

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Dilston College  
Date of visit: 9 December 2008

### Context

Dilston College is an independent specialist provider situated in rural Northumberland and is one of three specialist colleges that together form the Mencap National College (MNC). Dilston offers full-time residential and day education for learners aged 16 to 25 with learning disabilities. Currently 75 learners attend the college, of whom 63 are residential and 12 attend daily. Of these, two learners are of minority ethnic heritage, 44 are aged 16 to 19 and 33 are aged over 19. Learners have a wide range of learning needs. Thirty two learners have moderate disabilities and those with complex needs include 15 learners with autism spectrum disorders. Currently, 75% of learners are from the North East region; 10.5% are from the North West; 6.5% are from North Yorkshire and Humberside; and 6% are from the East Midlands.

The college offers an educational programme with accredited and non-accredited routes across three main areas: social and life skills; practical and vocational programmes; and skills for life (communication, literacy and numeracy). In partnership with Tynedale Virtual College, the college offers a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 1 in catering and hospitality. The college also operates an off-site laundry in the market town of Hexham.

The college is supported and monitored by the MNC board of governors which has representation from learners across the three colleges as well as trustees from the Mencap board. The acting principal and deputy principal are now confirmed in these roles and a new assistant principal is in post. The college has completed its reorganisation of the middle management. The purpose of reorganisation has been to increase the capacity of the college in order to meet the demands and expectations on the specialist sector.

The college was last inspected in January 2007 and was judged to be good in all areas. Strengths included good development of learners' practical; work-related and independence skills; excellent resources for vocational programmes; good integration of communication, literacy and numeracy

opportunities; effective learner involvement in the community; effective lesson observation process; and good management of change. The areas for improvement were the consistency of target-setting and recording of progress at all levels across the college; the development of recording and assessment of progress and achievement (RARPA); and the explicit promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum.

#### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to develop of the process for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA)?	Reasonable progress
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The college's bespoke management information system is now implemented fully in relation to supporting the RARPA process. Individual learning plans, targets and review reports are produced on the system. A review of a small sample of individual learning plans indicates that some subject targets are too broad to be achieved in the short-term. The college is highly focused on improving all aspects of target-setting. Overall targets are now more clear and specific. Tutorial forms are redesigned to promote a clear focus on discussing learners' progress. However, a review of two completed forms indicates wide variation in the depth of completion. The college is aware of the need for further work with personal tutors in this area. An interactive tutorial is available for learners with more complex needs. It allows the personal tutor to import pictorial representation and pictures of tutors and peers to support discussion and choices.

Personal tutors report that the use of the management information system is now central to target-setting and recording of progress and achievement. They value the comprehensive overview that it provides on each learner. The system generates an individual learner tracker form which is used to monitor and record progress in sessions.

Alongside the development of the management information system, a range of highly focused staff development for both tutors and learning support staff has taken place to improve the consistency of the RARPA processes. Ongoing support is available for individual staff on the use of the system. Development sessions are provided for learning support staff in target-setting, report writing and on the use of literacy, numeracy and communication cross-curricular priorities.

What progress has been made in preparing the learners to meet their long term goals? How successful are learners in progressing to these?	Reasonable progress
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The college is in the process of collecting four years of destination data from learners who have left since 2005. Plans are in place to use the management information system to collect and analyse this feedback to identify issues which will enhance learners' development towards their long-term goals. The data on destinations for 2008 leavers indicates that 71% achieved their long term goal for living arrangements. Of these leavers, 52% who had independent supported living as a long term goal achieved this although the destinations of 18% of leavers are still pending. The college is aware of the need for further work in this area.

Mencap and the college have established a pilot project on personalised learning and individual budgets. The aim is to enhance support for learners through this process. A steering group is established which includes representatives from local authority care managers, the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Connexions, as well as college key workers and personal tutors. Six learners in their final year are participating. This week each learner and their circle of support are presenting the individual draft plans to external consultants to test the readiness of the plans for submission to their local authority for approval. The outcomes of the project will be used to prepare learners for their transition out of the college.

#### Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in developing its learner involvement strategy?	Reasonable progress
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A draft MNC learner involvement strategy is in place. Learners from each of the three colleges were involved in its development. The strategy clearly identifies which structures for learner involvement are currently in place and the actions required to develop the strategy further. The strategy document will be presented for approval at the next board of governors meeting.

#### Leadership and management

What progress has been made to ensure the robustness of the arrangements to verify learners' progress and achievement?	Reasonable progress
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A policy and procedure is now in place for checking and improving the quality of teaching and learning. It clearly details managers' involvement in each part of verifying learners' progress and achievement. The new management information system is central to this process but is still being developed.

The curriculum learning managers check individual learning plans and targets through the management information system in the first two weeks of each term. Targets are either accepted or rejected with additional comments provided, at which stage the tutor has to revise and resubmit them. A similar process occurs with termly and annual review reports. However, a review of a small sample of individual learning plans indicates that the quality monitoring by college learning managers is not fully consistent. For example, a small sample of monitored and accepted subject targets were too broad to be achieved in the short term. Summary data is produced which allows senior managers to monitor the rejection of targets, target reviews and reports. Data indicates staff requiring further support. Reports on learner achievement by individual tutors are produced and links are being made to the individual outcomes of the observation of teaching and learning.

What progress has been made to develop the management information systems for gathering and using data to monitor achievements?	Reasonable progress
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The college has developed management information systems to promote effective management and usage of data. It is being implemented across the college, including in the residences, and plans are in place to develop it further. The college is identifying areas for development and reporting, for example destinations data. The system is central to the recording of progress and achievement and the verification of this process. A wide range of data reports are produced to promote the effective analysis of learner achievement. Managers use data reports well to monitor overall college and subject achievement and to monitor learner achievement at individual tutor level. This is now being linked to teaching observation records to identify individual or general areas for staff development. The management information system is used to store photographs of learner achievement, which staff and students use in sessions and reviews.

What progress has been made on addressing the formal promotion of equality and diversity across the college? What progress has been made in using data to monitor the performance of specific groups of learners?	Reasonable progress
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Schemes of work and session plans now contain equality and diversity aims and objectives. Line managers monitor schemes of work regularly. Staff are aware of the need to identify and promote equality and diversity within their sessions. A calendar identifies cultural events which are then developed as themes. For example, a theme on the Chinese New Year was celebrated through the catering and arts curriculum. A member of staff has recently

been appointed to promote cultural diversity across the three Mencap National Colleges.

A Mencap National College Single Equality Scheme is in place. Dilston College has a detailed action plan in place. A recent review indicates clear progress in several areas. All policies and procedures were impact assessed in summer 2008 with evidence of some amendments to the literacy, numeracy and communication policy and the identification of several actions required to promote equality.

Data is used systematically to analyse the performance of learners by gender and ethnicity. An issue of under achievement by a learner in a minority ethnic group was identified and reviewed appropriately. Data indicates no significant difference in performance of learners by gender.