

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Regent College, Stoke-on Trent
Date of visit: 4 June 2008

Context

Regent College is an independent specialist college offering day provision for learners aged 16 to 25 years. The college was established in 1999 by Shelton Care Ltd. Currently, there are 19 learners who are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and one learner funded jointly by LSC, Educational and Learning Wales (ELWa), and social services. There is one learner of minority ethnic heritage. All learners live within an hour's drive of the college. Most learners have complex needs, some have autistic spectrum disorders and two have physical disabilities. The college operates from one building in Stoke-on-Trent and uses a range of local facilities for community awareness, leisure, recreation and gardening. Vocational opportunities are being developed and learners undertake national awards where appropriate.

At the previous inspection, in November 2007, the college's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. Other key aspects of achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management were also judged as satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Is the linking of baseline assessments to targets and the rigour of target-setting improving?	Reasonable progress
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Comprehensive baseline assessments are conducted during the learners' first term, which contribute effectively to the development of the individual learning plan and the targets contained within it. The individual learning plan includes an appropriate series of broad-based termly targets which are directly influenced by the learners' long term goals. The termly targets are sensibly broken down into more detailed targets for each session. There is an extensive range of targets across the learners' individual programmes, but many of these are not yet sufficiently specific. Learner involvement in the process of setting targets is under-developed.

What progress has been made in the developing systems for tracking overall learner progress and development?	Reasonable progress
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The college has developed an effective tracking system to readily identify the lessons in which targets are being addressed, based on a comprehensive matrix of targets set against lessons through the week. In addition, the college has recently introduced an effective and easily-accessible electronic system of tracking each learner's progress against their targets. Tutors have satisfactory access to computers for recording and reviewing learners' progress. The system has been operating just a few months but the tutors are recording against the revised targets and using the tracking system effectively to monitor progress across the curriculum. An internal verification process has been introduced in which an identified member of the management team checks the learners' progress and the quality of the recording in lessons every week. This is still at an early stage of development but is being used to intervene promptly with tutors to develop their recording skills. Learners are not yet sufficiently involved in the process of reviewing and tracking their own progress.

Quality of provision

How successful is the college in improving the quality of lesson planning?	Reasonable progress
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There have been considerable and effective changes in lesson planning since the inspection. The previous focus on individual activities and completion of a task has been replaced with a clearer focus on learners' targets and the development of learners' skills. In addition, there has been an enhanced emphasis on the learning processes within each practical task that are relevant to the learners' future. The lesson plans are shorter, clearer and more focused on the learners' long term destinations. The recently developed quality indicators provide a sound basis for quality assurance, but are not yet fully embedded. However, there are inconsistencies in the structure of lesson plans. Some lesson plans now actively encourage individual learners to review, reflect and record their progress in a meaningful and individual way. This is clearly reflected in those learners' good understanding of the practical tasks and their purpose. However, other lesson plans are too general with insufficient reference to the learners' individual requirements. There is insufficient focus on the learners directing their own learning.

What progress has been made in developing transition planning for learners since the inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Each learner has a comprehensive transition plan which clearly sets out their plans for the future and identifies the people involved in helping achieve these. The transition element of the curriculum has focused third year learners' attention on the implications of leaving. This is to be extended to learners in all years from September 2008. There are comprehensive support systems for learners who are likely to go into supported employment or work, including an effective advocacy service and good Connexions support. Where a learner is not likely to undertake any form of employment the support systems are in the early stages of development with the advocacy service using person-centred planning techniques to support moves towards greater independence. The college has undertaken to lead a group of local organizations in supporting learners' transition. The group's work is at an early stage of development.

Leadership and management

The inspection report of October 2007 indicated insufficient specialist staff expertise. The college's position statement of May 2008 indicates that newly recruited staff have appropriate expertise. How much progress has been made in increasing the proportion of staff with specialist expertise?	Reasonable progress
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There has been a clear initiative within the college to increase the level of staff training and to support them in achieving teaching qualifications. All tutors are working towards a continuing professional development qualification to improve their awareness and skills in special needs. Most support staff have completed part of the same qualification. Effective links with other independent specialist colleges support this initiative and act as a relevant benchmark. The college has recruited sufficient sessional teachers to support speech and language therapy, and behaviour management to enhance its specialist input. The management has changed its recruitment policy to ensure it employs suitably qualified new staff. It is, however, too early to judge the impact of this policy.