

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Education and Services for People with Autism  
(ESPA) College  
Date of visit: 09 July 2009

### Context

ESPA College is part of Education and Services for People with Autism (ESPA). The parent organisation is a limited company with charitable status. ESPA provides residential and non-residential education for up to 105 Learning and Skills Council funded students with autistic spectrum and associated disorders. Learners come from within the region and nationally. The provision, spread across three main sites, is based on the ESPA curriculum which is constructed around the key areas of social communication and emotional literacy. Many learners attend courses, including GCSE A-level and national diplomas, at general further education colleges in the area.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in taking steps to further improve learners' outcomes?	Significant progress
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The curriculum has been further developed to more effectively promote and recognise the achievement of learners. For example, at the South Hill site, the Duke of Edinburgh Award is being piloted as a vehicle to accredit the wide range of skills and competences developed by learners. Outcomes are clearly mapped to nationally recognised qualifications, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Learners' progress towards attaining accreditation in a range of qualifications has significantly increased since introducing the award. In addition it is proving particularly effective in enabling learners to develop good social and communication skills. It has been well received by learners and is proving to be highly motivational.

The college's counselling service has been further developed and centralised to ensure that all learners receive good support. This has proved highly effective in enabling learners to remain in learning and to attend courses in an increasing range of general further education colleges. A team of five counsellors now work across all college sites, providing both group and individual sessions. Work is under way to evaluate the impact of the improved counselling service.

A Training and Awareness Group has been established comprising a group of learners who make presentations to external groups on the nature and impact of autism. In addition to raising awareness of others, this process is effectively improving the communication skills of learners, contributing to learners achieving their targets.

Further measures that have been taken to improve outcomes include significantly improved systems to manage and record learners' behaviour, the provision of a dedicated risk assessment team to facilitate learners' independent travel and the expansion of work placements which are now available for all learners.

In 2007/08 overall pass rates increased to 94%, an increase of 8% since 2006/07. Data for the current year indicates that this improving trend will continue. Success rates of learners attending external courses are also increasing. For example, one learner gained all distinctions in a level 2 diploma, and all of those attending external courses in 2008/09 are expected to attain their qualification.

#### Quality of provision

What further progress has been made in developing learning, assessment and review procedures and in improving the monitoring of learning	Reasonable progress
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Since the last monitoring visit, the college has made further changes to its baseline and initial assessment procedures. The new processes have been trialled during 2008/09 and changes are planned to bring about further improvements. All staff have had further, comprehensive training and are now more confident in identifying learner progress and recording achievement. Learners' targets are now carefully woven into their individual learning plans (ILPs) and a new ILP is being piloted in September 2009. Effective use is made of electronic portfolios to capture and record evidence of progress. Learners are now more responsible for identifying and recording their own progress and targets, including displaying their work to celebrate their achievements. A range of methods have been developed to better capture progress. For example, in 2008/09 all learners are completing a summary of their achievements at college that they will present at their review using a range of media. Residential support workers are now clearly recording and evaluating learner progress. They are using this documentation effectively to support learners to develop skills learnt in the classroom, for example cooking a simple meal in the residence. Progress and achievements in work placements are increasingly being captured.

## Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring that the significant improvements in the co-ordination of the Skills for Life provision have been further developed?	Reasonable progress
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There is now a whole college approach to Skills for Life. At each site there is at least one member of staff who is qualified to NVQ level 4 or 5 in teaching literacy and number. Support staff are also required to undertake literacy and numeracy qualifications at level 2. Skills for Life are now embedded in the curriculum and the teams meet to share practice at least once a term. Literacy, numeracy and language diagnostic assessments are used well to plan activities both in college and in the residences, through detailed, shared targets. There is now a clear focus on the behaviour and social functioning of learners in all settings. Detailed targets are shared and discussed across the college, enabling residential settings to develop specific timetables for individual students.

What progress has been made in devolving financial ownership from the parent company to the college management team? What progress has been made in ensuring that communication with regard to financial management is clear?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last inspection the college has made good progress in developing plans to devolve a budget to the college management team. This budget will include staffing and other aspects of finance that have an impact on learners. Preparations for the change have been made; financial controls have been improved, software has been updated, protocols have been agreed with senior college managers and budget setting guidance for staff has been produced. The arrangements will be piloted in September 2009 with full roll-out scheduled for April 2010. Training is planned for those staff that will have a budgetary responsibility under the new arrangements.

What progress has the college made in developing quality improvement processes?	Significant progress
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Since the re-inspection and monitoring visit in April 2008 the college has taken significant action to make further improvements to its quality improvement processes. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning have been strengthened. Very effective use is now made of the outcomes of observations to share good practice and to raise the quality of teaching across the organisation. Collaborative working with other independent specialist colleges is used particularly well to ensure consistency in the observation process and to drive up standards. Regular observations take place of teaching delivered by staff at the general further education colleges that the learners attend. Outcomes of these observations are

used to provide specialist training for teaching staff and to support learners to make informed choices about their learning programmes.

The college has a very good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement, which are clearly defined in a detailed, accurate self-assessment report. Comprehensive termly quality reports are shared with staff, including all support services. Opportunities for staff to share good practice are now firmly embedded and there has been a significant increase in cross-site working in all aspects of the curriculum.

The college installed a new electronic system for recording and analysing student information in October 2008. Staff development is taking place to ensure effective implementation of the system. The college has a clear vision and plan for use of the system and the role it will play in complementing the already well-established processes for monitoring learner and staff performance.