

Royal National College for the Blind

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates		9–11 October 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for students		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for students

This provider is good because:

- Students make exceptional progress in developing the skills and confidence they need to become more independent as learners and in their daily lives.
- Most students achieve their individual goals and the majority obtain the qualifications they need to progress to further learning or employment.
- Teachers are skilled at providing an accessible learning environment so that students with little or no sight can participate fully in lessons.
- Each student has an individual timetable and the wide-ranging curriculum is flexible, providing a comprehensive range of qualifications and activities.
- The specialist support services are outstanding. They respond very well to students' medical and therapeutic needs. They enable students to identify their most effective working medium and to develop the mobility skills they need in order to achieve greater independence.
- Managers and governors have high expectations of staff and students, with a clear focus on developing provision that enables students to achieve and make progress.
- Managers foster an inclusive environment where students support each other and feel safe.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- In a minority of lessons teachers do not plan sufficiently to make sure that students have the necessary skills they need in order to complete tasks unaided and learn effectively.
- Teachers do not always take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to reinforce students' understanding of race and gender.
- Managers do not have sufficiently robust information to capture progress in all aspects of students' experience from the start of their programmes, and so they cannot fully evaluate the college's performance from year to year.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons which are outstanding by focusing, in staff training and observations of lessons, on better planning for effective learning.
- Ensure that teachers use naturally occurring opportunities in lessons to enhance students' understanding of race and gender.
- Further develop management information so that managers capture the progress made by students on all aspects of their programmes and review and evaluate overall performance more effectively.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for students	Good
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- Students make very good progress in developing the confidence and skills they need to become more independent as learners and to prepare for the world of work.
- Most students achieve their qualification aims. The majority of students study at advanced level where the achievement rates are high in many subjects including: complementary therapies; sports massage; anatomy, physiology and pathology; performing arts; art and design; information and communication technology (ICT) practitioners; English literature; French and Spanish. In a few courses achievement rates are low.
- Achievements at foundation and intermediate levels, with fewer students, are more variable, but in key subjects such as foundation level English and Braille they are very high. At entry level students successfully take a range of work-skills courses.
- The college monitors students' achievements closely and has found no significant differences in achievements between different groups of students, including Welsh students.
- Students achieve the majority of their individual goals and make good progress from their starting points. These goals reflect social and personal development, mobility, Braille and employability skills, and are developed in a wide range of settings to encourage students to take more control of their own learning. However, individual learning plans and reviews require improvement to record and capture this progress from the start of the students' programme.
- Students benefit from the increasing range of internal and external work placements and most students now have work placements. The college is further developing its commercial enterprises to provide real work opportunities, and to link with the wider community. These include sports and arts-based projects, as well as a conference and business facility.
- Students' progression into further or higher education, training or into work of some kind is good with an increase in the number moving into employment in the last academic year. The college works closely with home areas to help students access the appropriate support services for housing and employment needs.
- Attendance and punctuality are good for most students, although a few individual students have had periods of poor attendance which the college is rectifying.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and result in good outcomes for students. Members of staff have high expectations of students and are ambitious for them, ensuring that

they are engaged, interested and enthusiastic about their college work. Students enjoy their work greatly and take part in learning activities with relish and much good humour. Accommodation and resources for learning are very good.

- Teachers are well qualified and experienced and all have, or are working towards, a specialist teaching qualification in visual impairment. They plan carefully for, and with, each student, devising individual timetables that meet their needs and interests well.
- Teachers strongly encourage students who have been over-supported in their previous educational institutions to become more independent in their learning, and make choices and decisions of their own about their work. Students value this and say it helps them to gain confidence and feel more powerful.
- In the best lessons, teachers focus strongly on the individual requirements of each student and keep the lessons lively and stimulating. They produce accessible resources, such as raised diagrams, which are used very effectively to help students understand spatial relationships. Teachers focus on different targets and provide different amounts of verbal feedback while offering appropriate amounts of challenge or support to every student. The teachers also encourage peer support, so that students work together on tasks, making best use of their individual strengths and levels of sight.
- However, a few teachers dominate by talking too much, particularly at the start of lessons. Others do not ensure that students have learnt or revised the skills they need before beginning an activity, and a few do not turn the language of the awarding body into a form that students can easily understand. A few do not plan for the fact that most students move more easily from concrete examples to abstract ideas.
- Support for students is outstanding. The college has a well-qualified team of specialist nursing staff who link with local health services to ensure the highest level of support for individual students. The teaching of daily living skills, mobility and travel skills is exceptionally good and contributes significantly to students' independence.
- Students learn to use a wide range of adaptive technologies. The increase in the use of smart phones supports their independence. Timetabled hydrotherapy, Alexander Technique and massage sessions help students to manage their medical conditions. The college has established good links with students' home areas to work collaboratively in planning for transition.
- The wider curriculum is varied and interesting. Students take part in a good range of physical and social activities outside lessons, including league cricket, football, swimming, bowling, jewellery making, singing and a dining club. Members of staff ensure that quieter students are encouraged to participate and help all students develop the social skills they need to participate in social activities.
- Teachers assess students' starting points thoroughly and they provide good feedback on their progress. They give positive and encouraging verbal feedback on students' work in lessons, taking real pleasure in their achievements. Staff show clearly what students need to do to improve. Annual progress reviews are comprehensive, mostly giving a clear picture of students' progress in every aspect of college life. However, the recording of transition arrangements needs improvement.
- Teachers embed the development of English, mathematical and technological skills very effectively in most lessons, with opportunities taken to reinforce concepts. Those students already experienced at using information technology continue to extend their skills. Others develop these technological skills for the first time, so that they have a sound working medium for study and communication. The advice and guidance provided to students are good overall, and those applying to university are well supported, with significant levels of liaison between the college and the prospective university to ensure continuing technological support. Guidance on personal issues by staff who know the students extremely well is particularly good. However, transition planning for work or study on leaving the college began later than it should for those in their final year at the college. The college has rectified this for those currently starting their programmes.

