

Royal National College for the Blind

Inspection report for further education college

Unique reference number	SC050563
Inspection date	09/06/2011
Inspector	Dawn Taylor / Katarina Djordjevic
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

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Date of last inspection	11/12/2008

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 'enable people who are blind or partially sighted, together with those who may have additional disabilities, achieve their full potential and integration in society'. The college provides education and training primarily for students who are blind and visually impaired. Some students have additional needs, which include medical and mental health needs. The college is located in Hereford in 25 acres of grounds and is in easy reach of the city.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced inspection. The inspection looked at the key standards from the accommodation of students under eighteen by further education colleges national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

Students were involved in the inspection process.

The overall outcome judgement is outstanding. The outcome judgements in being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution, economic well-being and organisation are outstanding.

The quality of service at this college is outstanding. The strong leadership and professional staff teams ensure that the college is ambitious and focused on continued improvement. Systems to monitor and evaluate work are comprehensive and accurately identify strengths and areas for development. Relationships between students and staff are excellent. The college has established policies and procedures, which are underpinned by a comprehensive framework of staff induction and training. This ensures high quality practice, which is robust and sustained. This service is consistently achieving outstanding outcomes for students.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations or actions made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Students' physical, emotional and healthcare needs are proactively met by a multi disciplinary staff team who are focussed and committed to providing a high quality service. All students have access to a network of specialist support including a qualified nursing team, student well-being coordinator, counsellor and additional professional support, for example the Consultant Ophthalmologist, where necessary. Their healthcare needs are taken into account throughout their college education from assessment through to transition onto further education or employment. For example, members of the healthcare team undertake pre-entry assessments and pre-entry assessment reports evidence recommendations for personalised programmes, including support for students who have additional health or psychological support needs.

There is an established ethos that is for students to become as independent as possible and this includes managing their own medical needs. This is embedded in all staff members day-to-day work practice and sensitively managed on an individual basis. For example, before a student is given responsibility for their own medication a rigorous risk assessment is completed to decide whether they can do this safely. These risk assessments are recorded and reviewed on a frequent basis and amendments made where necessary.

The college demonstrates a strong commitment to developing the health, nutrition and well-being of students. They can either take meals in the college refectory or, if assessed competent to do so, can cook for themselves in their halls of residence. At lunch and supper in the refectory, there are hot food choices provided, with a vegetarian option, sandwiches and salad bar. Catering staff are appropriately trained and receive specific training to equip them to support students who are blind or partially sighted. There are also additional staff available in the college refectory at each meal to support students. In discussions with inspectors students' views were thoughtful and considered. In some cases they felt strongly that there was still work to be done to achieve a diverse and consistent quality and quantity of meals. All the matters raised by students had already been identified by the college prior to the inspection. Discussions, quality assurance and consultation had highlighted concerns that the college had acknowledged by establishing focused working parties and addressing initial problem areas. The college is committed to making sure the varied needs of the students are consistently met and an outstanding service is achieved.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Safeguarding is at the forefront of practice at the college. Policies, procedures, staff practice and training continues to be reviewed and developed in line with societal trends and behaviours, changes to legislation and the needs of the student group. Students are further protected by comprehensive monitoring undertaken by the

residential management team and the college's quality assurance processes.

Students are systematically protected from harm by robust arrangements for safe personal care. Staff thoroughly respect students' need for privacy and confidentiality. Residential living arrangements provide space where students can relax and easily find privacy away from others if they wish. Sensitive information is held securely and students' issues are not discussed openly.

The college's protective strategies are exceptionally strong and enable them to act appropriately when welfare concerns are suspected. All staff have robust training that covers all safeguarding and welfare issues. In addition, all key staff and governors receive additional training relevant to their role. For example, a core group of staff from human resources and those staff involved in recruitment interview panels have undertaken safer recruitment training. The college also works in partnership with other colleges in planning and accessing additional training and conferences.

Staff recognise the importance of enabling students to take controlled risks in a safe nurturing environment. This helps students learn how to keep themselves safe in preparation for independence, how to take responsibility for their actions and the impact of their actions on others. Staff are effective at assessing risk and help students have a greater understanding of risk and how changing their behaviours can reduce risk.

Staff work hard to protect students from the impact of bullying, anti-social or intimidating behaviour and students are clear about their right to feel safe from this. Staff are sensitive and attuned to individual needs. Some students have experienced incidents of bullying but staff are pro-active and responsive to all bullying behaviour. The high staffing levels, vigilance and working practices adopted by the college reduce opportunities for bullying to occur. For example, staff work with students to develop their understanding of the diversity of their community and the importance of tolerance of others.

Complaints are taken seriously and resolved where possible. It is clear from observation and discussion that the residential management team is responsive to issues raised by the students and their parents and ensures measures put in place to resolve issues are effectively communicated. All complaints are appropriately, fairly and sensitively responded to.

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 students are free from avoidable safety hazards. High emphasis is placed on safeguarding by the residential management team ensuring staff supervision of vulnerable learners.

Students' safety is promoted by an established health and safety policy, which ensures risks are identified and appropriate action is taken to manage and reduce them. Health and safety matters are taken seriously with thorough fire and safety

procedures in place. Students and staff are involved in fire drills and there are regular checks on all fire and electrical equipment to ensure it is in good working order. All staff are appropriately trained in health and safety matters including first aid and fire awareness.

