

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: SENSE East
Date of visit: 12 February 2009

Context

Since the last monitoring visit (MV), student numbers have continued to increase. There are now 173 learners, of whom 37 are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Of these, 19 are male and 18 are female and two learners are of minority ethnic heritage. The college has now opened its new resource centre in Rothwell, Kettering. This visit was based at the Cambridge resource centre in Knapwell.

All learners funded through the LSC are non-resident and taught in all eight day services centres known as resource centres; in Peterborough (Hampton), Dereham, Nettleham, Glenside, Kettering and Bourne, Knapwell and Louth.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in preparing learners to meet their long-term goals?	Reasonable progress
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The tracking of achievements over time has improved. The form that records learners' personal achievement on a day-to-day basis has been amended to capture a much wider array of learners' personal and social skills such as self advocacy, personal care and coping skills. It also records exactly where and when the achievement took place across both educational and residential settings. This shows how effectively learners are applying transferable skills. Staff have approached the new system enthusiastically, with over 500 separate learners' achievements recorded since its introduction in July 2008. These outcomes are logged centrally and tracked electronically, but it is not clear how these achievements link formally to the learners' individual learning plans to see how they may contribute to the achievement of learners' long-term goals.

From this academic year, the monitoring of learners' progress is more frequent; formal reviews occur five times, instead of three times, annually.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing the learner voice to help the college improve further?	Reasonable progress
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The college undertakes a range of informal approaches to gaining feedback from learners, although there is not a formal strategy to encourage learners' involvement across the wide spectrum of abilities. Learners are encouraged to make suggestions and be involved in taking appropriate action. For example, a blind learner who felt it would be helpful to have talking door signs on the first floor of the Hampton resource centre, was encouraged to write a letter in Braille with her suggestion. This was then responded to by college managers who implemented her request.

Feedback is gathered from relatives and advocates through a biannual questionnaire and this is analysed by each centre. College data suggest the feedback is very positive. However, the outcomes of each centre's feedback is not yet used systematically within the self-assessment process; either to compare centre-by-centre feedback or evaluate feedback trends over time.

In order to gain learners' views on lessons, a pilot involving learners with a higher level of communication skills is underway. At the time of the MV it was too early to determine the impact of this.

The college had a range of behavioural strategies at the time of the last monitoring visit. How effectively have these been improved?	Significant progress
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The college has continued to refine and extend its rigorous behavioural management processes. Individual learner's behaviour is monitored meticulously so that any unusual patterns of behaviour, whether passive or overly assertive, can be reviewed, understood, and any support can be adjusted accordingly. In addition, comprehensive bespoke guidance is provided to staff on each learner identified as having behavioural difficulties. The guidance clearly identifies individual behaviour-related traits and triggers to aid staff in planning an individual's learning and support needs. The guidance has recently been adapted to include 'after the incident' guidelines to help re-establish trust and communication where applicable. Risk assessments undertaken for each learner are thorough and incorporate psychological as well as any physical risks sensitively. The number of behavioural or self-injury incidents reports has continued to fall significantly.

Since the last monitoring visit, the college's challenging behaviour policy has been reviewed to make it more accessible to new staff. A systematic programme of behavioural awareness training is in place for new and existing staff. In addition, six more focused, tailored training sessions have been recently designed to inform staff on specific behavioural themes such as

understanding body language and personal space. These sessions are already proving popular with 20 training days booked by staff teams across the SENSE East region.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring that policies and procedures continue not to discriminate against some groups of learners and staff?	No discernible progress
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Much of what the college does on a day-to-day basis embraces equality of opportunity; however it has been too slow to respond to current equalities legislation. The analysis and evaluation of performance by different groups of learners are underdeveloped. A single equalities scheme is not yet in place. College policies and procedures have not yet undergone equality impact assessments to ensure any potential positive or negative discrimination is identified and appropriate action taken. Actions plans to promote race, gender and disability are not fully in place and therefore not sufficiently monitored, by each centre or across all eight sites.

At the last monitoring visit, the college was planning to open two new centres from September 2008. What improvements have been brought about by these new buildings for learners?	Significant progress
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The Kettering and Dereham resource centres are the final two sites of SENSE East's extensive building and refurbishment programme. The new resource centre at Kettering, accessed by ten learners, was completed on schedule and to budget, opening to students in the autumn term of 2008. The Dereham site, which will cater for around 23 learners initially, has been delayed slightly and is now due to be opened June 2009. Both resource centres have been designed specifically to meet the complex needs of their blind and deaf learners. Throughout the planning stages, the designers have carefully considered the overall learning environment, learners' hygiene requirements and practical mobility needs. The learning environment at the new Kettering site has been improved markedly. It is furnished to a high standard and has already been personalised with learners' artwork and photographs.

The college has also continued to improve its Information Communication Technology provision across sites. Interactive whiteboards are now in most centres and a full information technology suite is planned for the Dereham site.

The college is currently revising its strategic plan for 2009 to 2015 to determine how to manage the growth in learner numbers and maximise the use of the eight sites across the region.

What progress has been made by the college in developing self-assessment processes to identify its strengths and areas for improvement?	Insufficient progress
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The college's self-assessment process does not draw sufficiently on the range of data and information available to help support its judgements and evaluation. The self-assessment report is overly descriptive in many areas and does not identify key strengths and areas for improvement sufficiently, or demonstrate the overall progress made since the previous year. As a consequence, many of the college's key strengths are underplayed and some key areas for improvement are not given sufficient priority. The college recognises that more use could be made of trend data to support its judgements about provision.