortford. The rights and responsibilities of the tenancy contract are used as a core component of the college curriculum. Partnership arrangements with both social and health services are also integral to the model. The key feature of the college is that it takes the assessed needs of individual students and shares the funding responsibility of health, care and education between the relevant agencies. It thereby encourages holistic person-centred planning by the diversity of agencies that touch upon students' lives.
3. The college's mission states that 'by the unquestioning expression of God's love we will work together to bring about the personal development of each individual'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Satisfactory: Grade 3</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. The overall effectiveness of provision at St Elizabeth's College is satisfactory.
5. Students' achievement and standards are satisfactory. Recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) is effectively used in the development of independent living skills. There is good development of work-related skills through social enterprise activities. The quality of target setting is variable and students are not sufficiently involved in setting and reviewing their own targets.
6. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students enjoy their work and the growing range of activities available to them. Some sessions are overly teacher-led, missing opportunities to increase students' participation in their own learning. The college's response to meeting the needs and interest of students is satisfactory, as is its response to social and educational inclusion. It is not fully compliant with equalities legislation. Effective multi-agency working is successfully aiding students' entry into supported independent living. Transition arrangements are very good. Opportunities to gain relevant and useful accredited Skills for Life qualifications are too limited and students' targets for developing their basic numeracy and literacy are often unrealistic. The quality of teaching and learning regarding Skills for Life varies significantly. Guidance and support are satisfactory overall. A wide range of specialist support effectively contributes to improving students' behaviour and self-management skills. Students do not have enough involvement in the design of their programmes or their individual development plans.
7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal and governors set a clear strategic vision for the college. Good partnership working with a broad range of external organisations is well promoted and is impacting positively on the students' experience. The consistency and rigour of quality assurance is too variable. Analysis, monitoring and evaluation are insufficiently established across the college's work. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. The college has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Quality assurance and self-assessment processes are improving but not yet fully embedded and as a result are insufficiently robust. The college's self-evaluation of its provision recognised several of the key strengths and areas for improvement identified by inspectors, although it overplayed some strengths and did not identify all key areas for improvement. Subsequently the college's judgements about its provision are over-generous. The college's quality improvement plans are detailed and reviewed regularly, and actions taken are steadily improving performance in some key areas of the college's work. Staff are enthusiastic, committed to the

college ethos and have confidence in the college's leaders and managers to bring about improvement.

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

9. The college has made satisfactory progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. A high percentage of staff are appropriately qualified in health and social care. An increasing number of staff are completing basic level 3 teaching qualifications, although not all tutors are adequately trained or qualified to teach basic skills. Therapeutic specialist support within the curriculum is a key strength of the college's work. The promotion of equality and diversity has been slow to establish and the college has not yet fulfilled all its requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The balance of the curriculum has improved with increased opportunities for students to access work experience. The development and delivery of the Skills for Life curriculum remains an area for improvement.

Key strengths

- good development of work-related skills through social enterprises
- comprehensive and effective arrangements for transition after college
- good partnership working with a broad range of external organisations
- wide range of specialist support that improves students' behaviour and self-management skills
- effective multi-agency cooperation that supports students' entry into the college's supported independent living and college programme.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the consistency and rigour of quality assurance, including evaluation and monitoring, across the college
- the development and delivery of the Skills for Life curriculum and accreditation opportunities
- increasing the involvement of students in all aspects of their learning programme at college
- the accountability of leaders and managers at all levels of the organisation.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. Students' achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students make good gains in independent living skills in preparation for supported living opportunities in the future. Those with challenging behaviours achieve significant gains in managing their conduct and improving their social interaction. There is good progress in their development of vocational skills through the range of social enterprises.
11. The RARPA staged framework is well applied in the residential settings and in the development of independent living skills. However, the quality of overall target setting is variable, with some targets being far too general to be measurable. Many targets use vocabulary which is not understood by most students at the college. Students are not sufficiently involved in the initial and subsequent stages of target setting or the development of their programmes. The college has recently introduced a nationally recognised award which is being undertaken by all first and second year students at relevant levels but it is too early to measure its impact on achievement.
12. The practical nature of much of the curriculum increases the students' enjoyment and motivation. Students gain good awareness of health and safety matters by routine reinforcement in lessons especially during the development of independent living skills. Within the residences, healthy eating is promoted effectively through the menu selections and food shopping.
13. Students develop good practical and work-related skills in the social enterprise settings with many having the opportunity to sell high quality art and ceramic items at local galleries. Students make very positive contributions to the local community, for example, by developing and testing training materials for the Red Cross and supporting other local charities with fundraising and voluntary work.
14. Attendance rates are high. Retention rates are similar to other specialist colleges. Of the nine students due to leave in 2008, seven will progress into supported living settings. One student in a work experience placement is expected to be offered part-time work at the end of his course.
15. The college's analysis of achievement across different groups of students show some variations but the numbers are too small to attach significance.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

16. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Students are generally enthusiastic about their learning. Most learning support in lessons, in the residences and the college is supportive but not intrusive nor overbearing and at a level that provides timely support to students. In a small minority of cases some staff in a supporting role are over-directive and tend to do too much of the work for the students. There is good teaching of domestic skills. Many students make good progress in developing their communication skills. However, the communication strategies are not always highlighted or prioritised to enable all staff to follow easily.
17. The planning of lessons is often too general and insufficiently differentiated to suit the needs of each student in the lesson. Better lessons are based on a clear, longer-term scheme of work. They have a detailed outline of the purpose of the lesson, indicate the different activities for each student and provide ample opportunity for students to be actively involved in developing their own ideas. The leaders of these lessons also take the opportunities to assess and recognise the achievement of individual objectives. Students do not yet have sufficient opportunities to plan their own learning programmes or to fully participate in their own learning within lessons.
18. The college's internal observation of teaching and learning is gradually promoting improvements. However, the quality of some lessons is over-estimated and where areas for improvement in lessons are identified, there is no formal action plan to help develop teachers' skills. The role of observer is expected to be devolved among the senior and middle managers during the next few months. The college is aware of the need to increase the proportion of good or better teaching.
19. Communication strategies for individual students are generally understood by the staff working with students who have limited or no verbal communication in lessons. The strategies, however, are not highlighted for easy reference. Symbolised cue cards and prompt statements and objects of reference are used effectively in the residences to aid communication and understanding.
20. Pre-entry assessments are thorough and informative involving a multi-disciplinary approach. The baseline assessment summary reports, however, do not provide a sufficiently clear indication of the students' practical skills and knowledge.
21. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of students is satisfactory. The very productive partnerships that exist with local housing associations provide students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills needed to hold a tenancy. This is a very effective tool for preparing students well for progression into supported and independent living after college. Students develop high levels of independence skills in their homes, through well supported individualised programmes.

22. There are insufficient opportunities for students to gain nationally recognised qualifications, particularly in Skills for Life. Many students are gaining vocational, literacy and numeracy skills which could easily be accredited and could prove useful in supporting students' future economic well-being such as gaining employment or moving into further education. Students' targets for developing their basic numeracy and literacy are often too ambitious.
23. Good opportunities are available for students to access college-based work experience through a cocktail of social enterprises in art, horticulture, jewellery, retail and a gallery in Bishop's Stortford. Although in the early stages of development, the range of external work placement is expanding. This provides students with appropriate opportunities to enhance skills developed in the college's social enterprises and other aspects of their programme.
24. There is a broad enrichment programme. Effective partnership working has led to opportunities for students to attend local schools for evening classes and to hold membership at a local gym. Social and educational inclusion are satisfactory and have improved since the last inspection. The new residential provision at Windhill in Bishop's Stortford has provided students with greater access to the community which they use effectively to support independent living.
25. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Good therapeutic and specialist support is provided which is accurately identified on students' entry to the college and reviewed throughout so that individual needs are consistently met. Arrangements include speech and language therapy, psychology, art therapy, multi-sensory, physiotherapy and counselling. The multi-disciplinary team make a significant contribution to students' ability to access the curriculum and make progress in managing their behaviour and developing self-help skills.
26. Students receive regular tutorials with their key tutors which focus on the acquisition of skills relating to home management. Tracking of progression in vocational areas is done by curriculum tutors. However, this information only comes together in the termly reports which can lead to students working on the same targets for long periods. A written individual development plan is used to track progress but a pictorial version is not yet in place to support involvement of some students who require a more accessible version. The college surveys students' views and the responses are analysed but as yet there is not a robust process for responding to the results and influencing the quality of provision.
27. Transition arrangements are good. A very effective transition process provides good outcomes for college leavers. Multi-agency team working provides a clear person-centred plan post-college enabling high levels of students to progress to supported and independent living, further education and voluntary work.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Satisfactory: Grade 3

28. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal and governors set a clear strategic direction for the college. Since the last inspection student numbers have more than trebled and this growth has been managed well. The college has successfully fostered good partnerships with a broad range of external organisations, including strong links with local housing associations, which are very effective in supporting the college's unique model of provision. Communication within teams is good, although across teams it is sometimes less clear - often due to an over reliance on informal discussions. Written and verbal communication to parents is very good.
29. Quality assurance is satisfactory overall. Senior managers have strengthened the collection and use of data. However, quality assurance processes are not sufficiently robust to ensure consistency across all areas of the college's work and to effectively monitor or evaluate what is working well or less well. The process of self-assessment has improved. There is greater involvement from all staff but this is in its early stages and whole staff ownership of the process has yet to be fully established. Many of the college's key initiatives are directed and led by the principal. Some senior managers and most middle managers are not yet sufficiently accountable for leading on, and implementing, key aspects of the college's work. The college recognises the need for further delegation and for increased management training to effectively support middle managers in their role.
30. Opportunities for staff development are generally good. The training and development of staff has been a key priority for the college over the last 18 months. Over 90% of staff are now qualified to level 2 in health and social care and around a third of staff have taken level 3 teaching qualifications. However, not all staff are appropriately qualified to teach basic skills.
31. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Students' representatives are involved in the college's equality and diversity group. All teaching sessions identify opportunities to integrate and promote related themes, though not all of these materialise in practice. The college does not fully meet the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. A clear single equality scheme covering race, gender and disability, and its associated implementation plans have recently been developed. However, it is too early to determine the impact from any actions planned. Senior managers analyse performance by different groups of students but reports are not yet summarised or reviewed formally.
32. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current government requirements. A nominated senior manager has responsibility for all safeguarding and virtually all staff have received appropriate training.

33. Governors are very supportive of the college's work. They bring a good range of experience and knowledge to their role. However, they do not sufficiently fulfil their responsibilities in regard to the systematic monitoring of equalities legalisation.
34. The standard of facilities for teaching students' independence skills is high and creates a good living and learning environment. Information communication technology resources and the college teaching accommodation are adequate. Financial management is sound. The college provides satisfactory value for money.