

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Hinwick Hall College

Date of visit: 5 March 2009

Context

Hinwick Hall is a specialist independent residential college situated in north Bedfordshire, on the border with Northamptonshire. The college forms part of a national charity and provide for learners with complex communication, physical and learning difficulties.

At the time of the monitoring visit there were a total of 41 learners; of these 30 are male and 11 are female and four learners are of minority ethnic heritage. All learners are currently funded through the LSC. Nine learners are non-resident.

After an extended period of interim senior managers, the college appointed a new principal in August 2008. Between July 2008 and February 2009 a new senior management team was appointed with the final vice principal due to take up position in April 2009.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving the consistency of target setting to effectively measure learners' achievement?	Significant progress
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The college has improved the consistency and quality of its target setting on students' individual learning plans (ILPs). A college review of learning plans in June 2008 identified further variable quality in target setting and progress tracking. As a result, all lecturing staff and some educational support staff received training on target setting and the individual learning plan format was amended to simplify the tracking and recording process. The college piloted an integrated approach to target setting in the summer of 2008 using multidisciplinary teams including therapists, residential staff, education support staff, and personal tutors, who have direct knowledge of each individual student. This more coherent approach to target setting is now in place across the college and is enabling information on individual students' progress to be shared more effectively. Individual learning plans are now reviewed every six weeks in addition to the three formal reviews each term. Teachers' confidence in setting and reviewing learner targets is increasing.

In order to further capture students' progress of short-term targets in a timely manner, the timetabling of student tutorials is now clearly structured into two sessions a week. In addition, three half-hour sessions have been identified for each student, which can be accessed flexibly throughout the week for individual reviews with their tutor.

College data shows that 84% of students achieved their full core targets in the autumn term compared with 31% at the same point last year and the proportion of partial achievements has reduced as a consequence. The college anticipate this higher rate of learners full target achievement will continue in the spring term. Individual learning plans and care plans are sampled twice a year as part of the college's quality assurance cycle. A review of individual learning plans and care plans in February 2009 showed improvement in target setting by teachers but clearly identified there is still work to be done to further improve the consistency and quality of target setting and progress monitoring in all areas.

Quality of provision

How effective are the steps taken to ensure the integration of literacy and numeracy within lessons is meaningful?	Reasonable progress
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The college now has a clear Skills for Life strategy. Arrangements for initially assessing learners' literacy and numeracy needs are more systematic. The college piloted an alternative approach for teaching numeracy and literacy in the summer term of 2008 to determine how students make the most progress in developing their basic skills. As a result of the pilot, all pathway one students now receive discrete literacy and numeracy lessons with the aim of building students' basic understanding through focused tasks. All pathway two and three students continue to have literacy and numeracy integrated into their lessons. The tracking of learners' targets has improved, although it was not possible at the time of the monitoring visit to determine the full impact on students' literacy and numeracy achievement.

The college's review of individual learning plans and care plans highlighted a number of literacy weaknesses amongst the care staff team. In response, specific training has taken place with key residential staff on the monitoring of student targets within the residential setting, and on the role of care staff in this process. The college has also reviewed its recruitment process to set a higher level of basic skills expertise required in the care support person specification and all short-listed candidates are required to complete an online basic skills assessment prior to interview.

To what extent has the college made progress in widening the opportunities available for learners to undertake work experience?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has increased the number of internal opportunities for work experience. Last year 45% of students undertook some form of work-related learning. At the time of the monitoring visit, 48% of students had already undertaken some form of work experience, with the figure predicted to rise to 58% by the end of the academic year.

Additional internal work placements now include reception work, vehicle maintenance, horticulture and building maintenance. The development of the nearby commercially-operated plant centre as an opportunity to deliver work-related learning has been identified as a key target for September 2009. External links with employers remains limited. However, the college has successfully developed a link with a local activity-based centre enabling students to get involved in additional work-related opportunities.

Partnership arrangements generally are in the early stages but are developing well. The college is in discussion with the Northants learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 14-19 group, a local secondary special school and a specialist training provider for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Northamptonshire. In addition, the college is developing links with a local specialist land-based college, around utilising joint horticulture provision.

Leadership and management

How effectively is the college using its internal observation processes to help improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Insufficient progress
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In 2007/08, 27 lesson observations were undertaken through the college's internal observation of teaching and learning. The college target for 2008/09 is 48 observations, with each member of teaching staff observed twice per term. However, at the time of the monitoring visit only five observations had been carried out, of which two were not graded and only two had action plans outlining staff development. From September 2008, tutorials are included within the college's programme of observations.

The college is actively encouraging peer observation to aid the sharing of good practice although this is in its early stages. The college is involved in external peer mentoring with a group of specialist colleges which form the East Midlands' peer review and development group.

All learning resources were reviewed by lecturers in April 2008 to ensure all learning materials and resources used in lessons are relevant, age appropriate and promote equality and diversity. All lesson plans are expected to incorporate equality and diversity themes where appropriate. The monitoring of learning resources and equality and diversity is undertaken through the college's observation of teaching and learning system and therefore it is not possible to fully assess improvement based on the small number of observations undertaken.

The college's formal moderation of the observations teaching and learning is insufficient. Joint observations are undertaken by college observers with external consultants but there are no joint observations undertaken between college observers and no formal moderation of written observation reports.

What progress has been made in integrating key performance targets into quality improvement planning to ensure objectives set are sufficiently measurable?	Reasonable progress
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The quality improvement plan has been rewritten and is more evaluative. The quality improvement plan is reviewed frequently by the quality team and reviewed formally each term by the assistant director for quality. There is more structured reporting of key performance targets by the principal to governors and trustees. However, although the college has key performance indicators, these are not all integrated into the quality improvement plan. In addition, some key objectives are still not sufficiently specific and do not enable the college to effectively measure progress.

The principal has worked hard to increase whole college ownership and involvement in quality improvement. This open and consultative style is very much appreciated by staff. A draft business plan for 2009/10 has been developed in discussion with staff to clarify the strategic direction of the college.