

Bridge College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Bridge College is an independent specialist day college. It provides for students with severe and complex learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and autistic spectrum conditions. It is based in Stockport. The college works under the auspices of the charity 'Together Trust'. A board of governors is responsible to the trust for the strategic direction of the college. The college recruits from special schools within the Greater Manchester area. There are currently 75 students on roll who are all aged nineteen years and over.

The college mission is to create a learning environment that is inclusive and where young people make a successful transition into adulthood by making progress in their self-esteem, Skills for Life and independence. Individual learning plans are delivered within two departments. The Department of Foundation Studies provides an entry level course and a Step Up programme for students with autistic spectrum conditions. The Department of Pre-Foundation Studies offers courses for students at pre-entry level and a sensory course for students with complex needs.

The college's last full inspection took place in 2008 when it was judged to be good across all aspects of provision. The college was subject to a monitoring visit in February 2009 in which it was judged to have made significant progress in three, and reasonable progress in two, of the areas for improvement identified in the last full inspection report.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effectively does the college monitor the progress being made to remedy areas for improvement it identifies in the self-assessment report? Significant Progress

At the last inspection, the self-assessment process was judged to be thorough and rigorous. However, the use of data to inform planning was underdeveloped and plans were in place to tackle this. The self-assessment report (SAR) for 2008/09 clearly identifies strengths and areas for improvement based on information provided by rigorous quality assurance processes. These processes generate useful data which are effectively analysed and used to form the judgments contained within the SAR. Actions taken to remedy areas for improvement are closely monitored. The quality improvement plan (QIP) is regularly reviewed and progress made to bring about improvements is effectively tracked. Although the college can demonstrate how the actions taken have brought about improvements, the QIP does not include useful targets to evaluate fully the impact that actions are having on the quality of provision or on outcomes for learners.

Outcomes for learners

Are students still making good progress in their achievement? Significant progress

Learners' progress has improved with the further refinement of individual learning plans (ILPs) and improved target setting. The increased focus on personalised learning has meant that targets are much more individualised resulting in better tracking of learners' progress and better outcomes. Long-term goals are broken down into manageable stages which clearly reflect the journey students are making towards their long-term goals. Learners successfully achieve qualifications in a range of subjects which are appropriate to their ILPs and longer-term aspirations. The college has been successful at enabling learners to progress onto meaningful destinations. The increased focus on work experience has meant that learners have more opportunities to gain work-related skills.

Does the college adhere to current safeguarding requirements and best practice? Significant progress

Safeguarding is given a high priority within the college and is fully embedded into curriculum activities and operational practice. Learners benefit from the highly supportive learning environment and risks are managed very effectively so that learners gain in independence. The college implements its policies and procedures very effectively and complies with current legislative requirements. Governors play a highly supportive role and receive regular safeguarding reports. The college is aware of new legislation and is taking actions in the recruitment and vetting of staff. However, senior managers do not yet have an overall plan to ensure that the college is on track to meet the new requirements.

Does the college continue to adhere to and promote current equality and diversity requirements effectively? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity were judged to be good. However, the college recognised that it needed to continue attempts to diversify its staffing profile. The self-assessment report did not include sufficient analysis of the impact of its work to promote equality and diversity. The college complies with current legislation and has appropriate policies and procedures, and action plans containing suitable impact measures. The college is highly effective at meeting and adapting its provision to meet the needs of individuals with very complex needs, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college analyses data on achievement for different groups of students and has been effective in recruiting staff from more diverse cultures and backgrounds. However, the equality and diversity action plan is not linked well enough to self-assessment nor is it based sufficiently on a comprehensive evaluation of how well equality and diversity are being promoted across the provision.

What progress has been made in ensuring that accommodation is fit for purpose?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, some aspects of accommodation were inadequate. At the monitoring visit in 2009, although improvements had been made, the college recognised that there were limitations in its buildings and plans had been drawn up for a new capital build which involved co-location with a general further education college. Plans are now at an advanced stage and both colleges are strongly committed to the new capital investment required to build on the Manchester College site, with an approximate completion date during 2011/12. The college continues to make adjustments and refurbishments to ensure that individual learners' needs are met in the interim. This is proving more challenging as the needs of students become more complex. The college is continually reviewing the sufficiency of the space it has available and its impact on learners whilst it awaits the completion of the new building.

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