



**Consultancy undertaken by: Nigel Evans Natspec associate**

**Date: 17-18 January 2024**

**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 overall progress since the previous review in November 2022.
- To review the implementation of new college curriculum pathways and new facility Fearnside House.
- To review progress made in developing work-related learning, including work experience and careers education.

**3. Consultancy methodology**

From 17-18 January 2024 Natspec consultant, Nigel Evans worked with Head of College David Kussel, College Principal Sylvan Dewing and school improvement partner Samantha Barham. Nigel, David and Samantha observed learning sessions, reviewed documentation, discussed how learning is planned, progress is recorded, and targets are set. Discussions also took place with subject leads, senior leaders, therapists, and students.

**4. Findings**

**Teaching and learning**

- Since the previous Natspec quality assurance visit in November in 2022 the Academy has made significant and wide-ranging progress in meeting the needs of their students and preparing them for their next stages.
- The new Fearnside post-19 education and residential centre is highly effective in helping students prepare for adult life. The accommodation is well planned and of a high standard.

Students based in the centre respond well to the positive culture and expectations that staff promote and reinforce. They develop skills for adult life well and are proud of their deaf culture.

- Students now run deaf awareness courses for local organisations, including the National Trust, the local police service and the Met Office. The courses are devised and delivered very effectively by students with good support provided by the teaching staff. The course for National Trust volunteers observed during the review was highly effective. Students with significant communication difficulties demonstrated high levels of knowledge, and understanding of what the hearing community needs to know to communicate well with deaf people. Students explained how BSL is constructed and worked with participants to teach them some basic signs. All participants valued the course and reported that their understanding of the needs of the deaf community had improved significantly.
- The Academy has made significant progress in developing work experience opportunities for students, the range available is very impressive. Excellent use is made of local employers as well as national companies that operate in the area close to the homes of students. In some areas, such as English, good employability language and concepts are reinforced well through relevant activities that are appropriate and developmental.
- Mathematics and English are very strong, students in mathematics classes develop a good understanding of mathematical concepts and how to apply them in everyday life. Every learner works at their own level and is motivated to improve their understanding and skills. The resources used are imaginative and appropriate to the needs and ages of students. In English, gaps in understanding are identified and the curriculum provides activities for students to overcome deficits in learning as far as possible so appropriate qualifications can be followed. For students in their final years at the Academy, where formal qualifications are not appropriate, the emphasis on giving them the literacy skills for adult life is effective and relevant.

### **Therapy support**

- Since the previous visit the capacity of the Health and Therapy team to provide support and guidance has increased considerably. Therapists work very well with education staff, providing them with assessments of need, practical support in the classroom and community and professional guidance for education staff to ensure the sustainability of therapeutic interventions. The use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAT) devices as part of a total communication approach is becoming increasingly well-established across the college with students becoming more confident in using their devices and teaching staff more skilled at making the best possible use of the devices in learning environments. The potential for the further development of AAC devices is strong once staff have greater access to these resources.
- Some therapy areas are still in development, for example, the physiotherapist has difficulty getting the necessary access to students and teaching and residential staff are not yet able to manage the plans devised by the physiotherapist. The Therapies Manager has produced a thorough quality improvement plan that clearly identifies the resources and actions required to further improve the service and how these plans will be implemented.

## **Leadership and management including quality improvement planning**

- Senior leaders continue to articulate a clear vision for the future of the college and its role in preparing young deaf people with complex needs for their next steps. They reinforce high standards and provide good support for staff to improve signing skills and develop the expertise needed to support students with most complex needs. The introduction of the post-19 provision demonstrates the dynamic approach to developing a suitable curriculum for students as they become young adults.
- Senior leaders use data intelligently to inform improvements and celebrate successes. However, the generating of reports and analysis of data still relies on a range of sources. EHCP outcomes are tracked on one system, evidence for achievement and progress on other programmes and individual learning targets are recorded on spreadsheets. The SLT now have a good understanding of what they need a management information system to do and are researching possible systems that will meet the needs of the organisation.

## **5. Recommendations**

### **Next steps**

- Develop a collegiate management information system that encompasses all elements of the student journey including enquiries, application, enrolment, induction and assessment, on-programme progress and achievement, work experience and transition to the next stage. Residential staff, therapists, parents, and students should also contribute to the system and significant achievements should also be recorded. The system should have clear links to EHCP outcomes and long-term goals, have the capacity to generate individual learning plans, track progress against targets and produce termly and annual reports.
- Devise a more detailed and informative individualised career action plan to enhance work-related learning. At present, the action plan is a summary of the student's needs, aspirations, and next steps. To increase the effectiveness of the careers education, information, advice and guidance offered the plans should describe the current situation, things that may affect choices, aspirations and ambitions with relevant information and links that will help the student make their choice. The plan should also include, what the individual needs to do to achieve their ambitions, the support the college, relevant organisations and other professionals can provide, alternative options. All actions should include a deadline linked to a named person.
- Increase the personalisation of schemes of work (SoW) so that they are closely linked to relevant short- and medium-term targets and to long-term goals. Currently, activities recorded on SoWs do not reflect individual needs or abilities. Some SoWs are overly ambitious in terms of the content planned. For some students, who require more time to process information or understand new concepts insufficient time is allowed for these individuals to comprehend what is required or how to respond to a question.
- Incorporate relevant elements of personalised job descriptions into individual learning plans. Work-related learning would have a greater impact on individuals if each work placement had a personalised job description, tailored to the needs, skills and interests of the student

placed. The job description should include; the job title, main duties and responsibilities, essential skills, desirable skills, qualifications, and working conditions. The job description should develop as the range of duties increases, the support given reduces, and the standards expected change as the student acquires new skills, language, and becomes more confident in the role.

- Develop guidance and resources to support parents so that students can continue to develop their communication and other skills with their families during holidays. At present some students lose knowledge, language and skills acquired when they return home for holidays because parents and siblings do not have the skills or confidence to use BSL or other accessible forms of communication in the family home. The Academy should consider making clear the expectation that parents will endeavour to support their sons' and daughters' education during holidays. This may include developing signing skills and adopting any guidance provided by speech and language, physio, occupational therapists, and mental health specialists. Actions for parents could be incorporated into annual reviews. Where appropriate, students should be given the skills, confidence and resources to improve their families' communication skills and develop strategies to overcome their anxieties when they return to a non-signing family.
- Ensure that education and residential staff share relevant information so that skills, language and knowledge can be developed in both settings. Currently, students develop life skills very well in the college setting, but tutors do not know if students use the new skills, knowledge and language they develop in the residential settings or if residential staff are fully aware of student capabilities. The new management information system should enable residential and care staff to simply share progress and achievement information.
- Make the connection between therapy targets and EHCP outcomes and long-term goals clearer. For example, one learner's therapy target was 'to jump with feet completely leaving the trampoline bed consistently on consecutive weeks'. If this target was linked to other relevant goals or outcomes the overall impact of the student's experience of the curriculum would be easier to demonstrate.

If you would like further support from Natspec Transform, please contact [transform@natspec.org.uk](mailto:transform@natspec.org.uk).