

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Derwen College

Date of visit: 9 June 2009

### Context

Derwen College (the college) is an independent specialist residential college situated near Oswestry. Students are enrolled from all parts of England and Wales.

Approximately 250 residential students are funded through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in England and the Welsh Assembly Government. The college caters for students with a wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties. Of these 11% are from a minority ethnic background and 59% are male. Over half of all students are aged 19 or over. The college was outstanding at the previous inspection in May 2006 and awarded Beacon status in June 2007.

### Achievement and standards

Has the college maintained the very high success rates and very good progress made by students as judged at the previous inspection in 2006?	Significant progress
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Opportunities for students to gain national awards have significantly increased since the previous inspection and especially on entry level courses. Students achieve high success rates on a wide range of vocational qualifications as well as in creative arts, practical skills, basic skills, information and communication technology (ICT), independent living skills and personal development. Students' confidence and self-esteem is increased effectively as they succeed on their chosen courses. Very good progress is being made by students against their individual learning goals. The college undertakes a thorough analysis of how well learners progress towards their individual learning goals, broken down into six aspects of learning, which include vocational, independent living skills, personal development, communication, literacy, numeracy and ICT. Students are appropriately challenged and achieve high levels of independence. For example, one student reported that he could now travel unescorted by train to his parent's home some distance away.

What progress has been made in the monitoring of students' progress?	Significant progress
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Students' progress is routinely recorded against individual student's objectives during all learning activities. Short term targets are precise and relate well to long term

individual learning goals. Tracking documents are used successfully to monitor students' milestone achievements and provide a comprehensive picture as to how well students are achieving across all areas of their individual learning programmes. Tutorials are held during and at the end of each term to discuss with students their progress. Students know and understand the targets set for them to achieve, how well they are progressing and what they need to do next to improve further. Underperformance is picked up straight away and actions are taken where progress is not being sufficiently recorded. As a result students' learning programmes are reviewed and learning objectives altered if necessary.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in embedding basic skills throughout the curriculum?	Significant progress
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The positive impact of the improvements made to basic skills provision across the curriculum is now evident. Staff with expertise and qualifications are assigned to curriculum areas and provide good and immediate support to teachers in the delivery of basic skills. The extensive amount of ongoing staff training and development has increased staff expertise in planning for learning. The college's lesson observations show significant improvements in staff awareness of how basic skills can be integrated fully and meaningfully into sessions. Staff are now much more skilled at recognising and recording achievements so that students make particularly good progress in progressing towards their individual learning goals set for basic skills achievements.

### Leadership and management

What improvements have been made to the college's self-assessment of the quality of provision?	Significant progress
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The college has greatly improved the self-assessment process since the previous inspection. All staff are now involved and rigorous systems are in place to ensure the judgements within the self-assessment report are well founded. There is more ownership of the report by staff and the 2007/08 self-assessment report is concise, mostly evaluative and successfully informs improvement planning. The board of governors are very involved in the process and an assigned board member works closely with the senior management team to ensure the self-assessment process is rigorously applied. Heads of department are required to evaluate their own programme areas and to identify the impact of the actions taken to improve their provision. Action plans are closely monitored. Data and quality assurance information are used effectively to inform judgements about the quality of provision. However, this information is not always used precisely enough to identify the areas for improvement, or to inform whole college performance targets used in improvement planning and monitoring.

Does the college have rigorous processes in place to ensure they respond effectively to legislative requirements?	Reasonable progress
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Policies and procedures are effectively implemented in relation to equality and diversity. All staff and governors have had training. Achievement by gender and ethnicity are analysed to ensure students from a minority ethnic background have the same opportunities as those who are White British. Impact assessments are being compiled effectively and impact measures and action plans have been devised appropriately. However, these documents are not sufficiently linked, and targets for improvement are not precise enough to enable effective monitoring by the equalities and diversity working group or the governing body.