

Dorton College

Independent Specialist College

Inspection dates

15–17 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Students become significantly more independent and self-reliant through good teaching and outstanding personal support.
- Specialist therapists, education and residential staff work together creatively and collaboratively to help students make good progress in daily living activities, education and their use of leisure time.
- The strong partnership work with the partner college gives students a very constructive learning experience and very good contact with sighted peers.
- The excellent study support provided in the college houses enables students to achieve high standards and make good academic progress.
- Leaders and managers use their knowledge, skills and experience very well to ensure that all staff make strong contributions to the progress and development of students.
- Strategic actions by trustees and governors have created a viable future for the college.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Not enough students progress into voluntary, paid or supported employment.
- Careers advice and guidance fails to give students the information they need to make fully informed choices about their futures.
- Some observations of learning in the partner college do not identify fully the skills acquired, or the progress made, by individual students.
- The development of mathematics skills is not sufficiently included and emphasised in a minority of lessons in the partner college.
- Action plans to improve the quality of provision do not always indicate clearly how improvements will be evaluated or identify how students will benefit from the improvements.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Dorton College provides education, residential provision and specialist therapies for young people with vision impairments. Many students have additional disabilities or learning difficulties. Five local authorities in London and the South East commission places at the college. Staff work closely with Bromley College to offer a range of subjects that includes performing arts, cookery, horticulture, practical skills, English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). The college houses provide the setting for specialist support, life skills, therapies, Braille and mobility training. The college also has a link with a local therapy centre that runs courses in massage.
- Dorton College is one of the services run by the Royal London Society for Blind People (RLSB). The college relocated from its campus in Kent in 2013 and now operates from two college houses in Bromley.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Provide specialist, impartial careers advice and guidance to students so they can make informed choices about further learning opportunities or routes into employment.
- Increase the work experience opportunities for students so that more students progress into voluntary, paid or supported work when they leave college or finish their education.
- Share the very good practice used to observe teaching and learning in the college houses to ensure that, wherever learning takes place, observations identify the progress individual students make and the skills they develop.
- Ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to develop and extend their mathematical understanding and skills in sessions run by the partner college.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders, governors and trustees took the courageous decision to make radical changes in the residential and educational provision for young people at Dorton College. As a result, the overall quality of provision has improved significantly and is now good. The strategic decision to relocate the provision to college houses and establish a partnership with a high-performing college gives Dorton College's students a well-designed, personalised learning programme with very good access to a wide range of specialist resources, high-quality accommodation, and good teaching staff in an inclusive learning environment.
- Leaders and managers have high expectations and robustly emphasise the high standards they expect from all staff. Leaders and managers use their skills, experience and enthusiasm to introduce new ways of working that develop a culture of cooperation and sharing of effective practice between education, residential and therapy staff. Managers identify, challenge and support any underperforming staff effectively.
- Quality assurance arrangements between Dorton College and the partner college are generally good. The arrangements identify how well teaching and learning help students progress, develop new skills and become more confident in a general further education environment, as well as what further improvements are required.
- The joint observations of learning carried out by managers from Dorton College and the partner college contribute to improved standards across the provision for students. Observers identify key strengths and areas for improvement clearly and staff requiring additional training or guidance to improve their practice receive prompt and practical help. A small minority of recorded learning observations at the partner college fail to identify clearly the progress made by individual students or the skills and competence developed during sessions or since the beginning of their course.
- The observation of practice in the college houses is exemplary. Managers regularly observe staff working with students in informal ways. Observers focus strongly on the experience of students and how the support, interventions and interactions help students achieve their learning goals.
- Staff training is strong and directly related to the needs of students. All staff identify their training needs and have a training plan to ensure these are met. In addition to safeguarding training, the government's 'Prevent' agenda and equality and diversity training, recent training has included communication, use of access technology, advanced sighted guide training and the use of a writing system that uses embossed symbols.
- Leaders' strategy for training and development has a good impact on students' experiences. Of the 23 residential, learning support and education staff, nearly all have at least a level 2 qualification in maths and the vast majority have a level 2 qualification or better in English, giving them the skills and confidence to support students in developing their own skills. Specialist therapists give other staff the skills and understanding to incorporate appropriate techniques and resources into other learning activities.
- The college's English and mathematics strategy emphasises the commitment to providing opportunities to acquire the essential skills students need as they progress into adult life. Tutors' implementation of the English element of the strategy is highly successful whereas in a minority of activities in the partner college, tutors' incorporation and development of mathematics skills are less effective and require further development.
- Self-assessment is thorough and evaluative and identifies the key strengths and weaknesses of the provision accurately. Leaders use the report well to produce an improvement plan that has objectives and actions that focus on the needs of students. However, the improvement plan does not identify sufficiently the difference that the actions will make to students. Students have regular opportunities throughout the year to evaluate and influence what the college offers to them. At the beginning of the academic year, they express preferences for joining interest-specific groups including those related to gender, sexuality or beliefs. College staff and volunteers then identify suitable local groups and support the students to join and become involved in their activities. The student satisfaction survey identified the need to improve the ICT facilities in the college houses; this is now part of the college improvement plan.
- Dorton College prepares students for life in modern Britain well. Students have a lively interest in current affairs and staff use visits, activities and individual experiences very effectively to stimulate discussions.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The strong and decisive action taken by governors, trustees and senior leaders to relocate the college and plan for growth has created a viable and sustainable college that gives students much easier