Excellent security measures are in place, which include closed circuit television, security lighting, alarm systems and secure entrances to each residential hall. The college employs a professional security team and there is an excellent working relationship with the local police. As a result of these and other measures, security incidents are rare and addressed promptly.

The college operates a robust staff vetting procedure and staff demonstrate a proactive awareness of the need to safeguard students. All adults who visit the residential hall are supervised by staff. This excellent practice ensures that students are appropriately safeguarded.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Individual support to students is given high priority by the college. All students have an assigned academic tutor and pastoral worker. These key people support a student throughout their journey through the college and on into further education or employment. This support is individual to the identified needs of each student, for example, some students will have more tutor sessions or be assisted to achieve different tasks or skills.

Staff across all disciplines work closely together creating a seamless service, which ensures students thrive and achieve outstanding outcomes. Communication is discrete but effective, ensuring gaps in learning or skills are identified and the right department or individual identified to address that need.

All students have a visual impairment and several students have complex conditions and require additional support or equipment. All potential students 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 disability equipment available on campus. All students 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. The college is proactive at ensuring as the needs of the students change the staff attend relevant training to be skilled to meet those needs.

There is a true commitment to promoting equality and diversity, which permeates throughout the college. This results in an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood and promoted. There is an established equality and diversity steering group who are making a real impact to development of the college,

staff practice and the experience of students. A cross-section of staff and student representation are proactive in sub groups who each have a clear remit in effecting change. For example: the co-ordination of celebration of a wide range of cultural events throughout the year; the introduction of a hotline for all staff to access equality and diversity support; mandatory equality and diversity training for all students and staff specific to each groups learning needs; the identification of needs, and introduction of activities for specific groups, for example, creating women's football teams. One of the many outstanding pieces of work undertaken by the college has been a link made with the local hospital, providing them with real insight and advice into improving the experience of a visual impaired patient using their service.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are established, as well as developing, structures in place for students to make positive contributions to the operation of the college. For example, the learner involvement strategy and student satisfaction surveys and resulting action plan, all of which identify actions taken or to be taken in response to student consultation. The college has a positive approach to responding to comments and maintains strong links with its student union representatives. The college is in the process of developing further systems to provide more opportunities for all individuals to affect change. They also plan to provide training and support to those who act as representatives to develop their advocacy skills.

The college work in partnership with parents to ensure students receive the support they need. They are involved prior to admission in 'have a go weekends'. Parents input and expertise is highly valued and proactively sought by staff. The college has facilities to accommodate overnight stays for family and friends. Students are supported to have appropriate private contact with friends and family with access to phones located around the college and unlimited access to e-mail. The college is also proactive in liaising with external agencies to promote individual care programmes, specific to the student's needs.

There are exceptional procedures for the assessment and introduction of students and their families to the college. These processes ensure that students receive services, which are tailored to meet their individual needs. Prior to starting at the college they are individually assessed by a team of specialist staff. They are consulted regarding their academic and support requirements. Younger students are invited to a new learner conference prior to their starting date. This process enables students 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 college respond to learners' views when planning these activities.

Students are also fully supported by staff during and after transition from college. They are provided with both practical and emotional support. For example, staff will

support some students with mobility in their new environment.

Students felt that staff commitment to supporting them at all stages of their progression through college was a key strength. Comments from students include 'the specialist support we receive here is excellent', 'staff are always available to help us with any problems', 'the staff are brilliant at helping us help ourselves' and 'For example, I was able to arrive at the college with a small group of other students prior to the start of the year and was supported with my mobility around the college campus before others arrived.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The college has a high standard of facilities and residential accommodation. There is an on going development plan, which since the last inspection has seen the opening of a complementary therapy and sports therapy building and the complete refurbishment of the assessment facility. This work demonstrates the college's commitment to continuing high standards.

The accommodation provided for students under 18 is very comfortable, well heated and lit. Each student has an individual bedroom with en-suite facilities. Each cluster of rooms has a sitting room, dining and kitchen area. Students' needs 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 high 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 students.

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

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

An outstanding feature of this college is the knowledge and skill of the residential management team. They continue to provide effective day to day support to staff whose commitment to ensuring a consistent quality of service is another strength of the college.

The college 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 students during

pre-assessment visits, initial assessments and induction.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The college promotes a positive ethos that fully embraces diversity and difference. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Students receive an individual service, which is designed to meet their personal needs. All staff have an in-depth knowledge of the students they are working with, ensuring their needs are consistently met. Staff work in partnership with parents and other professionals to ensure a high quality service where the ethos is centred around meeting the individual needs and aspirations of students.

Students are benefiting from a highly qualified, professional staff group, who are motivated and manage their time well. The skills within the teams are well matched to the diverse needs of the students accommodated. Staff have access to an excellent training programme and are provided with comprehensive policies, procedures and guidance that promotes the strong values and ethos of the service. They are caring, competent and well supported by each other and by the residential management team. They are passionate and dedicated to the work that they do and to the students.

This very positive and enabling staff team have developed mutually respectful relationships with students. They support them to understand and address their emotions and how these effect their behaviour and interaction with others. Staffing arrangements are organised around students' needs and changing circumstances. This demonstrates that the staff team are flexible and work in partnership with each other for the benefit of students. Staff effectively share information with each other so the changing shift teams provide continuity of care and have an awareness of students' current circumstances.

There are an effective range of quality assurance systems, which involve staff and learners. The residential management team ensure proper scrutiny of all aspects of the students pastoral care. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to the reports presented to the board of governors and the college's overall strategic plan.