

# Royal National College for the Blind

Inspection report for further education college

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNCB) is an independent specialist residential college with charitable status, and is a company limited by guarantee. Its mission is to 'lead, innovate, develop, promote and deliver world class learning, products and services, driving standards of excellence'. The college provides education and training primarily for learners who are blind and visually impaired. Some learners have additional needs, which include medical and mental health needs. Some 6% of learners have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The college is located in Hereford in 25 acres of grounds and is in easy reach of the city. There are 158 residential learners and one day learner. There are 29 learners who are aged 16 up to the age of 18 years.

### **Summary**

This key, announced inspection was undertaken over four days by one inspector. All the key national minimum standards for accommodation of students under 18 by further education colleges were inspected.

Since the last inspection in 2006 the college has made substantial progress. The college continually reviews its activities and condition, and plans strategically for the future accordingly.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection four recommendations were made and all have been met. The college reviewed its procedures for recruiting staff, volunteers and gap students to ensure there is careful and robust selection and vetting of all staff working with learners. All students under the age of 18 now live in a designated residential hall within the college grounds. There are specific rules that apply to this residential accommodation that includes a visitors policy that promotes the safety and well being of this younger learner group. The college has established positive links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and chairs the further education safeguarding children board sub committee.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Learners' health care needs are proactively addressed because they have access to a network of specialist support including a qualified nursing team, specialist counsellor, coordinator of therapeutic intervention and additional professional support where necessary. A Consultant Ophthalmologist holds a clinic on campus regularly and learners who are identified as needing additional support, for example, a diagnostic report or specialist psychological assessment, may be referred through an internal referral procedure.

Learners' health care needs are taken into account throughout their college education from assessment through to transition on to further education or employment. For example, pre-entry assessment is undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team and pre-entry assessment reports evidence recommendations for personalised programmes including support for learners who have additional health or psychological support needs.

Learners health needs are met and protected by highly effective medication policies, procedures and practice guidance, which are implemented extremely well. Before a learner is given responsibility for their own medication a rigorous risk assessment is completed to decide whether they can do this safely. Any such risk assessment is recorded and reviewed on a frequent basis and amendments made where necessary. Safe storage for such medication is always available when required.

There are effective systems in place to ensure that information is passed confidentially between staff to promote consistent practice. Regular communication exists between academic and pastoral staff regarding welfare matters.

Quality assurance records show that the provider habitually and frequently checks whether medication policies, procedures and practice guidance are put into practice effectively.

Learners are always encouraged to take an interest in looking after their health and leading healthy lives. The promotion of a healthy lifestyle is successfully integrated into how the college operates. Learners are educated on how to live a healthy lifestyle through discussion groups in lessons that cover healthy eating, exercise, environmental issues and drug awareness. This is reinforced by outside visits and external speakers. The college takes a firm stance regarding illegal behaviours and the use of illegal substances, while remaining supportive of learners whose problems may be of a temporary nature.

Menu planning is of a good quality, includes food from different cultures, caters for most learners dietary restrictions and requirements and encourages them to try new dishes. Healthy choices are taken into account in the college restaurant and in the residential halls at breakfast. The restaurant has been refurbished to a high standard. Catering staff are appropriately trained and receive specific training to equip them to support learners who are blind or partially sighted. There are additional staff available in the college restaurant at each meal to support learners. All residential halls have kitchen facilities where learners can prepare their own meals or make snacks and drinks. There are established systems in place to support those learners who wish to progress to self-catering in the halls. The college is in the process of re-establishing additional staff support in the residential halls at meal times to support learners who self-cater.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Learners safety is promoted because staff listen and take appropriate actions to ensure their welfare.

There are effective comprehensive policies on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of learners, which are known to learners, parents and staff and, which are implemented successfully in practice.

Staff and learners know that bullying is not tolerated and that staff act on any information that bullying might be taking place. Learners welfare is safeguarded because staff receive regular in-house training in child protection and demonstrate excellent knowledge of policies and procedures. The designated child protection officer and key staff attend external training to maintain their knowledge of national and local child protection procedures and ensure that the college's child protection policy reflects local practice. Staff have responded in a very

professional and knowledgeable way to any concerns about a learner's safety. Learners confirm that they feel staff give a high priority to keeping them safe.

