

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Bridge College
Date of visit: 11 March 2009

Context

Bridge College is an independent specialist day college. It provides for students with severe and complex learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and autistic spectrum conditions. It is based on one site in Stockport and makes use of a range of community facilities to enhance the curriculum. In 2009 there are 75 student places and 70 students currently on roll. The majority are aged 19 to 23 and are recruited from special schools within the Greater Manchester area. One fifth of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college mission is to create a learning environment that is inclusive and where young people make successful transition to adulthood by making good progress in their self-esteem, skills for life and independence. Individual learner programmes are delivered within two departments. The Department of Foundation Studies provides an entry level course and a Step Up programme for students with autistic spectrum conditions. The Department of Pre-Foundation Studies offers courses for students at pre-entry level and a sensory course for students with complex needs.

Bridge College became a Makaton Centre of Excellence in 2001. It has also applied to become a National Autistic Society accredited centre. The college's specialist resources include a hydrotherapy pool, physiotherapy suite and fitness area. The college employs 103 staff. It has its own team of paramedical staff, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses and access to the 'Together Trust' educational psychology service. The college works under the auspices of the charity 'Together Trust'. A board of governors is responsible to the Trust for the strategic direction of the college. The governing body includes members of the Trust, as well as parents, staff and representatives from education, business and the community.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made by the college in sustaining the good level of learners' progress noted in the 2008 inspection report?	Significant progress
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Learners' progress continues to be good. A move to 'person centred planning' has improved further the quality of targets set. A good focus is given to capturing the small steps achieved by students, without losing sight of their overall goals. The system is flexible to allow varying numbers of targets to be set for individual students and these are reviewed on an ongoing basis. College data show a high

proportion of students reached their targets in 2007/08. The college has made significant progress to ensure staff allow students enough time to work out problems for themselves or learn from mistakes, an issue that was identified at the previous inspection.

Many examples of students developing their confidence and communication skills can be seen. They participate well in college-based and external events. Examples include: taking part in a trade fair at a large retail outlet; a radio programme for Community Service Volunteers; and a music festival at the Lowry arts centre. The college constantly reviews the extent to which external qualifications meet the needs of their students. In 2007/08 nine students gained accreditation in English Speaking Board or City and Guilds qualifications and 14 completed or partially completed 'Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Towards Independence' modules.

What progress has been made in preparing learners to meet their long term goals? How successful are learners in progressing to these?	Significant progress
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Transition planning is an integral part of a student's programme. This is as a result of successful curriculum changes and the much improved emphasis since the previous inspection on the development of work related skills, where appropriate. Another significant development since the inspection is the focus on helping students to develop links in their home area. All of these initiatives are contributing well to help students meet their long term goals. For example, of the 25 students who left the college last year, 60% progressed to a course at a general further education college or to other training.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made by the college in maintaining the strengths in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning noted in the inspection report?	Significant progress
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The college has built upon the good systems that were in place to monitor teaching and learning at the previous inspection. The system now has increased emphasis on areas for improvement and there is extensive sharing of good practice. Improvements in the management information system enable staff and managers to monitor well the effectiveness of lessons and adjust planning quickly where necessary. The impact of specialist therapies on teaching and learning is being monitored more closely.

Governors are now involved well in monitoring the impact of the quality improvement plan; this includes sampling individual learning plans and checking

progress on the grading profile of lessons observed. College records show a significant increase in the proportion of lessons graded as good or outstanding since the inspection.

What progress has been made by the college in developing links with employers since the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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The creation of a new post to focus on this work has led to significant developments in work with employers since the previous inspection. Additionally, four support workers have a role dedicated to this aspect of the college's work. As a result, there has been a significant increase in work experience activity. All students have work skills incorporated in their programmes. They generally progress from internal to external work placements within their second and third years, although this is sufficiently flexible to ensure individuals can take up a placement as soon as they are ready. The range of placements has been extended and successful work has taken place to offer students placements in their home area, where appropriate. This is particularly valuable for students in their final year at college, as part of their transition plan. Internal work placements have been extended. As well as reception and kitchen work, students now also have placements with the maintenance team and the speech and language therapist and plans are in place to extend the scheme to housekeeping. At the time of the monitoring visit, 43 students were benefiting from some form of work experience, 30% of which was external.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to improve the quality of accommodation to support teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Since the inspection, the college has continued to improve aspects of its accommodation. This includes enhancements to safety features and a refurbished sensory room. It has improved specialist equipment in a number of areas and made modifications to the hall to address an issue of dual use identified in the previous inspection report. However, the college recognises the limitations of its buildings and plans have been drawn up for a new capital build, which involves co-location with a general further education college.

What progress has been made in measuring the impact of policies and procedures for equality and diversity?	Reasonable progress
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Positive aspects of equality and diversity identified at the previous inspection continue to be evident, including recruitment of students from a range of ethnic backgrounds and careful monitoring of their progress. The college recognises the

need to continue attempts to diversify its staffing profile. There is better monitoring of the impact of equality and diversity policies at governor level. A recently appointed advisor to the governors is helping the college to develop its systems to support Muslim students and their families. The college continues to celebrate diversity within the curriculum. For example, students enjoy participating in performing arts workshops delivered by a Zimbabwean group. The college's increasing emphasis on person centred planning is contributing to its focus on meeting individual needs, including helping students to get involved in activities in their home areas. One example is a student who has been helped to join a group of young Asian people with learning difficulties that has been set up through the Millennium Volunteers project in Trafford. The college recognises that the self-assessment report does not include sufficient analysis of the impact of its work to promote equality and diversity