

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Queen Alexandra College

Date of visit: 28 April 2009

Context

Queen Alexandra College (QAC) is an independent specialist residential college based in the suburbs of Birmingham. QAC provides education and training for learners with visual impairments. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of students with a range of other disabilities, in particular those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. QAC's major contracts are with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Residential Training Unit of the Department for Work and Pensions. There are approximately 100 LSC and 45 Residential Training Unit funded learners.

QAC offers a range of vocational courses from pre-entry to level 4. The provision for Residential Training Unit learners is geared to individual preparation for employment. QAC has residential accommodation for up to 110 learners, staffed according to their varied needs. There are hostels on-site and housing accommodation is provided within the community.

At the previous inspection in November 2007, QAC's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Is target setting for learners' achievements now rigorous? Are learners fully involved in their development?	Reasonable progress
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Personal development learning targets and objectives for learners to achieve are clearly identified within individual learning plans and are based on useful and comprehensive information gained from initial and ongoing assessment. They are embedded across curriculum programme areas to ensure that learning is successfully reinforced and progress is effectively recorded. It is not always clear how medium-term goals contribute to the achievement of long-term goals. Whilst some medium-term goals are specific and measurable, others are less successful at demonstrating whether learners are achieving in line with, below or above expectations. However, medium-term objectives are broken down into smaller targets which are more specific and measurable. The achievements of these are successfully recorded to show short-term progress. Learners are fully involved in the setting of targets and in

evaluating their progress through discussions held with their personal tutors. The electronic database enables staff working across college provision immediate access to individual learning plans so that learners' achievements can be recorded and new targets can be set to ensure continued progress.

Quality of provision

Does QAC provide coherent programmes for learners to follow across the day and extended provision?	Reasonable progress
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Links between day and residential provision are more established. There is much more liaison, both formal and informal, between residential and day staff. Information is shared between residential and day staff teams about issues which may impact on learning. There is a greater awareness amongst college staff of the training taking place in the residences and how evening and weekend activities can be used to reinforce and practice independent living skills, personal development, literacy, numeracy and communication skills, within real social and living learning environments. More joint working is taking place and there are plans to develop learning targets and objectives for learners' achievements which span the day and residential provision at the start of the next academic year.

What progress has been made in planning for learning and the quality assurance of lessons?	Significant progress
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Lesson planning has greatly improved and curriculum activities are successfully matched to individual learner's needs. Individual learning targets are effectively integrated into lesson planning and support clearly identified. A clear priority since the previous inspection has been given to improving the quality of support provided to learners. Lesson plans are shared with learning support assistants to ensure approaches are consistently applied. Learning support assistants are observed and areas for improvement fed back to them to improve their performance. They are also deployed to subject areas with the relevant skills to enable them to provide much more effective support to the learners. Lesson plans are quality assured and schemes of work are scrutinised by managers to ensure activities are appropriate and meet individual learner needs. Lesson observations conducted by QAC's observation team have a clear focus on learning and the progress being made by learners. Action plans are agreed with tutors and the required improvements are closely monitored.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring QAC is fully compliant with equalities legislation?	Insufficient progress
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Although the promotion of equality and opportunity was judged to be good overall at the previous inspection, QAC was not fully compliant with equalities legislation.

Although some progress has been made, this still remains the case. QAC has a single equality scheme and has established a cross-college equality and diversity steering group which meets once a term. Outcomes for different groups of learners are analysed in relation to minority ethnic backgrounds and gender and no differences between achievement rates are evident. However, action plans and impact assessments are underdeveloped and insufficiently monitored or reviewed.

What improvements have been made to the college's self-assessment of provision, quality improvement planning and review?	Significant progress
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Quality assurance arrangements are more embedded and now provide comprehensive information to substantiate the judgements made by QAC about its strengths and areas for improvement. Self-assessment processes are much more robust and subject to both internal and external peer validation. Staff teams are more actively involved in carrying out quality assurance processes which enable them to accurately self assess their curriculum and programme areas. Quality improvement plans are thoroughly reviewed and actions closely monitored. QAC are aware of the need to simplify the self-assessment report so that it is more evaluative with judgements that are based more consistently on substantive evidence about learner outcomes and the quality of provision.