access to the local community facilities and activities.

- Governors now have a clear understanding of their strategic role in the management of the college and in supporting and challenging the leadership team. Recently appointed board members have good experience and expertise and strengthen the board's ability to scrutinise the work of the college. Their understanding of the strengths of the provision and where further improvements are required is good. The recently appointed student governor enables other students to have direct dialogue with the board.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Arrangements for safeguarding are comprehensive and strongly focused on the needs of the students. All staff have a thorough understanding of the potential risks to students.
- Links with local safeguarding boards are good and effective. Staff handle safeguarding incidents professionally and sensitively. Minor incidents or concerns are recorded in appropriate detail with suitable actions identified and completed.
- Parents have a high level of confidence in how Dorton College handles safeguarding incidents. They have frequent and regular contact with college staff and are confident to share any concerns with staff.
- Dorton College has a strong focus on ensuring that students develop the mental capacity to make their own informed decisions. Staff use the decision-making assessment very effectively to identify how confident and capable students are in making informed decisions about various aspects of their lives.
- All students receive suitable training in e-safety and complete an e-safety risk assessment with a specialist tutor. Staff are vigilant in monitoring changes in behaviour that might be as a result of unwarranted attention, actions through social media or text messages.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Well-qualified tutors use their experience and expertise well, so that students gain a range of practical skills for independent living and leisure, and good vocational knowledge, for example on programmes such as ICT and massage. Tutors use a good range of teaching and learning techniques during taught lessons and progress reviews to emphasise learning points, and develop students' thinking and decision-making skills.
- Staff know and understand their students well. An integrated team of therapists and college staff make good use of the comprehensive information about what students know, and can do, at the start of their course to design learning programmes that reflect students' individual key priorities closely. Staff hold discussions with students before they start college that encourage them to talk about their ambitions, concerns, and the support they think will help them best.
- Staff monitor and record students' work and achievement carefully. Tutors carry out frequent reviews of progress and revise support arrangements to ensure that they are suitable and meet students' needs. Tutors' verbal feedback to students is constructive and suitably challenging. However, their written feedback on vocational courses is superficial and does not guide students sufficiently on what they need to do to achieve their learning goals, and how to do this.
- The highly trained learning support team works very effectively, alongside the partner college's staff, so that students participate fully in challenging learning activities and complete work at high standards. Praise and practical support help students become self-confident and more independent.
- Resources are good. Staff use up-to-date assistive technology effectively to meet students' unique needs and enable them to communicate and access and store information. These devices provide students with the independence to compete effectively with sighted peers, for example taking notes, carrying out research or studying for tests. While some students have become highly confident in using Braille, others make good use of auditory materials and devices or use coloured and sensory materials to develop their knowledge and independence.
- Learners improve their English, mathematical and ICT skills well. The good incorporation of English in both practical and taught sessions helps students develop their spoken English and literacy skills. Most-able students significantly improve their knowledge of word processing, spreadsheets, databases and presentation software. However, tutors include mathematics well in practical sessions in college houses, this is not the case in the partner college's lessons and this slows down students' progress.
- Currently, students do not receive specialist, impartial careers advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions on their progression routes and long-term work goals. When students want to change their plans for the future or preferred area of employment, they are not sufficiently aware of how their skills and knowledge can affect their career choices.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

