

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Tyne and Wear Autistic Society Adult Services:  
Thornbeck College  
Date of visit: 18 June 2009

### Context

Thornbeck is an independent specialist college for adults with autistic spectrum disorder, learning difficulties and disabilities. It is a registered charity based in Sunderland and is part of Tyne and Wear Autistic Society Adult Services. Currently, 13 learners are funded by the Learning and Skills Council, one of whom is residential.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in learner achievements since the previous inspection and monitoring visit?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in learner achievement since the previous inspection. Learners continue to make significant gains in developing their personal social and communication skills as well as their involvement in learning. Such skills include developing effective communication through weekly speech and language therapy sessions and individualised communication strategies, increasing their ability to travel semi-independently and to manage their own behaviour. Learners are now actively involved in developing their behaviour and transition plans. The range of opportunities to develop work-related skills has increased significantly and 12 of the 13 learners attend weekly work experience. The college has increased its range of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities. The non-accredited learning is now formalized through a framework called 'living and work units'. The non-accredited units are linked to learners' person-centred learning plans and their long term goals. The framework consists of three skills areas: functional skills; vocational skills; and personal and social development. Data on achievement of non-accredited learning is summarized at the end of each term. In the 2009 spring term, 74% of learners achieved their planned targets. Unplanned achievement is now routinely captured by tutors and included in the termly summative achievement report for each learner.

The range of opportunities for learners to achieve accredited qualifications continues to increase. Currently, 10 of the 13 learners are following an accredited programme. The college is piloting a national unit award scheme for those learners for whom accredited qualifications are not appropriate. Six learners are currently working

towards skills for working life qualifications in business, administration and retail, land based and independent living skills at entry level 2. Two learners are on a level 1 horticulture programme through the college's partnership with Newcastle College. These learners gain practical work skills and are assessed at a large local garden centre. Three learners are undertaking a level 1 qualification in book keeping; while 7 learners are working towards a level 1 qualification in computing. The majority of the learners are working towards the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. Currently learners are undertaking 30 learndirect entry level units in literacy and numeracy.

How well is the college measuring the distance travelled by learners in terms of their progress since joining the college?	Reasonable progress
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The college is making reasonable progress in measuring the distance travelled by learners towards their long term goals. Of the 2007/08 leavers, 82% achieved their primary learning goal. Since the last monitoring visit, the individual learning plan (ILP) was reviewed and revised and now includes a distance travelled summary. This summary, completed at the end of each term, includes detailed summative judgements in four areas: accredited learning; non-accredited learning; speech and language therapy; and unplanned achievements. Unplanned achievements are now routinely recorded. The college holds an individual weekly surgery for each tutor, which is used to monitor the quality of the recording of individual learner's progress. Since September 2008, the college is successfully engaging learners in developing their individual electronic transition plans which include a clear outline of learner skills developed over time.

### Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing the skill levels of learning support assistants?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in developing the skill levels of learning support assistants (LSAs). The planned observation of all learner support assistants is now routinely carried out each term. After each observation each LSA receives verbal and written feedback. The detailed records indicate that observers are clearly identifying relevant issues such as individuals providing too much support. Reports also provide useful examples of alternative strategies. The action plans are detailed and are reviewed in the termly supervision sessions. The outcomes of these observations are included in the termly quality improvement reports. However, this gives an overview rather than providing a detailed analysis of the outcomes. The college provides significant training for LSAs through a weekly two-hour session run by a speech and language therapist. The training modules are carefully planned to meet the needs of the learners.

What progress has been made in developing the transition process?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing the transition process. A whole organization review was carried out in 2007/08 and a comprehensive 'improving transition planning' action plan is now being implemented. The aim is to make the process more inclusive for the learners, increase the involvement of parents and social workers and focus more clearly on learners' long term goals. The college is currently reviewing the impact of the plan. Electronic transition plans have been in place since September 2008. Each learner is responsible for developing their transition plan with support. Learners use it in transition reviews as a presentation and it enables them to outline their achievements and skills through hyperlinks to videos and listed achievements. Independent information, advice and guidance are now increased. An agreement is in place for the Connexions adviser to meet individually with learners twice each term. A structured programme of activities, including visits, supports this process. Learner data indicates that 100% of those who completed in the past two years have progressed into supported employment schemes established by the college.

