

Linkage Community Trust

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Kath Smith HMI

Last day of inspection: 3 February 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Toynton Campus
Toynton All Saints
Spilsby
Grimsby
Lincolnshire
PE23 5AE

Telephone number: 01472 372400

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Linkage College is part of Linkage Community Trust, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The college operates from two main sites at Weelsby and Toynton, and, since the last inspection, from the Louth Centre located midway between the two. The college provides residential and day further education for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, many of whom also have conditions such as Down's syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Tourettes, autistic spectrum disorders, epilepsy, speech and language difficulties, cerebral palsy and emotional and behavioural difficulties. All learners are placed within one of the three programme areas which provide progression routes for learners as appropriate. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 219 learners, 186 of whom were residential and 33 day. The college's overall effectiveness was judged to be outstanding at the last full inspection in December 2007. Monitoring visits took place in June 2008 and 2009 and on both occasions the college was judged to have made either reasonable or outstanding progress in the aspects of provision inspected.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the quality of improvement planning?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection there was insufficient use made of data to inform planning and the setting of targets for increasing achievement. The college has significantly improved the breadth and rigor of its quality assurance monitoring, evaluation and use of data to identify areas for improvement. Managers are now provided with useful information to use with their staff teams to bring about improvements to provision. However, although self-assessment has improved since the last inspection, meaningful and relevant data on which to base judgments contained within the report are less evident. Although the 2009/10 quality improvement plan contained clearly identified objectives and actions, it did not include targets for improvement or success criteria related to learner outcomes. As a result, the absence of measurable targets or success criteria has hampered the college's ability to effectively evaluate how successful the actions have been in bringing about improvements. The college has plans to address this as they continue to develop the 2010/11 quality improvement plan.

Outcomes for learners

Has the college maintained the high levels of achievement and progress made by learners since the last inspection?	Significant progress
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Achievement levels of learners gaining accredited awards have significantly increased since the last inspection. There is rigorous monitoring of individual learners' progress and data are used well to ensure that the vast majority of learners achieve their

medium and long term goals. Learners progress well through their externally accredited courses which are planned appropriately to ensure they achieve their long-term goals. Learners make good progress in relation to their independence skills which enhances their successful transition into mainstream education and training. Many progress onto vocational courses at general further education colleges and a significant number (17%) gain employment on leaving the college.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning across college sites?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection the matching of the quality of teaching across the Weelsby and Toynton campuses was a key area for improvement. Significant progress had been made at the time of the previous two monitoring visits in the college's development of its monitoring and support systems to improve teaching and learning. Inspectors continue to have confidence in the thoroughness of the current observation scheme and agreed with college observers' judgments on teaching and learning. Analysis of the college's observers' feedback to teachers following observations is satisfactory overall. There is good attention paid to health and safety and good planning to meet individual needs. However, on the college's lesson observation forms, there are insufficient comments made by observers to indicate how the teacher could improve the promotion of equality and diversity. Teachers' planning does not indicate how they will address learners' understanding of equality and diversity well enough. Skills for Life targets are not always included in lesson planning leading to missed opportunities to record achievements in relation to literacy and numeracy.

What progress has been made in improving the opportunities to integrate core skills across all programme areas?	Significant progress
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At the last inspection opportunities were missed to integrate the development of core skills across all programme areas. The implementation of the Skills for Life strategy is now thorough and effectively implemented across the college. A variety of delivery modes are used which include the embedding of literacy, numeracy, communication and information communication technology (ICT) in lessons, discrete provision and one-to-one sessions as requested. A Skills for Life champion is in place on both sites to support the embedding of Skills for Life and functional skills. In 2008/09, 79% of all graduating learners gained a Skills for Life qualification. This improvement in outcomes for learners is related to improved initial and diagnostic assessment and increased motivation demonstrated by learners. Staff are very well qualified and a comprehensive professional development programme is supporting their development.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made by the college in response to equalities legislation?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection the college did not fully analyse data on learners' achievement in relation to disability, race and gender and did not complete impact assessments. Action plans were not sufficiently evaluated. The equality and diversity action plan is now clear, well focused and monitored monthly. A single equality scheme is currently being developed that will amalgamate the gender, race and disability schemes. The college is able to give many examples of how the impact assessments have improved provision for learners. For example, by widening doors and improving provision for day learners at Toynton. Data are now effectively analysed in relation to disability, race and gender. The college has very successfully raised the profile of equality and diversity issues but its effective promotion in lessons is less evident.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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