

Natspec Transform consultancy report

Report for The Deaf Academy



Consultancy undertaken by: Nigel Evans Natspec associate

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1. Introduction

Natspec is the membership association for organisations, including colleges and independent providers, which offer specialist FE provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Our vision is that all young people with learning difficulties or disabilities access high quality education and training, which meets their individual needs and supports their aspirations for skills, work and life. Through Natspec Transform, we offer consultancy services to aid specialist FE providers to improve the quality of their provision and raise standards across the sector.

This report provides a set of observations about your provision, based on the information provided to the associate and the conclusions that it was possible to draw within the scope of the consultancy visit. We hope that the observations and the suggested next steps will enhance existing quality improvement and performance planning, as you continue to develop and improve your provision.

2. Aim and objectives

- To review the effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the current pre-enrolment and initial assessment arrangements
- To evaluate the progress made in developing work-related learning, including work experience and careers education.

3. Consultancy methodology

Over a two-day period, Natspec associate, Nigel Evans, worked on-site with Head of Education, Mark Stock, and College Principal, Sylvan Dewing, to review the effectiveness of the curriculum and reflect on progress made since the recent Ofsted inspection. Nigel and Mark observed learning sessions together, reviewed documentation, and discussed how learning is planned, progress recorded, and targets set. Discussions also took place with subject leads, senior leaders, a therapist, and students.

4. Findings

Teaching and learning

- Overall, activities were well-planned, adapted to meet individual needs and developmental. In the most effective lessons observed, students knew what was expected of them and were involved in planning their own learning. Feedback to students supported progression by letting them know what they were doing well and how they could improve. A small number of sessions lacked personalisation with all students following the same activity at the same level regardless of their needs or abilities.
- The majority of teachers understood how the activities, topics or projects they plan will help individual students develop new skills, enhance established skills, acquire new knowledge and

language. For example, during the Enterprise session students were using a software programme to design marketing materials for a forthcoming Christmas market; some students were familiar with the programme and required minimal support, whilst others needed introducing to the programme. One student developed their communication skills by explaining to another student how to use the programme. All students were making good or better progress in relation to their starting points.

- Teachers, learning support workers (LSWs) and communication support workers (CSWs) know their students well. Students responded very well to the positive, reassuring approach used by education staff. Students are developing their signing skills well; many students who previously had low level signing skills have rapidly become fluent and confident in using British Sign Language. In the sessions observed there were no examples of over-supporting the learning process by LSWs or CSWs. They were using the right level of support to keep students focussed on the tasks involved and knew when an individual student requires a break from learning or a change of activity.
- In some qualification-based classes all students were undertaking the same activity at the same level, regardless of their prior experience or level of understanding. This meant that the most able students were not extending their knowledge sufficiently or developing new language or skills.
- Many targets set by staff are taken from the EHCPs or from the qualification criteria. In a minority of cases targets reviewed were out of date or applied to a previous learning environment. These targets did not always reflect the priorities for students, and in some cases, it was difficult to link the targets to medium- or long-term goals. In the best examples, targets were developmental and clearly supported students' goals and aspirations.
- Generally, the curriculum is broad and appropriate to the needs of students. Relevant qualifications are offered to students who need them to progress to their next stage or have the potential to achieve the qualification. Some elements of the curriculum would benefit from greater cohesion so that the different elements or subjects clearly support the development of personal, social or employability skills. In the majority of cases observed, teachers were reinforcing skills development and the acquisition of knowledge, but the evidence is not routinely recorded and used to demonstrate student progress.
- The recently appointed work-related learning coordinator is developing a good system to record the work placement activities and the monitoring form is being used well to document how the student is performing at work. The work placement logbook includes references to generic employability and personal skills but does not cover job specific skills, therapy targets or other individual targets that could be reinforced and developed in the workplace. The offsite work placement form would be even better if it included judgements about new skills developed, the standards achieved and the recommended next steps. This information would help tutors discuss progress with individual students.
- Currently, tutorials are used for pastoral support, specific topics and information sharing. There is limited use made of the time available to review progress or involving students in planning their own learning.

Assessment

- At present, staff rely on a range of sources to understand the needs of students before they arrive at The Deaf Academy. These include Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), school reports, medical and therapists' reports. Often the information is out of date, is not relevant, or misses key pieces of information that would help staff devise appropriate individual learning and therapy plans.

- Students would benefit significantly from a detailed assessment plan that gives accurate relevant information. The assessment plan should include a forensic review of the EHCPs to ensure they are fit for purpose, outcomes and aspirations are relevant and up to date and qualification expectations are appropriate. Primary barriers to learning should be identified in the pre-enrolment phase so that conditions that could potentially overshadow the main deafness diagnosis are recognised and incorporated into education planning. For example, The Deaf Academy staff are aware that a significant proportion of students have dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD, but these conditions are rarely identified appropriately in EHCPs or other reports received. The new post-16 environment that students enter will require a different approach to assessment. The college should be able to derive from this assessment the information it requires to ensure educational and, where appropriate, residential provision are compatible with the needs of the students.
- In the best examples, the career and independent living aspirations of students led the purpose of assessments. However, the information required is not always available. Education staff should identify students' starting points so learning plans reflect prior learning, gaps in knowledge, particular skills acquired, and standards achieved so that the impact of the learning experience can be clearly demonstrated.
- Senior leaders recognise that an accurate assessment of need will take longer than the current time allocated and that as students become more confident in their new environments different needs may emerge; these may affect destination planning, qualification levels and therapeutic support. For example, senior leaders have correctly identified that low language levels and superficially passive behaviour can mask underlying social, emotional, or mental health needs that only become apparent when a new student acquires the ability to express themselves. The information received by The Deaf Academy seldom highlights the potential risks to progress, achievement or even the success of the placement that this variable quality of information sharing can cause.

