

Dorton College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 133001

Name of lead inspector: Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

Last day of inspection: 19 January 2012

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Seal Drive
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Information about the provider

1. Dorton College of Further Education is a specialist residential college which is part of the charity, the Royal London Society for Blind People (RLSB). The college is located, along with a school and nursery, on its 47 acre site at Seal, near Sevenoaks in Kent. The college provides further education for learners who are blind or partially sighted. Increasingly, the cohort of learners who attend often have other complex disabilities. Currently, all 27 learners are funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and live at the on-site residential facility. Of these 30% are male, and around 45% are of minority ethnic heritage; just over a quarter of the students speak English as an additional language.
2. The college works with three partner colleges. Some 15 learners follow their main programme in one of these colleges and the other 12 learners are taught solely on the Dorton College site. Since the last inspection, the post of Principal has been removed from the organisational structure. The educational provision for the college, school and nursery is now overseen by the director for services and internal affairs.
3. The college's mission is to 'deliver a world class, emotional, education, community and peer support service, delivered as close to the beneficiary as possible and in collaboration with other organisations'.
4. The following organisations provide education and training in a range of subjects on behalf of the college:
 - Kent College (K College)
 - Hadlow College
 - Bromley College.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to 18)	32 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	18 full-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 3
Capacity to improve		Grade 3
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		3
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		3

Overall effectiveness

5. Dorton College now provides a satisfactory standard of education for its learners. Learners' achievement has improved notably since the previous inspection; however, inconsistency in the quality of target-setting for learners, and in the quality of teaching, is preventing learners from progressing to their full potential. Staff work hard to ensure learners enjoy their experience at Dorton and the rapport between staff and learners is good. The high quality of specialist and mobility support at the college contributes to learners feeling very safe and builds learners' confidence and their desire to live independently.
6. Development of the curriculum, increased monitoring of learners' performance and better use of data have helped the college to improve significant areas of provision, deemed inadequate at the 2010 inspection, to a satisfactory standard. The college has now made notable improvements to several areas of its work, such as better arrangements and opportunities for work experience, the development of functional skills and an increase in the specialist training for staff. However, these are not yet well established across the college and it is too early to determine the full impact on learners' outcomes.
7. Governors and managers have ensured that the college now meets its duties for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. The college has effectively developed its quality assurance processes to create a firm basis for further improvement. A few significant aspects of quality assurance and action planning however lack focus and are much too complicated. Some reports by managers about the quality of aspects of the college's work are too complicated or unhelpful. As a result some aspects, such as the quality of teaching and

learning, are not improving as rapidly as they could. The college has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Main findings