- The promotion of equality and diversity in relation to visual impairments and disability in general is very good. However, staff do not pay sufficient attention to gender and ethnicity in lessons, particularly in employability lessons where students may not fully understand equality and diversity issues in the workplace.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The Principal, governors and managers have a very clear vision for the college, with a strong focus on enabling students to become more independent. Students talk of greater confidence and independence as key elements of their experience at the college. The college has maintained its outstanding specialist support for students with visual impairments, which was a key strength at the last inspection.
- Strategic planning is good and managers take full account of the needs of students. The new building that houses much of the classroom teaching is fully accessible, with adaptations that are much appreciated by students, particularly those who have recently lost their sight. Student representatives have a much improved voice in the college and were productively involved in the discussions and consultations about the new building and its accessibility.
- The governing body has recently been refreshed and has recruited new members with significant relevant experience and expertise. Governors hold the managers to account, challenge their decisions and take part in activities in the college to monitor the experience of students. They have helped the college to resolve the significant financial and structural challenges it has faced over the past few years. The student governor makes a valuable contribution to the discussions about matters that affect the experience of students.
- Managers and governors have recognised through their self-assessment procedures that attendance monitoring and progression data have needed improvement, and have introduced new management information systems in order to monitor the performance more closely. They have taken steps to rectify underperformance in a minority of higher-level courses. They recognise that the arrangements for capturing data about all aspects of students' programmes need further development, so that the college's performance can be evaluated more effectively over time.
- All stakeholders contribute to the college's self-assessment, which is evaluative, and provides a very effective basis for improvement planning. The most recent subject area self-assessments are self-critical and show that members of staff across the college have the expertise and confidence to identify areas for improvement. Professional development is extensive, as members of staff are required to keep up to date with developments in learning technologies, particularly in specialist subjects such as Braille. The college is a Higher Education centre for specialist qualifications in visual impairment.
- In the most recent round of observations the staff team and moderators found no inadequate teaching and a large majority good or outstanding. The observation team focuses strongly on accessibility and independence in learning, and inspectors agreed that these aspects were good or better. However, inspectors found that other aspects of teaching and learning, such as planning for effective learning, were not always evident in lessons observed and that observers took insufficient account of these weaknesses when grading.
- The curriculum is personalised so that all students have a programme that matches their choices. Where a student requests a subject area not currently offered the college will make arrangements for that to happen. The college has built on its national specialism in sports as part of the wider curriculum, and has recently developed further specialisms in modern foreign languages, and media and sound technologies, which offer realistic career opportunities for students with little or no sight.
- Managers have redesigned the curriculum in response to the recent introduction of Study Programmes and all students now have work experience as part of their programmes.

- The curriculum for students working below intermediate level now focuses appropriately on the development of employability skills through projects and enterprises that include community arts, sports and retail activities. Some of these initiatives have involved partnerships with other organisations and they enable students to increase their engagement with the local community, and to contribute to its diversity.
- The college community is particularly cohesive and students describe how they respect and support each other. Peer support is encouraged throughout the college. Inspectors saw examples of unobtrusive and sensitive guidance for students temporarily disorientated. The college does not tolerate bullying or harassment, and this is made clear at induction. Complaints about equalities issues have reduced and are now rare.
- Managers analyse staff and student equalities data closely and employ a significant number of staff with a visual impairment. The teachers demonstrate strongly their understanding of disability, but in lessons do not always take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to increase students' understanding of other aspects of equality and diversity.
- The college meets its statutory requirement for safeguarding students. It has well-embedded policies to safeguard students, and health and safety are rigorously enforced throughout the college. Students say they feel safe and know who to go to if they feel vulnerable. The college follows safer recruitment practices. Governors have had recent updating training in safeguarding and the board has a named member responsible for this area. Residential and specialist members of staff are sensitive to students' needs and respect their rights to make choices. However the college has not yet developed a policy for the staff with regard to student sexual relations'.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Royal National College for the Blind

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study programmes
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for students	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college							
Age range of students	16-18 and 19+							
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 97							
	Part-time: N/A							
Principal/CEO	Ms Sheila Tallon							
Date of previous inspection	June 2008							
Website address	www.rncb.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of students (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	9	6	13	10	28	18	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of students aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community students	N/A							
Number of employability students	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA) Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Contextual information

The Royal National College for the Blind is a specialist residential college of further education and training for people who are blind or partially sighted. It is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The college recruits students nationally and this year has 14 students from Wales. The proportion of students who have disabilities in addition to sight loss increases each year. The college provides a wide range of courses from advanced level to entry level. It prepares the students for independent living, transition to employment and progression to higher education. The college is home to the UK's first Football Academy for blind and partially sighted players and is the base for Team GB Blind Football Team.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Joyce Deere HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Student Services as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on students' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used case studies, group and individual interviews, findings from surveys to gather the views of students and employers. These views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, and perused assessment and progress reports. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider apart from the Residential Training Unit, which is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions and is not in its scope.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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