

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Linkage College

Date of visit: 12 June 2008

### Context

Since its inspection in December 2007, the college has leased premises to create a further centre at Louth, in addition to the two main campuses at Weelsby and Toynton. The Louth centre is located approximately midway between these campuses and can be accessed by all students. Courses currently running at the centre include childcare, business and customer care, with job club and health literacy programmes adding to this curriculum offer from September 2009.

The student population predominantly includes those who have conditions such as Down's syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Tourette's syndrome, autistic spectrum disorder, epilepsy, speech and language difficulties as well as less overt emotional and behavioural difficulties. From the next academic year, the college plans to offer places to students with more profound learning disabilities where it is able to adapt its provision to meet the levels of support required. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 232 students enrolled; 91% residential and 9% day students.

### Achievement and standards

In February 2008 students' achievement was judged to be outstanding and standards were rising. Are standards continuing to rise?	Reasonable progress
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In-year data suggest standards are continuing to rise although it was too early at the time of the monitoring visit to make an exact comparison with attainment in previous years.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in matching the quality of teaching and learning across the Weelsby and Toynton campuses?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection the college was judged to have a high proportion of teaching and learning that was good or outstanding. Since then, the

college has continued to develop its monitoring and support systems to improve teaching and learning further and ensure greater consistency. For example, the observation team has been restructured to give a focused and consistent approach to observing teaching and learning across both campuses. The college now strategically monitors the quality of teaching and learning between sites in order to consider any emerging trends over time.

The college has refined its support for individual teachers. The period for internal lesson observations within the year has been reviewed and extended significantly, from 3 to 12 weeks, to allow additional time for opportunities to coach and support staff. Teachers are now observed by different members of the observation team to help provide a range of constructive feedback and more effectively monitor teachers' progress against their own developmental action plan. Mentors of new staff are now more involved in the observation process to help more directly support the staff they are mentoring.

A student forum involving students from both sites has been recently formed and is effectively identifying improvements to the planning of teaching and learning. For example, it has already influenced how certain subjects are delivered; suggesting preferences of delivery such as whether lessons should be planned as a workshop, one-to-one or on a group basis.

What progress has been made in ensuring quality improvement processes are coherent across all areas and between sites?	Significant progress
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There is much formal sharing of good practice across the college and between the Toynton and Weelsby sites. Staff representatives from both sites are now meeting more formally to discuss initiatives and share ideas. For example, creative arts staff make regular alternate site visits and are in the process of developing the college's 'My Space' initiative designed to promote students' art work. Independence lecturers from both sites are meeting regularly to develop an 'independence through technology' initiative.

All the college's quality assurance policies and procedures have been reviewed and, where appropriate, refined to ensure they are consistent and fully effective. One change leading from this, for example, includes the introduction of a more systematic approach to tracking students' progress by aligning audit times more closely to when staff observe individual students in their learning environment in order to better understand and develop the student experience.

The peer reference group, set up in September 2007, which involves Linkage working with five other independent specialist colleges to discuss quality-related issues, is now more established. The group enables all colleges to share and review best practice. Students are also now being involved in this inter-college approach, with the first meeting due to take place in mid June to discuss and share their views.

## Leadership and management

How effectively is the college analysing data on students' achievement in relation to disability, race and gender?	Significant progress
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The college now analyses data by different groups of students much more comprehensively. Students' progress is analysed by using their medium-term and long-term goals to review progress against expected targets to date. This is reported specifically by age, gender, ethnicity, and by learners' primary learning difficulty and/or disability. Initial analysis from the early reports has enabled managers to more effectively identify specific groups of learners who are performing below expectations and take appropriate action. The college recognise that further work is needed in analysing and monitoring types of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and is developing this further for the next academic year. A programme of training is planned for all middle managers to enable them to use these data with confidence. In addition, systems have been developed to enable the college to analyse student survey data and destinations data by different learner groups from September 2009.

Overall, equality and diversity continues to be effectively promoted. The college is in the early stages of development regarding impact assessments, but has a clear and carefully considered approach in place. Consultation groups have been set up and all 90 college policies have a three year schedule of screening and have been prioritised accordingly. The college is in the process of analysing its staff training in equality and diversity to evaluate its impact on teaching and learning.

What progress has been made towards using summary data to inform planning and target setting?	Reasonable progress
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Along with the more comprehensive data produced for different groups of learners, the college is developing ways of using a range of summary data to inform planning. Much of this is in the early stages of development, such as summary data from student questionnaire and destinations, and is due to be

integral to the 2008 self-assessment cycle and target setting for 2008/09. In conjunction with a national management information systems (MIS) provider, the college has developed a process of capturing information from internal lesson observations electronically. The system is due to go live from the start of the next academic year. The reports pull together quantitative information that provides an overview of college strengths and areas for improvement from lesson observations to help identify and plan more bespoke whole-college training.

Training is underway for middle managers to enable them to use summary data and information at all levels to inform planning and set increasingly challenging targets. It was too soon at the time of the monitoring visit to fully evaluate the use of these data and any impact on raising achievement.