- Success rates on accredited courses and the achievement of learners' non-accredited targets improved markedly in 2010/11. Most learners are achieving their individual targets to a satisfactory standard and within relevant timescales. Initial assessments of learners' skills and specialist requirements are thorough and directly inform learners' individual learning plans, targets and long-term aims.
- Learners' individual targets are not sufficiently challenging to enable all to make the progress they are capable of. The quality of learners' targets, and of teachers' recording of progress against them, have improved, but are not yet consistently good. Records of progress emphasise what learners have done rather than what they have learnt. Opportunities for learners to transfer their learning into different settings are not always maximised.
- The preparation for learners' economic well-being is satisfactory. The college has improved opportunities for work experience, although this development is in its early stages. Teachers now integrate literacy and numeracy more into the curriculum, but this is not done consistently well. Managers collect and analyse destination data satisfactorily.
- Teaching and learning are now satisfactory. Many learning activities are fun and increase learners' enjoyment of lessons. Lessons are better structured and planned than previously. However, not all teachers or learning support assistants use these plans effectively to enhance learners' progress, particularly for learners with more complex needs.
- Managers' actions are not improving the quality of teaching quickly enough. While teachers have improved the quality of lessons overall, and reduced the number of inadequate lessons notably, too much teaching is satisfactory rather than good. Teaching staff are observed frequently, but managers do not yet make good use of existing expertise to ensure that weaker teachers improve swiftly.
- The curriculum satisfactorily meets learners' needs and interests. Learners have good access to courses at partner colleges. A revised pre-entry and entry-level programme is comprehensive and strongly promotes learners' independence. The new curriculum however does not sufficiently develop learners' skills in directing their own care and support.
- Care, guidance and support remain good. Specialist therapeutic and medical care and support are a particularly strength and enable learners to extend their mobility and independence. Support in lessons is mostly satisfactory. Staff provide effective specialist guidance to partner colleges. The college has recently strengthened the arrangements to support learners entering the college and progressing to other settings, and these are now good.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors and senior managers now set and measure the college's performance more effectively against key targets. Learners' educational experience has improved as a result. The ten-year strategic plan for the charitable trust is clear, although the college's position and its strategic aims within this are less well articulated.
- The governing body has improved its oversight of the college and the governors perform their role satisfactorily. The appointment of governors with an educational background has improved the focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers have improved their reports to governors, although reports are often too unwieldy to enable governors to ask challenging questions.
- The college has improved its safeguarding of learners, including through the relevant training of staff, and this is now satisfactory. Learners feel very safe. Teachers promote safe working practices well in lessons. Staff provide comprehensive risk assessments for individual learners and review them regularly. Managers have improved their reports to senior managers on matters related to safeguarding, but these are still not always presented clearly or in enough detail.
- Self-assessment and quality assurance processes are satisfactory. The self-assessment report and subsequent action plans are comprehensive but often over complicated given the size of the college. As a result, the key priorities within action planning are sometimes diluted. The frequent monitoring of actions to improve is mostly effective and has led to improvements in several key aspects of provision.

What does Dorton College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that managers check the quality of individual learners' targets and learning plans more robustly, and improve their analysis of data on learners' outcomes and destinations, so they can take effective action to increase learners' achievements and positive destinations.
- Ensure that individual learners' targets are sufficiently challenging and that the recording of progress focuses on what they have learnt, so that learners reach their full potential.
- Provide more opportunities for learners to practise and demonstrate what they have learnt, including literacy and numeracy skills, within different settings and activities in order to maximise their progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching more rapidly by: increasing staff expertise in working with learners with the most complex needs; using existing staff expertise to develop less experienced teachers; and, monitoring the quality of teaching more rigorously.
- Implement the new curriculum fully, including the elements which enable learners to direct their own support and care, and increase opportunities for internal and external work experience, in order to develop learners' independence and employability

- Ensure that self-assessment and action plans focus on main priorities and involve less paperwork; refine the analysis and reporting of data into user-friendly formats; and, streamline reporting to governors to enable them to monitor performance and challenge senior managers more effectively.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the teachers
- the quality and choice of food
- getting the education and qualifications they need
- getting the right skills for their future through work placements
- feeling safe and knowing who to go to if they have any worries
- the mobility staff because their support really helps learners achieve independence.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more chances to get out and about and do interesting things, particularly at evenings and weekends
- the computers
- more heating in the gym so it can be used more
- more ways to help them to communicate with other learners who maybe unable to talk or communicate as easily.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

8. Progress against most of the nine key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection is satisfactory overall. The college has made some progress in improving the quality of teaching, including increasing specialist staff expertise and sharpening individual learner target setting, but this remains a key priority for improvement. The college's self-assessment report is detailed and broadly accurate in its evaluation of provision. Although often far too complicated, quality improvement processes have been strengthened and in many cases provide a firm basis for further improvement. The college has rightly reduced its reliance on external consultancy. It is too early to judge the full impact of the recent management restructure. Managers are aware that refinement to this is required to clarify all responsibilities, and to involve staff more in strategic decisions. The strategic plan for the Royal London Society for Blind People has provided a clear basis for long-term planning, but the college's role within its objectives is less well articulated. The governing body is now better placed to monitor the college's academic performance more rigorously, and is more effectively holding managers to account. Governors rightly identify the quality of teaching and learning as their main priority.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

