

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education was inspected in January 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

The academy is currently based in Exeter, although it is moving to a purpose-built site in Exmouth. At the time of the monitoring visit, 29 students aged between 16 and 25 years attended the college.

Themes

How effective have leaders and managers been in improving the quality of teaching and assessment so that students develop their skills and knowledge and make good progress from their starting points? Reasonable progress

Leaders have redesigned the curriculum based on feedback from students and staff. They now offer four curriculum pathways which better meet the needs, interests and aspirations of their students. As a result, most students are motivated and engaged in learning.

Leaders have recently introduced an 'assess, plan, do, review' approach to improving the quality of teaching. This is helping teachers plan learning strategies which support students to make more rapid progress from their starting points. Students with more complex needs now benefit from opportunities to practise new skills in a range of community settings.

A specialist team now undertakes a comprehensive assessment of students' needs, interests and goals before they start at college. Managers use this information well to ensure that students are on the correct pathway. However, they correctly recognise that students are set too many targets. This means that teachers are not always clear what skills, knowledge or behaviours students are developing across the curriculum. As a result, students are not always able to transfer this new learning into different situations.

Staff encourage students to become more independent and support them to learn from their mistakes. For example, students are encouraged to travel more independently. Occasionally, they do not get off at the right bus stop. Staff do not routinely intervene but prompt students afterwards to think about ways they could remember where to get off in the future.

Leaders have introduced new initiatives designed to improve the quality of teaching and assessment. Not all of these have been successful. More recent work to define the curriculum content has led to positive changes for students and staff. These include reducing the length of individual sessions and increasing the consistency of staff teams. However, it is too early to see the full impact of these latest changes.

How well do leaders, managers and tutors teach students to improve their skills in English and mathematics so that they can use them effectively in a range of learning and community settings? Reasonable progress

Leaders have carefully considered the issues that students, whose first language is British sign language, face with developing their literacy skills. As a result, leaders have established a visual 'shape coding' system for students to learn the rules of sentence construction. Although this is a new strategy, there is clear evidence that students are increasing their understanding of spoken and written grammar already.

The increased focus on developing students' literacy skills across the curriculum is proving effective. In cookery sessions, students are encouraged to develop their knowledge of reading recipes and at the same time develop their knowledge of the ingredients needed.

Staff plan activities that enable students to improve their ability to communicate when working in teams or solving problems. For example, students work together to check whether the sentences they have constructed are grammatically correct.

All students now have a language 'passport'. These detail the best ways of supporting students to develop their language skills. Speech and language staff work alongside teachers to review these passports regularly. As a result, students gain from more consistent advice and support across the curriculum.

Staff use verbal and signing feedback effectively. They highlight areas students need to work on and the strategies they can employ to improve their work. However, in written feedback staff do not routinely identify students' grammatical errors or establish what they can do to improve.

The majority of teachers develop students' English and mathematics skills. They relate new skills and knowledge to activities students understand; for example, measuring the perimeter and area of furniture to ensure that it fitted in a newly decorated room. However, a minority of teachers base the work set, and the resources used, on the qualification criteria rather than the students' interests or requirements. As a result, students do not understand the relevance to their lives and do not embed the new knowledge in their long-term memory.

How effective have leaders and managers been in improving support and help for students so that they can make informed decisions about their next steps towards further education, employment, training or independence? Reasonable progress

Leaders have taken positive steps to ensure that learners are better informed about their next steps after college. They have set up an internal careers team and recruited an independent careers service who work closely together to offer realistic advice and support; for example, ensuring that a student who wanted to become an actor understood that their income could be inconsistent.

The members of the transition team have a wide range of experience which they share to help students better understand their options after college. Transition staff are now working more closely with care, therapy and education staff. As a result, students learn relevant life skills and knowledge, then can practise these in a range of settings. These include learning how to book interpreters for meetings or understand how to take gas and electricity meter readings.

Managers are building relationships with a smaller group of more committed employers whose organisations offer a wider range of job roles. These work placements enable students to gain skills, knowledge and behaviours that directly link to their long-term goals. Supported interns work effectively in different jobs across the local National Health Service trust.

The new curriculum pathways focus more on students' longer-term goals. An extended personal development programme is also proving successful. Last term, this focused on democracy and understanding the voting system. As a result, most students voted in the general election as they felt they could now make an informed decision. However, this work is new, and staff rightly recognise that they need to continue to develop this part of the curriculum, particularly to support students to improve their resilience and awareness of the wider world.

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