The college now uses a range of data to develop transition living and employment opportunities for learners. Learner postcode data is analysed effectively to identify the local areas in which to develop supported living houses and employment opportunities. There are currently two houses in Durham and an additional house is due to open in Newcastle in August. Strong links are being developed with social services to enable funding. Strong links are also in place with housing associations which supports the development of tenancy agreements in the houses. Clear plans are in place to buy a farm in Durham to increase supported employment opportunities in that area. Other supported employment opportunities include the existing workshops, the city centre shop, a wedding stationery social enterprise, a top-up greetings card service to local health centres and hospitals, horticultural maintenance in a local convent, mail merges for Newcastle football club, and a business centre for customers to order the goods made in the workshops.

## Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to promote equality and diversity across the college? What progress has been made in using data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to make reasonable progress in promoting equality and diversity across the college. The college was recently short listed for the North East equality award for their person-centred learning plans and achieved the North East equality and diversity standard award in April 2009 for its leadership commitment. A tutor and a care manager act as equality champions in the college. An accredited equality course is now mandatory for all staff; 75% of staff have either achieved or are working towards this qualification. An e-learning equality and diversity workbook

is included in the new staff induction and used as a refresher course for existing staff. All policies and procedures have been reviewed against the six key areas of the college's single equality scheme to identify potential inequalities and assess the need for a full impact assessment. Any new policies will have a full impact assessment. Detailed action plans are in place for the single equalities scheme and the equal opportunities policy. It is planned that impact assessments will be completed by 2010. In March the college circulated its first Equality Matters newsletter to all learners, staff, parents and relevant stakeholders. Plans are in place to produce the second newsletter in July in a range of formats including pictures and symbols making it more accessible to all learners. Learner induction packs and the complaints procedure are now in pictorial and DVD format. Plans are in place to produce college policies in a range of formats. Outcomes of learner satisfaction surveys are now produced in a pictorial representation. The college has made reasonable progress in monitoring the performance of learners by gender in relation to destination and achievement of long term learning goals. Plans are in place to analyse achievement of non-accredited learning by gender.

What progress has been made in ensuring the robustness of the arrangements to verify learners' progress and achievement?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in developing its arrangements to verify learners' progress and achievement. A quality assurance process is now in place for monitoring the stages in the learner journey. A senior manager reviews targets at the start of each term and reviews records of learner assessment and reviews throughout the year. She holds an individual weekly surgery with tutors at which she reviews aspects of their work and identifies areas for development. However, some records of these individual meetings are not sufficiently detailed. In addition, tutors have a comprehensive supervision session each term and samples of learner achievement records are reviewed with relevant areas for development identified and an action plan compiled. Supervision records are detailed and specific. Areas for development are carefully monitored.

What actions have been taken to further develop staff skills and expertise?	Significant progress
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The college has a strong commitment to developing staff skills and expertise and has made significant progress in this area. The needs of staff are identified carefully through observations of teaching, learning and support as well as in the individual sessions with tutors. Two staff training and development weeks are used effectively to focus on identified training issues linked to learner need. The college has developed a range of internal staff training modules which have a significant focus on increasing staff skills and expertise in working with learners with autism and to meet individual needs effectively. The two speech and language therapists work closely with all staff to increase their skills and expertise. Comprehensive staff training includes modules on communication, intensive interaction, and the use of individualised symbols and pictures for effective communication. These modules are

approved by the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) at Northumbria University. The aim is that achievement of modules will lead to an accredited higher education qualification. All modules are used internally as part of new staff induction through a coaching and mentoring system. The college has been successful in its bid for a £10,000 award to compile a manual on managing challenging behaviour. Senior managers work closely with the therapy team to plan and implement strategies and produce materials in a range of formats.