

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Dorton College  
Date of visit: 8 December 2008

### Context

Dorton College of further education (FE) is a specialist residential college that provides further education for learners who are blind or partially sighted. Many have additional learning needs. Currently 63 students are funded by the Learning and Skills Council and /or social services. The college has discontinued its contract with the Residential Training Unit of the Department for Work and Pensions. The college is owned by the Royal London Society for the Blind, which is a charitable trust. The college is located on a 47 acre site at Seal, near Sevenoaks, Kent. The college works with two partner colleges, where most students take their vocational qualifications. The college's intake is changing, with an increasing number of students with learning difficulties, who are studying at entry level or below.

The college had a full inspection in 2007, where it was found to be satisfactory in all aspects, compared with the previous inspection where it was judged to be good overall. The college has restructured during the current year, and has reduced its management team from seven to three. The current head of education is the society's chief executive, who is acting as principal while the college is recruiting for a permanent appointment. The college is currently in the process of reshaping its curriculum at entry level and below to reflect the need for more students to study in a practical, realistic context.

### Achievement and standards

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| How much progress has been made in using data to record students' achievements and progression | Reasonable progress |
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Since the previous inspection the college has analysed its achievement and progression data, going back over several years in order to identify trends. The resulting evidence is being used to develop a starting point upon which key performance indicators ( KPI) can be based, to show clearly the extent to which the college is meeting students' longer term needs. These KPIs are still being developed, and were not included in the 07/08 SAR. This finds that students' achievements and destination outcomes are satisfactory, with those on vocational courses in partner colleges doing as well or better than their peers. Key skills pass rates in partner colleges have declined, and the college is investigating why this was.

However, without the added analysis to indicate, for example, value added data from partner colleges, or the extent to which open or supported employment were agreed progression goals, it is not possible fully to evaluate the extent to which the college is succeeding in its preparation for the next stage of a students' life.

## Quality of provision

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| How much progress has been made in the development of target setting for students? | Reasonable progress |
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The college has made reasonable progress in the development of target setting for students. The baseline is now more coherent, with basic skills targets incorporated into the main individual learning plan. The college now involves students in the development of targets, and these are discussed with tutors. The number of targets is manageable and the wording is simple and clear. Review of targets takes place more often, and achievements are celebrated at the end of each term. The early signs are that this system involves students more effectively, and enables tutors to plan a more person-centred timetable. The college is planning to incorporate the basic skills targets into the residential arrangements. The college is developing a management information system that captures learners' achievements.

## Leadership and management

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| How much progress has been made in providing specialist training for partner colleges and Dorton staff? | Reasonable progress |
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The college has improved its arrangements for training the staff in partner colleges. All staff working with students from Dorton College are required to have a day's training that covers the main eye conditions, sighted guiding, assistive technology and adaptations. Subject tutors meet the student to discuss their needs, and support workers attend one to one tutorials at the colleges. An analysis of support needs has been carried out, and the college is looking to further emphasise the need for reduction of support workers in the classroom, as students become more independent.

All Dorton staff have mandatory training in core topics such as child protection, equality and diversity and manual handling. Life skills staff are encouraged to learn Braille and to assist with mobility. Staff are being trained to support the greater emphasis on community engagement and preparation for community integration, reflecting the change in the college cohort.

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| How much progress has been made in quality improvement? | Reasonable progress |
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Early signs are that the college now has a more rigorous approach to quality improvement, based on a more systematic analysis of data, and a focus on the quality of experience for the students. The college has identified a strategic direction based on the increasing complexity of student need and the external climate. The staff have been fully involved in the self-assessment process, and the report is significantly more evaluative than the previous report. It acknowledges areas for improvement, with plans to address them. The college acknowledges that the programme for students at pre-entry and entry levels did not involve sufficient active learning. The teachers have introduced more practical sessions into this year's programme and the college is planning to start enterprises that involve realistic work and social experiences. The college has carried out a detailed critical analysis of its observation of teaching and learning scheme and has introduced a change of procedures for this academic year. The first observations are much improved, with a greater emphasis on the experience of learners.