Learner information is handled in a professional and sensitive manner. Confidentiality is respected and information is only shared with necessary parties with learner consent. Learners state that the college respects their privacy and confidentiality, that their concerns are listened to and they are supported to behave in a socially acceptable manner. The college have a strong focus on promoting effective and supportive networks, for example, learners are positive about their tutor and enrichment support officer links. A clear behaviour management policy together with an established structure and opportunities for the learners to be guided to learn good social skills are having the positive effect of creating a harmonious environment in the college.

The college has a clear complaints procedure and information about this is available to learners and parents in a range of formats. Learners state that the college responds quickly to any concerns raised by them and learners are proactively supported to raise any concerns or issue that they have.

Learners expressed confidence in the safety and security of the college. Learners learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they regularly practise the emergency escape drill and staff receive fire training. Safe procedures are in place to protect learners through tests on fire systems and other electrical equipment at appropriate intervals. Environmental risk assessments are in place to ensure the college is fully informed about potential hazards to reduce risks.

Staff recruitment files contain extensive evidence of recruitment checks that have taken place prior to staff being employed. This includes an appropriate enhanced criminal record bureau check. All adults who visit the residential hall are supervised by staff. This excellent practice ensures that learners are appropriately safeguarded.

The college has thorough risk assessments for all aspects of the premises, grounds and activities, both on and off site. Particular efforts are taken to ensure that all areas used by learners are free from avoidable safety hazards. High emphasis is placed on safeguarding by the residential management team ensuring staff supervision of vulnerable learners.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Individual support to learners is given high priority by the college. Learners are benefiting from living in a college where both teaching and non-teaching staff are focused on their success, needs and achievements.

Staff work in a very encouraging and supportive manner, and consequently the care, social opportunities and activities are outstanding. Learners are very clear, which members of staff they can go to for personal support and freely initiate interaction and seek help from a variety of staff across site. These include the learner's primary learning team who consist of an allocated tutor and an enrichment support officer who ensure their continual care needs are met. All learners receive personalised advice, tuition and support from their first enquiry through the assessment and induction process to their time pursuing learning at RNCB and onto transition into further learning or employment. All learners have individualised programmes, which can

include independent learning skills, mobility, pre-vocational, vocational, academic subjects and careers and employment advice.

The co-ordinator of therapeutic intervention works with the primary learning team who refer any learner having additional difficulties. They can work with the individual or refer the learner onto the college counsellors or other internal or external professionals or to onto activities (such as yoga, hydrotherapy or Alexander Technique).

Learners are able to develop interests in a wide range of group and individual sports and activities with staff guidance and input from the enrichment support team. The developing programme of social events provides learners with opportunities that encourages them to achieve educationally and socially to their fullest potential. Extra curricular activities include sport, Duke of Edinburgh, music, drama, art and weekend trips. Across the college site there is a wide range of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities for the use of learners.

The college provides an environment where the value of quality and diversity is understood and promoted. This year RNCB has introduced an equality and diversity strategy steering group consisting of the senior management team and college executive. This group meet once every six weeks and is responsible for setting the organisational strategy. This group will also measure organisational performance against National Standards. The college have also introduced an equality and diversity operational group, which includes a cross-section of staff and learner representation. This group is responsible for implementing quality improvements across the whole organisation. Their remit also includes the co-ordination of celebration of a wide range of cultural events throughout the year.

All learners at RNCB have a visual impairment and several learners have complex conditions and require additional support or equipment. All potential learners are assessed at pre-entry by an experienced assessment team and any additional support or equipment needs identified. There is a wide range of specialist pan-disability equipment available on campus. All learners are provided with mobility training to aid independent navigation on and off campus as appropriate to their skills and needs. All staff receive sighted guide training on induction and teachers are required to achieve a specialist qualification in visual impairment. Many staff have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities-related qualifications and experience.

Arrangements are made for learners who wish to attend religious or spiritual services off campus including to churches or mosques. RNCB has a visiting Chaplain (Church of England).

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Learners are actively encouraged to contribute to the running of the college because their views and opinions are valued, which results in social cohesion and strong college identity. Learners consider that they benefit from a supportive and educational system, which is open and inclusive. They also believe that by effectively communicating with them about matters concerning their own lives, progress and future, the college is helping them to be responsible and independent. The college's systems gain learners views about matters affecting their daily lives and the general running of the college. This helps learners to feel ownership of the setting and to be part of college community life. RNCB governors meet a sub group of the student union regularly. RNCB staff also facilitate focus groups and residential hall staff encourage

learners to attend and contribute to hall committees. There is also learner presence on cross college groups such as the health and safety committee and equality and diversity group.