9. Success rates on accredited courses which learners take at partner colleges improved by seven percentage points in 2010/11, to 74%. Learners' achievement of their non-accredited individual targets also shows an improving trend: the large majority of learners are achieving their individual targets to a satisfactory standard and within relevant timescales. Initial assessments of learners' skills and specialist support requirements at the start of their courses are thorough and directly inform learners' individual learning plans, targets and long-term aims.
10. The process and systems for target setting have improved notably since the last inspection. The quality of these targets, however, and the recording of progress against them are still not consistently good. For example, not all targets provide sufficient challenge for learners to allow them to demonstrate good or better progress. In several cases, when recording individual learners' progress against their individual targets, teachers recorded learners' activities rather than what the learners actually learnt. In addition, teachers miss opportunities for learners to practise what they have learnt across a range of different activities and situations.
11. The college now collates and analyses the performance of different groups of learners, including their destinations when they finish their course. College data indicate that no significant variations in attainment exist for different ethnic or gender groups. In 2010/11 the majority of learners who left the college went

into supported living arrangements, and one learner progressed to higher education.

12. No learners progressed into employment although 1 learner progressed into supported employment. It is too early to determine the impact of current measures, but the college's increased focus on internal and external work experience and on literacy and numeracy this academic year is aimed at increasing learners' employability in 2011/12.
13. Learners say they feel very safe. They know who to go to if they are worried or concerned and particularly appreciate the help of the new mobility staff in increasing their independence. Individual risk assessments are thorough and teachers use them appropriately in lessons. Learners have contributed to the development of a new personal relationships policy through a process of consultation. Learners make a satisfactory contribution to the local community. Three learners take part in community work at a local theatre and are helping to design an accessible community café for theatre goers.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

14. Staff build good relationships with their learners and often use activities which are fun to enable learners to achieve their targets in everyday settings. Improvements to the structure of lesson plans have helped teachers to plan learning within lessons more consistently. However, not all teachers have the necessary understanding, confidence or expertise to do this successfully, particularly for learners with more complex needs. The range of information and learning technology (ILT) and its use within lessons are adequate, but ILT is not used creatively in lessons to increase learners' involvement and interest. Teachers' planning for developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills in lessons is improving, but teachers miss opportunities to develop these skills in meaningful contexts. Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily in lessons.
15. In the best lessons teachers encourage learners to evaluate their own learning. They can successfully identify their achievements and what they need to do to improve further. In one practical activity, the teacher gave concise individual briefings to learners about what they would be doing, and consulted them before specific tasks about whether they wanted help. Directions to support staff were very clear at every stage to ensure they did not support any more or less than was necessary. The teacher used a simple tactile self-assessment method for learners, which they enjoyed, and enabled them to demonstrate greater levels of independence and make good progress. Overall, learning support within lessons is satisfactory.
16. The curriculum for Dorton learners has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Increasing numbers of learners attend partner colleges as part of their programme of study. Learners have good

access to academic and vocational courses at two general further education colleges and specialist facilities at a local agricultural college. The college has improved the opportunities and arrangements for work experience. A revised programme for pre-entry and entry-level learners on the Dorton campus covers all elements of learners' lives and has a strong focus on independence. The curriculum in its current form, however, does not sufficiently develop learners' skills in directing their own care and support. The range and take up of enrichment activities are satisfactory.