Therapy support

- At present, The Deaf Academy has gaps in its therapeutic provision. The current therapy team use their time effectively to prioritise working with the most complex and vulnerable students. The recently introduced Individual Therapy Plan (ITP) is not used consistently. The ITP is most effective when it is clearly linked to the aspirations and long-term outcomes for students and when it clearly supports the educational goals and targets. Many of the ITPs reviewed did not identify resources, techniques and strategies to be used nor did they specify the specialist training and support that education staff will need to implement the ITP. The revised approach to assessing the needs of students prior to enrolment should enable therapists to focus on needs of students and the practical steps required to enable them to achieve their potential. The therapy team plan to introduce the approach currently used in the school that involves a therapist spending dedicated time every day with each class. This will enable the therapy team to work even more effectively with education staff and report on progress made by students as a result of therapeutic interventions and support.

Leadership and management including quality improvement planning

- Senior leaders have a clear vision for the future of the college and its role in preparing young deaf people with complex needs for their next steps.
- A large amount of useful data is collected from a good range of sources and used to assess the quality of the provision. The generating of reports and analysis of data is unwieldy and reliant on a few individuals knowing the systems. This means that the full potential of the data collected is not being used.
- The quality improvement plan (QIP) is comprehensive and detailed. The QIP would benefit from separating the progress and impact statements so that it is clear to the reader exactly what

difference the actions will make to the experience and progress of students. For example, the statement regarding the development of the curriculum could include:

Intent <i>What we want to happen</i>	Implementation <i>How we will make this happen</i>	Impact <i>The difference it will make to our students</i>	Next steps
<p>By April 2023 the curriculum offered will take account of the starting points of students, their learning, therapeutic and/or behaviour support needs, as well as their aspirations.</p> <p>The curriculum subjects will clearly indicate how they contribute to the personal, social, emotional and employability goals of every student.</p>	<p>Senior leaders, tutors and therapists will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ devise a thorough assessment package that identifies strengths and needs ▪ plan a curriculum that is integrated, focusses on the development of skills, knowledge, and language development. 	<p>All students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ make good or better progress towards their long-term goals and relevant EHCP outcomes ▪ follow a clear, personalised programme that builds on their strengths, develops the skills necessary to be a successful adult and enables them to make informed choices about their next stage ▪ achieve the qualifications relevant to their next step ▪ develop an understanding of deaf culture ▪ develop a positive view of what it means to be deaf, that emphasises the possibilities not the deficits. 	

- Senior leaders have a strong focus on developing the skills and expertise of all staff to ensure they meet the needs of students and prepare them well for their next stage. Senior leaders are aware of the professional development needs of staff and are implementing an appropriate training programme.

5. Recommendations

Next steps

- Develop an initial assessment plan that makes best use of available information to identify relevant needs and prior learning. Where appropriate information is lacking or out of date, The Deaf Academy staff should devise and apply suitable assessment tools that will enable them to gain the necessary information to allow them to plan appropriate individual learning programmes.
- Review the current use of individual education plans (IEPs) and individual therapy plans (ITPs) so that they are complementary, focus on and support the achievement of medium and long-term goals and contain measurable outcomes that are linked to students' aspirations.
- Where possible, therapists should maximise the time they spend in classrooms so they can support education staff, integrate therapeutic and educational aims effectively and improve joint planning with teachers.

- Senior leaders should ensure quality improvement planning clearly indicates how improvement actions will increase the rate of progress for students and prepare them, where appropriate, for independent living, employment, or further education.
- Ensure qualification-based classes take account of students' starting points and prior learning so that the most able students extend their knowledge and skills.
- Build on the recent work-related learning actions so that students are aware of the new skills and language they develop, and the standard of work they achieve. Incorporate job specific skills, therapy targets or other individual targets into relevant planning and assessment documentation. All relevant aspects of the curriculum should support employability skills.
- Devise a straightforward method of collecting evidence that demonstrates the impact of The Deaf Academy experience on students. In particular, consider how to evidence that learning and therapeutic activities are enabling students to overcome barriers to learning, the progress they are making towards achieving targets and goals, and how well students are prepared for adult life.
- Revise the tutorial system to include a focus on reviewing progress and setting targets and to enable students, where appropriate, to influence their learning programmes.
- Investigate using a management information system that is fit for purpose, easy to use, and accessible to education staff, residential staff, and therapists as well as senior leaders.

If you would like further support from Natspec Transform, please contact transform@natspec.org.uk.