- Students develop their vocational and social skills well and gain a greater sense of self-worth. They participate well with sighted peers as part of teams or in carefully designed activities. They develop good analytical and reflective skills, and share ideas and knowledge well. The contributions they make in lessons significantly enhance the learning of the whole group.
- Students benefit from outstanding personalised support that helps them achieve their main goals and develop independence. The health and well-being assessments and action plans provide a clear focus on well-being concerns or incidents, and this helps students keep fit and healthy. The extensive staff expertise in mental health helps students manage changes in behaviour, such as levels of anxiety, mood swings or concerns about body weight.
- Residential students make good contributions to life in the college houses. They take turns in completing communal daily chores such as cooking, cleaning and tidying and, as a result, they are more likely to progress into independent or supported living arrangements.
- Students all participate in a range of activities that inspire and challenge them, and develop their organisation, planning and other work-related skills. They organise visits and other leisure activities in their locality or beyond, including trips to exhibitions and the theatre.
- Students gain good awareness of their local communities and of current events in the wider world through a carefully planned tutorial programme and enrichment activities. They make a useful contribution in a regional forum for vision-impaired people, by raising awareness of the needs of young vision-impaired people and demonstrating how well they manage in everyday situations. Students recently started discussions related to the risk of radicalisation and terrorism.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are good. Students make good use of mobile phones to manage their time effectively. They appreciate the importance of good timekeeping through discussions on rights and responsibilities, for example on how lateness can have an adverse effect on others.
- Students learn the importance of safety and hygiene in various aspects of their practical work in kitchens, therapy sessions and in ICT lessons. They demonstrate their understanding of housekeeping chores in the college houses, for example by cleaning kitchens and other communal spaces. Students know how to keep safe when using social media, and how to keep the personal data of clients safe.
- Students learn about healthy eating, well-being and develop financial awareness. They understand the benefits of regular exercise and enjoy taking part in leisure and fitness activities such as using the gym, or participating in bowling, horse riding and cycling.
- Staff do not guide students sufficiently in the correct posture when using computers, or in how to manage some mannerisms associated with vision impairment. As a result, the most severely vision-impaired students remain unaware of the effect poor posture may have on their physical well-being, or how some mannerisms may influence how sighted people at college or in the outside world perceive them.

Outcomes for learners are good

- Outcomes for students have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. The initial assessment process is thorough and used effectively by staff to identify and reflect students' starting points, interests and aspirations accurately.
- Students improve their confidence, social and independent travel skills significantly. By the end of last year, of the nine students one travelled independently to the partner college with six students travelling semi-independently and two regularly walking to their favourite café without support. All current students use public transport with support.
- Education, residential and therapeutic staff contribute to the detailed assessments when students start at the college. Staff set realistic and measurable targets in individual learning plans. Students make good progress from their starting points. Staff record students' achievement and progress accurately. Individual learning plans are clear and detailed. Students' progress in achieving targets is monitored rigorously every six weeks with new or revised targets set every 12 weeks.
- Staff are ambitious for students. Standards of work in sessions are high as a result of the challenging targets set, good-quality learning support and the effective use of assistive technology with appropriate adaptations. Where appropriate, students develop good, accurate Braille skills.
- Therapists work closely with staff and individual students to overcome barriers to progress or provide creative solutions that develop independence and increase the pace of learning; for example, one student

received intensive occupational therapy in the college house kitchen to develop strategies that enabled him to plan, prepare and cook a meal with minimal support.

- The vast majority of students achieve their learning goals, with particularly good achievement in health and well-being, employability and English. The highly effective supported study sessions provided for students, in addition to the partner college's programmes make a strong contribution to the good achievement. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of students.
- The arrangements for preparing students to leave college are good. The staff member responsible for supporting students during the transition to life after college works determinedly to ensure that the appropriate professionals attend transition reviews and take responsibility for students when they leave college. Staff have good working relationships with specialist accommodation organisations, which increase the prospect of successful and sustainable transitions. The college works hard to ensure that the accommodation provider will meet the needs of individual students. However, in a small number of cases, delays in local authority funding approval result in the length of time between leaving college and moving into supported accommodation being too long.
- Progression into employment is low. Managers recognise the need to increase the number of students, where they have the potential, who gain voluntary, supported or paid employment. Currently, leaders are developing closer links with the employability team in the RLSB to make use of the resources and expertise available in order to increase the likelihood of students progressing into employment.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	9
Principal/CEO	Jude Thompson
Website address	http://www.rlsb.org.uk/our-services/dorton-college

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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	6			2		1		
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	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 learners aged 14–16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Nigel Evans, lead inspector
Marinette Bazin

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the college manager, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report, development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students, parents and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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