

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Strathmore College

Date of visit: 24 March 2009

Context

Strathmore College and Strathmore Care Services were acquired by Craegmore Healthcare Limited in 2003. In 2008 the college catered for 46 students with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of students are male and aged 19 and over. Most students are residential but the college also caters for day students. Few students are from a minority ethnic background. The college offers practical teaching in vocational areas and independent living skills through its own facilities and the use of other business and community sites.

The college was inspected in May 2008 and its overall effectiveness was satisfactory. Achievement and standards, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity were all satisfactory and the quality of provision and capacity to improve were good.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to develop the rigour of setting objectives for learners, which was identified as an area for improvement at inspection?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

A number of improvements have been made to the rigour of setting objectives since the inspection. Learners are better involved in the process. The relevance of targets has been reviewed and greater consideration is given to the setting of timescales for targets. A new individual learning plan (ILP) is being trialled; this document is simpler than the previous one and easier for the learner to understand. It includes information on the individual's learning styles that helps tutors in planning learning. As well as long term targets, there are clear and specific objectives set for daily living and personal skills, and the community, leisure, practical or vocational elements of a student's programme. These provide measurable outcomes for the tracking of progress, which is helped by clearer recording of a student's starting point. There is also a greater emphasis on targets for confidence building to help students achieve their goals with minimal support. These improvements are already having a positive impact on the quality of progress monitoring but it is too early to judge fully their effectiveness.

What progress has been made in preparing the learners to meet their long term goals? How successful are learners in progressing to these?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

The college gives a high priority to preparing students for transition at the end of their programmes. This includes self-advocacy sessions and students using information technology to prepare a leaver's plan they can take with them. The college gives significant emphasis to promoting the development of students' social networks in their home area, especially in their third year. There is a good level of progression against destination goals. The majority of students achieve and, in some cases, exceed expectations. In 2008 there were 16 leavers in total; 10 out of 12 leavers whose destination was to live in supported accommodation achieved this goal; 14 out of 15 progressed to attend full-time courses at further education colleges. A small number of students made outstanding progress, for example a student who had been diagnosed as bi-polar and aspired to live independently achieved his own tenancy as well as a place at college and voluntary employment.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the quality of the tutorial system?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Effective changes have taken place to the tutorial system since the inspection. The college visited other providers to identify best practice. All students are now involved in regular progress reviews, which include their tutor, key worker and a manager. These meetings review all aspects of the learner's programme. Simplified documentation to record the outcomes of the meetings is being trialled. Outcomes are fed into the learning plan for the individual student. Evidence looked at during the monitoring visit indicates this system is working better than the previous one and that learner involvement is developing well. The college is aware of issues surrounding the involvement of learners with communication difficulties and electronic technology is being piloted to overcome this.

To what extent has there been improvement in the proportion of teaching staff with specialist expertise and qualifications?	Insufficient progress
---	-----------------------

The college has clear plans in place to increase the proportion of staff with specialist qualifications but recognises that this is at an early stage of implementation. At the time of the monitoring visit three staff hold specialist qualifications for working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One is working towards a degree in autism and others are taking literacy and numeracy qualifications. All teaching staff have or are working towards teaching qualifications. The number of residential staff with higher level NVOs has increased since the inspection.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to address the uneven application of the quality improvement processes?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Since the inspection the parent company has strengthened its quality improvement role across all three of the colleges in the group. This includes the introduction of an audit role to check the consistent implementation of quality assurance procedures. It is too early to evaluate fully the impact of this compliance check. Managers at the college have a good understanding of the need to make judgements on the quality of provision as well as whether procedures are being adhered to. To strengthen quality assurance, three new curriculum leader posts have been introduced along with an information and learning technology co-ordinator. There are good links with other specialist colleges to help standardise and moderate judgements on the quality of provision, for example peer involvement in the observation of teaching and learning. Senior managers are driving the culture for continuous improvement and are involved well in monitoring processes, for example checking the quality of ILPs.

To what extent has the strategy for the implementation of literacy and numeracy been improved since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

At the time of the previous inspection a Skills for Life strategy was in place but was not being implemented fully. There has been reasonable progress to address this issue. All students are now assessed to determine their starting points in literacy and numeracy, which helps to inform their ILP targets. Training has been effective in giving staff a much better understanding of Skills for Life and this is helping them to embed literacy and numeracy opportunities in the curriculum. Three staff are working towards a level 5 literacy or numeracy qualification and other staff are taking courses to develop their skills. The college recognises that some staff need further mentoring to apply their training as effectively as possible in the classroom and plans are in place to address this.