Learners each have an enrichment support officer and a personal tutor who oversee and co-ordinate their care and education. When on programme learners are timetabled to meet weekly with their personal tutor where they have the opportunity to express views regarding their progress and barriers to achievement. They attend regular progress reviews and are consulted on their individual programme. Learners are encouraged to record their own comments during tutorials, on their individual learning plan and in progress reviews and to attend hall committees to express views on residential issues. RNCB staff regularly facilitate focus groups. At the end of the academic year the learning directorate holds a returning learner conference to consult with learners regarding their programme and accommodation for the following year. All leaving learners are asked to complete an exit interview.

RNCB has a positive approach to responding to comments and receiving complaints and maintains strong links with its Student Union representatives.

Systems of listening to and obtaining the views of learners are fully integrated into the running of the college and involve learners in any developments or changes to college life.

The college demonstrates a very positive attitude to learners families and parental contact. This is demonstrated by the weekend of events held for all new parents and learners. Learners are supported to have appropriate private contact with friends and family. The college understands the value and importance of communication and contact with parents. All learners have access to phones located around the college and are given unlimited access to e-mail. The college also provides accommodation that learners can book for guests to stay.

Learners are supported to join and leave the college by well established assessment, induction and transition processes. In advance of learners starting at RNCB they are individually assessed by a team of specialist staff. They are consulted regarding their academic and support requirements. Younger learners are invited to a new learner conference prior to their starting date. This process enables learners and parents, carers and guardians to learn more about the college and to be consulted regarding support requirements. Evaluation is undertaken after pre-entry assessment and the conference and RNCB responds to learner views when planning these activities.

There is very good support for learners' progression into further education, higher education and employment. Personal tutorials provide very good, regular and formalised support to learners. This support is reinforced and enhanced by enrichment support officers who support the learners in their enrichment and residential activities.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The college provides a comfortable and safe living and working environment for learners and education and non-education staff.

The college has a very high standard of accommodation for its learners. This accommodation and other areas on campus are in the process of being significantly developed. A purpose build residential hall has now opened. Another residential hall is now for the exclusive use of students

under the age of 18. The College is now continuing to follow its development plan, which will see the opening of a complementary therapy and sports therapy building in early 2009. This work demonstrates the commitment by RNCB to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of learners and staff.

The accommodation provided for learners under 18 is very comfortable, well heated and lit. Each learner has an individual bedroom with en suite facilities. Each cluster of rooms has a sitting room, dining and kitchen area. Learners are risk assessed upon admission and throughout their education to ensure their accommodation is appropriate to their developing independence skills and at the same time their safety. All accommodation is maintained to a good standard by a team of support staff. These are employed by the college, as opposed to external contractors, and are very loyal and knowledgeable in an emergency. The support staff are integral to the college's success and are involved at more than one level with the learners.

Accommodation is adapted and is chosen being mindful of the learner's ability and needs. Some learners have additional disabilities and the college accommodation has been adapted to meet those needs. The college is accessible to wheelchair users.

The college has their own transport so as to enable the learners to access the wider community. The grounds that surround the college are well maintained and offer the learners a safe environment in which to relax or pursue sporting activities.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

RNCB has a range of material produced in a number of mediums that include all the information required to meet Standard 1. All information is reviewed and amended annually. In addition to the audio, visual and written material the college promotes the mission statement and core values with parents and learners during pre-assessment visits, initial assessments and parent weekends.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The environment represents the individual and diverse identities of learners and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding. Learners enriched care and educational experience is underpinned by the college's coherent philosophy, values and strong management team. Sufficient investment is given to the development and training of its staff whose deployment and performance are effective. Learners are kept safe and provided with good care as they have sufficient numbers of staff to look after them. Learners are making good progress because staffing in the college is well organised and very effectively managed. RNCB has well qualified staff with a wide range of specialist expertise and experience who are effectively led, supported and developed. There are much improved quality assurance and performance management systems. There is an extensive annual programme of self-assessment, quality improvement and a baseline entitlement of continuing professional development for staff.

The Royal National College for the Blind has substantial strengths and a sustained record of delivering good performance and managing improvement. Where areas for improvement emerge the college recognises and manages them well. The senior management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as the complaints, child protection and discipline log. This monitoring and consultation and regular communication ensures proper scrutiny and advancement of all aspects of the learner's care. Any shortfalls in these areas are

identified and addressed very quickly. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to reports to the governing body and the college's overall strategic plan and implementation.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):