

The Deaf Academy QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW FEBRUARY 2025

Consultancy undertaken by Nigel Evans – Education and Training Consultant

1. **Scope of review**

- Review overall development and improvements made with the delivery of the curriculum since the January 2024 visit.
- Compare current curriculum model to the strategic vision for the future and offer advice on our direction
- Review how Assessment, IEPs and Annual Reviews work together to express student progress

2. **Consultancy methodology**

- From 5-6 February 2024, Nigel Evans worked with Head of College Greg Ireland, College Principal Sylvan Dewing and, on day 1, College Governors Rob Aubry and Tony Collyer. A range of learning sessions were observed, documentation was reviewed, and discussions took place regarding how learning is planned, progress is recorded, and targets are set. Nigel Evans also met with subject leads, senior leaders, therapists, and students.

3. **Findings**

Teaching and learning, including assessment of starting points

- The Universal Provision Map is clear and strongly linked to the diverse needs of students. By covering communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social emotional and mental health and sensory/physical, the Academy demonstrates its strong focus on the specific needs of deaf young people with SEND. The provision clearly defines student entitlements and, if quality standards are explicitly linked to the provision, student achievement and progress will continue to improve.
- The overall standard of teaching and learning sessions visited was at least good. Students enjoyed learning, and there was evidence of new skills and language acquired. At present, senior leaders do not have an overview of individual schemes of work and the planning of learning. This makes the standardisation of quality difficult for senior leaders. Every class visited had a wide range of individual needs and abilities. Learning was generally personalised. However, there was no clear rationale regarding the learning strategies used, the content covered or how prescribed therapies were being incorporated into classroom activities. In a small number of sessions visited, teachers spent too long at the front of the class, resulting in some students appearing to disengage from learning. The lack of a learning plan for sessions and a profile of students' needs and abilities makes it hard for observers to judge the effectiveness of the approach taken by teachers.
- Teaching assistants (TAs) and communication support workers (CSWs) are skilled and have excellent relationships with students. In the best examples, they help students maintain their focus on learning, they break down tasks into appropriate steps, helping

students to understand concepts, new knowledge and relating activities to their personal experiences.

- Currently, managers have not produced formal guidance for TAs and CSWs. Fortunately, most TAs and CSWs know their students well, but the absence of standardised schemes of work or learning plans means the approach to managing learning support staff is probably inconsistent. Support staff who are new or covering an absent colleague do not have easily accessible information that would help them support learning in the most effective way. Clarification of the support roles would benefit students by increasing the effectiveness of these roles. Although the CSW role has national guidelines, because of the specific needs of Academy students, these guidelines could be enhanced to reflect the SEND of the students they work with.
- Students make good and, in some cases, very good progress towards their medium-term goals and long-term outcomes. The identification of starting points using a range of assessments is reliable and comprehensive. The collection of evidence to demonstrate progress is currently inconsistent and relies upon the individual skills and pedagogical understanding of teachers and support staff. For example, the use of a learning log is usually restricted to a record of activities. Although the record can be useful as a trigger for language development and helping with recall of activities, the resource would be even more effective if it showed the acquisition of new learning, skills, language or knowledge in a sequential and evaluative way. For students on work experience, the learning log could be linked to the relevant tasks and duties, the standards they achieve and the level of support required. Students' next steps would be clearer, measurable and the evidence to support progress and achievement would be robust and easy to access.
- Preparing students for adult life is a fundamental priority for the Academy, and the curriculum and adult atmosphere within the college and residences support this priority. Explicitly linking to the Preparing for Adulthood framework will help ensure that all staff reinforce and contextualise the skills students need to succeed in the adult world. The integration of residential, college and therapeutic plans will increase the effectiveness and usefulness of these plans. Parents will have an improved understanding of their contribution to giving their children the best possible start to life after college.

Use of data and management information

- The Academy has now identified a management information system that it believes will meet its data and information needs. When established, the new system will improve the current arrangements, which involve teachers using their own systems to record assessments, recognise achievements, track progress, plan learning and capture evidence. In most cases, teaching staff do this diligently and accurately, but it is time-consuming and not standardised. Senior leaders will be able to view all relevant student information, and relevant staff will be able to upload progress data, record summative

evidence for achievement and generate reports for termly and annual reviews. All schemes of work and learning plans will be in one place, and parents and students will have limited access.

- The Academy collects data from a good range of sources and presents the data clearly. In many cases where percentages are used, numbers are too small to be statistically significant. At present, judgements arising from the data are not made. An executive summary resulting from the data collection would enhance the use of the data and support other judgements made about the overall quality of provision. The information gathered could be used to compare the progress and achievement of students with previous results, identifying any trajectories of improvements in the College provision. Where appropriate, the progress and achievement of students with different conditions could be analysed. For example, do residential students make better progress than day students, or do students with autism have higher levels of achievement than others? Using the information to develop practice across the college and set improvement targets will make the use of data even more effective.
- The reporting of attendance is comprehensive. Further analysis of the data will help pinpoint successful strategies and areas requiring improvement or development. For example, why do 66% of students have attendance rates of over 90%? Are there success factors with those students that could improve the attendance of other students? Are there valid reasons why some students' attendance is lower than expected?

Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance

- Following the decision to close the local careers company, Careers South West (CSW) the Academy no longer has an external specialist careers advisor. A senior member of staff is now completing a careers qualification at an appropriate level that will enable students to receive the personalised careers advice they require. A dedicated careers teacher will enable careers education to be embedded across the curriculum, and ensure the links between work-related learning, vocational subjects, and independence are strong and explicit.
- Work-related learning, including employability and work experience, would benefit from a more personalised, cross-curriculum approach. For example, in one session, students were learning about the difference between skills and abilities; the activity was the same for all students regardless of their vocational experiences and aspirations.
- The use of job descriptions to support employability is still under-developed.

Use of Therapies

- Therapists continue to work very effectively with students. All students benefit from a thorough and detailed assessment process. Therapists review previous assessment information, observe new students, and liaise with parents and other professionals. The recently introduced model of working with groups for five to six weeks to devise strategies and identify resources for groups has the potential to enhance the skills of

teaching and learning staff and integrating therapy techniques and resources into sessions.

- The use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) continues to be strong, with more students becoming confident in using accessible methods of communicating. Currently, the Academy operates individual education plans (IEP) and individual therapy plans (ITP). The proposal to amalgamate both plans will reduce duplication and ensure that the focus on the achievement of long-term outcomes is even stronger.

Learner Voice

- All students' contributions are welcomed, valued and respected; many are keen to talk about their experiences at college. Before starting college, the vast majority of students have not been 'listened' to or given the skills of self-advocacy so that they can evaluate their personal experiences or effectively influence the curriculum. Deaf young people require a range of methods to express their views. Students who are less confident in articulating their thoughts about life at the Academy require specific resources, training, and techniques to give their opinions and suggest improvements.

Quality assurance

- Senior leaders know their college well. They have a very good understanding of the strengths of the provision and the areas for development. The recently appointed Head of College is implementing a quality assurance cycle that will give leaders and managers the necessary knowledge and understanding of how well the curriculum and wider college experience are meeting the needs of students. Senior leaders recognise the need to ensure that the curriculum is delivered to a consistently high standard across the Academy.
- The Head of the College now holds meetings with teaching and learning staff; this has improved communication and reduced some of the frustrations experienced by staff.
- The introduction of the new management information system requires careful planning and consideration. Staff involvement in the design and trialling of the system will ensure it meets the needs of students, teaching, learning, residential staff, therapists, parents and senior leaders.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Strengthen the Standardisation of Teaching and Learning

- Develop a structured approach to lesson planning and schemes of work, ensuring all sessions have a clear learning rationale.
- Provide guidelines for the incorporation of prescribed therapies into classroom activities to better integrate therapeutic interventions into learning.

4.2 Improve Support for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Communication Support Workers (CSWs)

- Introduce formalised guidance and training for TAs and CSWs to standardise their roles and ensure they are effectively supporting students.
- Develop role-specific expectations that reflect the unique needs of deaf young people with SEND.

4.3. Enhance the Use of Learning Logs

- Change learning logs from activity-based records to evaluative tools that track the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, and language in a sequential manner.
- Link work experience learning logs to relevant tasks, standards achieved, and levels of support required, making progress measurable.

4.4 Expand Data Use and Analysis

- Implement a more systematic approach to data analysis to track student progress, identify trends, and compare cohorts.
- Develop an executive summary of data to support leadership decisions and quality assurance.
- Use data to examine patterns in student progress, such as differences between residential and day students and students with specific conditions such as autism, ADHD or poor mental health.

4.5. Embed Careers Education Across the Curriculum

- Strengthen work-related learning by making it more personalised to students' interests, aspirations, and vocational experiences.
- Incorporate job descriptions more effectively to help students understand employability skills in a meaningful way.
- Ensure that the dedicated careers teacher's role is fully integrated across subjects.

4.6. Optimise individual therapy plans (ITPs) and individual education plans (IEPs)

- Implement a single, integrated plan combining IEPs and ITPs to reduce duplication and enhance long-term outcomes.

- Continue to develop the group-based therapy strategies to equip staff with better techniques for supporting students in the classroom.

4.7. Strengthen the Student Voice

- Develop structured self-advocacy training to help students express their views more confidently.
- Implement accessible feedback mechanisms that allow students with diverse communication needs to contribute meaningfully to curriculum improvements.

4.8. Strengthen Quality Assurance Processes

- Establish a robust quality assurance cycle to provide leaders with consistent insight into curriculum effectiveness and student experience.
- Ensure that curriculum delivery is standardised across the Academy, maintaining high expectations in all subjects and learning environments
- Involve relevant staff in developing the management information system to ensure the system is efficient and fit for purpose.

Nigel Evans February 2025
