

St Elizabeth's College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Much Hadham
Hertfordshire
SG10 6EW

Telephone number: 01279 844422

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

St Elizabeth's College (the college) is located at Much Hadham near Bishop's Stortford, East Hertfordshire. The college predominantly enrolls learners with a range of moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities and complex medical needs with the aim of developing skills to support independent living. Currently there are 36 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded students aged between 19 and 25 years enrolled at the college and all are tenants of housing associations in either Much Hadham or Bishop's Stortford. There is an even gender mix with 18 female and 18 male students. Around 14% of learners are of minority ethnic heritage.

The most recent inspection report was in April 2008. The college was graded satisfactory in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management. The last monitoring visit in April 2009 looked at five themes and judged the college to be making reasonable progress in four and insufficient progress in one.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| <p>What progress has been made in strengthening quality assurance arrangements, action plans and self-assessment to identify clearly the college's priorities for improvement?</p> | <p>Reasonable progress</p> |
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The 2008/09 self-assessment report is written using the previous inspection framework and makes clear judgments about each aspect of provision. The new framework is being applied for 2009/10. Increased use is made of learners and parents views throughout the report to help support judgments. The use of trend data however, does not feature enough to support judgments on the full extent of any progress made or to help show sustained improvement over time. The self-assessment is much more learner-focused although is still overly descriptive in a few places.

The college has strengthened its quality cycle of audits to help inform staff training and development and check the impact of actions taken. For example, an initial audit of tutorials has ensured students gain their tutorial entitlement. After highlighting training in learner target setting, further audits now focus on improving the quality of students' individual development plans (IDPs). Outcomes from the most recent audits suggest the quality of IDPs is improving.

The college's quality improvement plan is monitored and updated each term with senior managers responsible for the overview of progress against each aspect. Few objectives in the plan have really explicit or precise targets against which to measure clearly progress. In a few cases, areas for improvement identified are not sufficiently well defined.

The self-assessment states the college are undertaking a comprehensive review of its safeguarding policy to incorporate more clearly e-safety and safer recruitment procedures. Student and parental feedback suggest students feel safe in the college environment. Initial training has been undertaken in preparation for vetting and barring legislation. However, the planning programme for its full introduction is not yet fully developed. In addition, although records are kept of incidents and accidents, outcomes are not analysed over time and the follow up responses are not logged on the same form making it difficult to track the outcome of these. Currently, near misses are not recorded.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has been made in developing Skills for Life provision to help support students' economic well-being? Reasonable progress

Accountability for Skills for Life provision is now clear and managed by the new college vice principal who took up post in September 2009. A Skills for Life policy and accompanying action plan are in place. Staff received specific Skills for Life training in October 2009 to consider the types of activities to use to better integrate relevant basic skills into sessions. In addition, the college are working closely with an awarding body to develop an accredited framework for life and living skills for the next academic year. Since September 2009, the college has run two discreet groups of nine more able learners, to improve and develop their literacy skills. Plans are in place to accredit units where appropriate. A vision for Skills for Life has now been established but it is too early to determine the full impact on the outcomes for all learners.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

The college has notably increased the number of observations it undertakes annually from 30 in 2008/09 to over 85, by observing every tutor twice during the 2009/10 academic year. In 2008/09, 30% of teaching was judged by the college to be good or better. This year, college data indicate an improvement to at least 50% of teaching judged good or better which is on schedule for meeting the college's target for 2010. An audit of lesson observations undertaken in February identified strengths in teaching around the use of learning materials and learner involvement and indicated further training required in sharing and setting learning aims, session planning and questioning skills. Managers have provided subsequent training for teaching staff and plan to undertake further audits to check how successful this has been. The teaching and learning audits are not sufficiently comprehensive however to help identify and celebrate best practice.

The moderation of the observation process for teaching and learning remains underdeveloped. Arrangements to continue external joint observations have been undertaken this year with a local general further education college. However, internal joint observations are not formalised and currently there is no moderation of written observation reports to promote consistency and/or share good practice.

Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in actively promoting equality and diversity? Reasonable progress

The college analyses progress by gender and ethnicity systematically and college data show no significant differences in learner performance. A college equality and diversity report produced annually, shows that the staff profile closely matches that of the student body. The college has set objectives to ensure the governing body profile is also more representative. The reports analysis of the staffing profile is not comprehensive. For example, it does not analyse gender, age, ethnicity and disability by job level to ensure the identification and avoidance of potential discrimination. Promotion through the curriculum is gradually developing with some meaningful approaches to celebrating culture. For example, students from minority ethnic backgrounds are actively encouraged to celebrate their heritage and raise awareness of their cultures through the design and cooking of national dishes for other residents in a version of 'come dine with me'. It is unclear from college observation data how widespread promotion is across all subjects.

The equality and diversity group monitors the implementation plan for gender, disability and race, although the targets set are not always sufficiently precise or meaningful to easily judge the full impact on learners and staff. Records of complaints, incidents and accidents are not analysed by different groups to determine if there are any patterns emerging that may require action.

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

T: 0300 1231231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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