

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Henshaws College
Date of visit: 1 April 2009

Context

Henshaws College is a national specialist, residential further education college for learners who are blind or partially sighted with additional difficulties. It is located on a 12 acre rural site on the outskirts of Harrogate, North Yorkshire. The college forms part of Henshaws Yorkshire, the biggest of three regions of Henshaws Society for Blind People. This is a registered charity based in the north of England. The college principal is the regional chief executive officer (CEO) and reports to the regional board of management. The Society is managed by a trustee board of nine, made up of regional trustees and a group CEO.

All learners have learning difficulties and disabilities in addition to their primary disability of being visually impaired. These include moderate and severe learning difficulties, physical disabilities, epilepsy, communication disorders and behaviours that challenge. Learners are recruited nationally; the large majority from the north of the United Kingdom. Residential accommodation is available in learners' residencies on the main site. In February 2008, the college opened new, purpose built residential accommodation for 22 learners with enhanced facilities for learners with more complex physical support needs. Further improvements include a new common room area and training kitchen. At the time of the visit there were 61 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded residential learners and eight day learners. All learners are aged between 16 and 25. Five learners were from minority ethnic backgrounds and 27 were female.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to further develop the framework for recognizing and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA)?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to make reasonable progress in developing its RARPA framework through its use of the management information system (MIS). The implementation of the detailed MIS action plan is being carefully monitored. A development group meets monthly to review progress against the plan and to identify future developments. All learner records are now held on the MIS, except for retrospective records for third-year learners. The curriculum is now broken down into skills areas, with each skills area having ten sub-levels for each of the ten Henshaws achievement levels (HALs). This gives small measurable steps in non-accredited learning. These are currently being input onto the management information system.

Personal tutors are allocated one afternoon each week to review learner targets and progress. Further training took place in January, for both personal and curriculum tutors, on monitoring achievement using the management information system and data. This involved use of the first full term of MIS data.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing the vocational curriculum further?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing the vocational curriculum further. The vocational curriculum pathways were increased, in September 2008, with the addition of a fifth pathway. The communication and media pathway includes three strands: television, film and theatre; radio and music technology; and digital art and media. An increase in technology resources to support this development has been made, including the purchase of two fixed and one mobile interactive board as well as appropriate graphics and music software. With the increased vocational options, the 21 second and third year learners chose their vocational pathway for the first time from September 2008. Eight learners chose media, six administration and retail, three hospitality, and three chose horticulture. No learners chose the art and craft vocational pathway. The college recently achieved a BECTA Next Generation Award for ICT in the curriculum.

A planning day held in February clarified the college's focus on developing real work opportunities. Closer vocational links are being established with Henshaws arts and crafts centre in nearby Knaresborough. Horticulture is now more closely linked with the centre; a Saturday job has been established for one learner and filled flower pots are being produced by learners for sale at the centre. After Easter, a retail shop and information point will open at the centre with work tasks for four learners. This will provide further opportunities for the learners to develop real life and work skills with the public. The college is in the process of establishing a production company as part of the media pathway. This will provide work projects for learners through commissions for the development of media CDs or DVDs.

A three-year employer engagement strategy was established in 2008 and is being implemented well. An employer engagement forum has been established; a products and services leaflet has been developed for employers, with each college curriculum team participating; a breakfast event was held recently to launch the strategy, 16 employers attended and several are now involved. The products and services include handmade cards for sale or return, opportunities for employers to loan art works produced at the college and the arts and crafts centre, conversion of documents into Braille, and awareness training on disability etiquette or visual impairment. The work centre at the college has now been renamed the employability centre and provides opportunities for learners to liaise with employers and take orders for products and services.

What progress has been made on further integrating Skills for Life within the vocational areas?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress on integrating Skills for Life further within the vocational areas. A coherent Skills for Life strategy is now established. Since 2008, the focus is on integrating Skills for Life into the vocational curriculum. The Skills for Life manager and senior tutor have provided support to vocational teams to map the core and pre-entry curriculum into work placements, enterprise projects and world of work sessions. Since September 2008, three Skills for Life staff are piloting the delivery of the media vocational pathway. Two Skills for Life staff offer general vocational information communication technology across all vocational pathways. Following a recent planning day, the planned focus is on integrating Skills for Life within vocational tasks. From September 2009, Skills for Life tutors will have dedicated responsibilities for work placements and work carried out by students in the vocational pathways. These tutors will allocate a specific Skills for Life target to the vocational placement alongside the vocational targets.

What further progress has been made in preparing learners to meet their long term goals? How effective are learners in progressing to these?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in further developing its transition process. The transition process is now well-established. An e-portfolio will be introduced in September 2009 as part of a project with other independent specialist colleges. During 2008, the college achieved a Connexions award for careers education and guidance. A transition house is being developed on the main college site. This will be available for two leavers from summer 2009. The aim is to provide increased independence for leavers to support their transition into a residence in the local community. The learners will be supported by community workers. A manager has been appointed with responsibility for supported living.

Analysis and use of destination data linked to long term goals is just developing. Destination data has been collected for a number of years and has recently been linked to learners' long term goals. Learners have three long term goals, for living arrangements, an occupational and a recreational goal. Some aspects of achievement data is incomplete as some recent leavers are waiting for decisions about funding.

Leadership and management

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 subject targets. This involves managers reviewing targets but recording of the process is not sufficiently formalised. The process indicates that personal and

subject tutors monitor learners' progress weekly and curriculum managers monitor learners' progress each half term. In independent living skills, the team formally moderate target levels following baseline assessment and record this process effectively. They also maintain clear records of discussion about individual learner's progress and the specific actions required where underperformance is identified. Meetings take place in other curriculum areas and some changes are recorded. However, the process is not always sufficiently formal or records detailed. The college plans to share the verification practice in the independent living skills team at a forthcoming best practice workshop.

<p>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?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college has made reasonable progress in promoting equality and diversity across the college since the previous inspection. Recent building developments on the college site are fully accessible, and adapted for wheelchair users and those with more complex physical support needs. Training kitchens are now adapted for wheelchair users. The college won a Yorkshire and Humber diversity champions award in 2008. An appropriately detailed single equality scheme has been in place since September 2008 following consultation with staff and learners. The student council produced an adapted version for learners. A detailed single equality scheme action plan for 2008/09 supports the implementation of the scheme and is monitored by an equality and diversity group. Staff and members of the Henshaws Yorkshire board of management have had training on the implications of legislation. Since 2006 impact assessments are being carried out as part of a three-year plan. A record of impact assessments is maintained. Five impact assessment workshops will take place during the summer term involving a range of staff, learners and trustees. These will be facilitated by an external consultant. The college is in the process of developing its use of data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners but it is too early to judge the impact of this.