

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Arden College

Date of visit: 24 June 2008

### Context

Arden College, based in Southport, is an independent, residential specialist college that provides further education for learners aged 16-25 years of age who have learning difficulties and/or social, behavioural or emotional difficulties, speech and communication difficulties, and a range of conditions such as Fragile X, Tourette and Williams' syndrome. Craegmoor Healthcare Company Limited owns the college, under the auspices of Speciality Care (Rest Homes) Ltd. The main teaching accommodation is on one site, but plans are in place to expand the off-site teaching accommodation in September. The college makes substantial use of its residential homes and the local community for teaching. Learners' residences are all within two miles of the college. Many of the learners travel independently; 51 learners are residential and 22 learners attend on a daily basis. A new principal has been in post since March 2008.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made on implementing the principles of recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA)?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress on developing the RARPA process. In independent living skills, the process of recording and monitoring achievement is now well established. Effective monitoring of the quality of all learners' individual learning plans and targets now takes place each term. This process includes thorough monitoring of individual learner progress against specific short-term targets. Multi-disciplinary and residential staff are now more involved in this process. Targets are generally more challenging. However, some medium-term targets are not broken down sufficiently to demonstrate small steps in learning and achievement. For example, one learner has had the same medium-term target for two years, which is to gain a work placement. The quality of the content and the timely completion of half-termly learner reports are now thoroughly monitored. While learner achievement against individual targets is summarised the college is aware of the need to develop its analysis and use of achievement data to promote improvement. A clear action plan is in place for the implementation of the college management information system for September 2008.

What improvements have been made in the analysis and use of attendance and punctuality rates?	Reasonable progress
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The college process for monitoring attendance and punctuality is now well established. Tutors systematically track individual learners' attendance and punctuality. Absence or lateness is discussed with individual learners at the weekly tutorial and targets for improvement are recorded. Tutors highlight specific areas of concern during the weekly staff meetings and these are highlighted to senior managers. The college is aware of the need to improve the analysis and use of data and structured plans are in place to introduce the new management information system in September.

#### Quality of provision

What action has been taken to improve consistency in the use of support staff?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in monitoring and improving the deployment of learning support assistants. A clear and detailed support plan was introduced in September 2007. This outlines the allocation of learning support assistants to classes and individual learners. The plan is reviewed on a termly basis. A curriculum manager reviews allocation on a daily basis, considering absences and individual learner needs. A classroom assistant is now responsible for the induction process for new learning support assistants. During induction, a thorough skills analysis is carried out for all new staff. This process identifies individual strengths, weaknesses, experience and skills. The information is used to match assistants to classes and individual learners. A very recent support plan identifies clear actions to increase the number of assistants and to provide a more comprehensive induction for September 2008. The plan also includes weekly staff training for support. The proposed appointment of a senior classroom support assistant with involvement in the observation process has not yet taken place. This appointment will be part of an overall strategic review of the staffing structures that is taking place across the three Craegmoor colleges and is due to complete by December 2008.

How has the range of vocational opportunities for learners improved since the inspection?	Reasonable progress
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In January 2008, the college introduced an additional nationally accredited award in preparing for employment. A review has since taken place and for September, aspects of the award will be delivered through the independent living skills and work experience programmes. Enterprise activities in art and horticulture are now increased. Links with local further education colleges are well developed. A local college provides taster sessions that support the learners through the transition process. Since March, the college has carried out a thorough review of the curriculum and detailed action plans are in place. A clear focus is now on widening the vocational provision and increasing opportunities for learners to develop employability skills. The detailed curriculum plans clearly outline an increased range

of vocational opportunities for the autumn term including entry level certificates in catering, conservation and in using information and communication technologies.  
Leadership and management

How have accommodation, finance and strategic oversight of Arden College by the parent company improved?	Reasonable progress
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A new area manager, with an educational background, is now responsible for the three Craegmoor colleges. Craegmoor Healthcare is currently carrying out a strategic review of all three colleges and residential care that will be completed by December 2008. The company aim is that all three colleges will work more closely together, for example, to validate each other's self-assessment report. The new college principal has been in post since March. She meets formally each month with the area manager. Senior management team meetings now take place regularly each month with an increasing focus on strategy as well as operational issues. The area manager meets with the chief executive on a quarterly basis. Very recently, a service level agreement was established between the colleges and Craegmoor Health. This clearly specifies the individual roles and responsibilities. However, it is too early to measure the success of this development. Each college now has an individual designated budget.

The college is currently completing a management restructure that places an increased focus on curriculum teams and will be operational by September. The curriculum co-ordinators will now have a curriculum management role in leading programme teams with a clear focus on quality improvement. The principal plans that the new team structure will be central to improving the self-assessment process and the report format. It is proposed that curriculum managers will have a devolved budget. Plans are in place to increase teaching accommodation for September; however, leases are not yet finalised. Alongside this, clear plans to improve access to buildings are in place. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of these actions.

What actions have been taken to develop the annual quality improvement cycle?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last visit, the monitoring of learner progress reports, individual learning plans and targets are more thorough and systematic. The quality improvement cycle has been reviewed and developed further. The cycle now clearly indicates when the specific monitoring activities take place, the person responsible and the evidence base. The new principal has a clear focus on quality improvement. The recent college restructure now places a greater emphasis on quality improvement through the clarification of the curriculum manager responsibilities and the team structures. Planned opportunities are provided for staff to meet and share good practice during training days.