17. The relationship with three partner colleges has increased the curriculum choice significantly for learners and provides improved progression routes. Staff at partner colleges receive effective specialist training from Dorton staff on the needs of visually impaired learners, while Dorton teachers have benefited from functional skills training in return. The college is developing more links with external employers and community groups.
18. Specialist therapeutic and medical care and support remain a particular strength of the college. The team has increased staff resources to meet the psychological needs of learners. A thorough initial assessment of learners' skills and specialist support requirements allows the team to chart better the effectiveness of their support strategies. The team works together closely and provides increasingly effective guidance to teaching and support staff on meeting learners' needs. Multi-disciplinary reviews of learners' progress are particularly effective. Learners have good access to Braille teaching and support as an essential part of developing their independence alongside use of information and communication technology. Staff now provide good, timely support for learners entering the college or progressing to other educational or residential settings. The external Connexions service provides good specialist higher education advice for learners.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

19. Managers have prioritised and rectified the large majority of weaknesses from the previous inspection, leading to marked improvements in learners' educational experience and outcomes. Governors and senior managers now set and measure the college's performance systematically and effectively against specific targets. The recently revised long-term strategic plan for the Royal London Society for the Blind outlines clearly the organisation's commitment to promoting 'life without limits' for blind and partially-sighted people. However, the college's long- to medium-term strategic objectives within this plan are insufficiently specific.
20. The increased representation of governors with an educational background has provided greater expertise within the governing body in monitoring the college's performance and quality of provision. While managers' reporting to governors has improved notably, particularly against statutory requirements, their reports are often far too long or not in an easy-to-interpret format. As a result,

governors are not always best placed to challenge senior managers or hold them to account as effectively as they could.

21. The college has improved its arrangements for safeguarding significantly since they were judged inadequate at the previous inspection. Staff have received relevant awareness-raising training, including in the Mental Capacity Act (2005). Within lessons, staff ensure learners understand and follow safe working practices. The college promotes its anti-bullying policies well. Learners' understanding of what constitutes bullying and/or unacceptable behaviour is good. Staff report comprehensively on issues relating directly to individual learners, such as personalised risk assessments. Managers' recording of matters relating to safeguarding, and their reports to senior colleagues and governors, have improved, but are not always presented clearly or in enough detail to be useful in deciding upon further actions.
22. Events to celebrate and raise learners' awareness of differing cultures and beliefs are carefully planned through the year. The promotion of some wider equality themes, such as sexual orientation, successfully raises learners' understanding. Staff now analyse and report much more routinely on data relating to different groups of learners and staff. This analysis varies in depth, thus limiting its usefulness for managers and governors when planning further improvement. The college's equalities action plan is reviewed frequently through its equality sub-committee. However, the plan is overly long and complex and it is not easy to identify the college's most important priorities or the impact of its actions.
23. Managers use learner views better to inform the college's self-assessment report. Learners' representation on college committees is generally good and is enabling learners to air their opinions and ideas about issues that are important to them. Feedback from one learner, for example, has led to a review of furniture arrangement in some classrooms to facilitate learners' mobility. Staff communicate well with parents and/or carers in relation to individual learners. Efforts to involve parents and/or carers more widely has met with mixed success, with low response rates to questionnaires and initiatives.
24. Managers now monitor and evaluate the college's work satisfactorily. Self-assessment and quality improvement planning are comprehensive, but often overcomplicated. Managers' frequent monitoring and review of actions and targets to improve are mostly effective, and have supported notable improvements in aspects of safeguarding, equalities monitoring, self-assessment and governance. The rate of improvement in raising the quality of teaching and learning however has been slower. Teaching staff are observed frequently, but the college does not make good use of internal staff expertise to support teachers and observers to improve. Managers do not sample or report formally enough on the quality of learners' individual learning plans and targets, thus limiting improvement.

25. The college has maintained its good specialist resources. Residential accommodation for learners has been refurbished and is of a high standard. The college has improved the proportion of staff who have relevant literacy and numeracy qualifications. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Information about the inspection

26. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's head of quality improvement and residential services as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
27. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from a range of programmes the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Dorton College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners	27	16	11
Full-time learners	0	0	0
Part-time learners			
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3		
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
Leadership and management	3	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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