

Royal National College for the Blind

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

14–16 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Students enjoy their learning, and most make good progress and achieve well. As a result, the large majority progress to employment, education or training.
- Students participate in a wide range of enrichment and work experience activities. As a result, they develop very good confidence and social skills and are well prepared for their next steps.
- The staff's promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the college is good. Students have a high level of understanding of tolerance and democracy. They are respectful to their peers, staff and the wider community.
- Students receive highly effective pastoral and academic support.
- Governors have a very good understanding of the students' experience in the college and the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have taken strong and decisive action to secure improvements.
- Leaders, managers and staff have a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the college and the students.
- Students take part in a broad and flexible curriculum which is tailored to meet the needs, abilities and goals of individual students, and leads to good development of their independence skills.
- Teachers' feedback on the quality of a few students' work does not enable them to improve the standard of their work, and a small minority of students do not develop their English and mathematics skills well enough.
- Safeguarding is effective, although the recording of actions to control risks is not always clear and accurate.
- Managers' evaluation of individual teachers' work does not focus sufficiently on the impact of their teaching on learning and progress.

Full report

Information about the provider

- 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 provides a wide range of courses from entry level to advanced level. It prepares students for independent living, transition to employment and progression to further and higher education. The proportion of students who have disabilities in addition to sight loss is around half. The college recruits students nationally and this year has 10 students funded by the Welsh Government. Currently, 81 residential and two day students are enrolled. The college is based on one site, with three halls of residence and six lodges. Some 18% of college students are of minority ethnic heritage, and 58% are male.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all health and safety risk-assessment documentation is up to date, by ensuring that actions taken to control risks are clearly and accurately recorded, are time-bound and are reviewed regularly to ensure that risks have been effectively tackled.
- In order to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continuously, make sure that:
 - teachers provide all students with learning targets that are specifically linked to the development of their written communication and numerical skills, so that, as well as achieving their qualifications, they develop further the skills they need to live independently
 - teachers provide all students with detailed written feedback (or equivalent depending on individual need) so that they know what to do to improve their writing skills and the quality of their work
 - managers provide feedback to teachers on the quality of their teaching that focuses explicitly on the progress, skills development and standard of work achieved by students in lessons and over time
 - managers make use of the findings from the observation of lessons when reviewing the quality and outcomes of teachers' work, and identify how teachers can improve the quality of their teaching.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, managers and staff have a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the college and the students. They seek to improve continuously the quality of the students' learning experience and the learning environment, and increase the number of students who progress into employment. This number has already increased significantly since the previous inspection.
- Leaders and managers have successfully improved the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Most notably, they have improved students' skills so that they are able to learn more independently – which helps prepare them for their progression into further learning and employment – and have increased the usefulness of management information so that staff can capture the good progress made by students over time.
- Leaders and managers work effectively in collaboration with new and existing partners to provide students with ways of learning, in the college or other settings, which are flexible and tailored to their individual needs. For example, students studying complementary therapies attend sporting events organised by other charities, and provide disabled and non-disabled athletes with massage treatments. As a result, they develop good practical and customer-service skills in a range of settings.
- The curriculum meets the wide range of students' needs very effectively. All students study on full-time courses in small classes at entry level 1 to level 3. The curriculum includes academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels in a good number of subjects, as well as vocational and specialist studies in fields such as information technology, business administration, sport and recreation, literacy, numeracy, home-cooking skills, Braille and personal and social development and transitional support. As a result, students develop their skills very well.
- The large majority of students achieve their personal goals and make good or better progress from their starting points. However, managers have identified the need to improve further the achievement of personal goals for a few students studying performing arts, music and media.
- Leaders and managers focus well on improving the opportunities for students to develop skills for work and life. They develop further students' independent learning and life skills by encouraging students to learn without the support of learning assistants. Students rightly value the efforts that staff make to enable them to become more independent and develop their self-confidence.
- Students aged 16 to 18 are in full receipt of their study programme entitlement. All students develop English and mathematical skills, which are integrated into most lessons, and study towards achieving GCSE or functional skills qualifications in these subjects.
- Managers and staff promote equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) very well. They adopt a wide range of innovative and engaging strategies, including the recently introduced EDI staff log, which staff use frequently to record learning activities and the topics of discussions and questions prompted by students. Discussion topics include Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address' and the links between it and freedom, equality and democracy, and the FIFA's banning of the poppy from football shirts. Other activities include talks from

external guest speakers on topics such as the Holocaust and Traveller and Roma Gypsy communities, and students providing the staff at the local library with advice on how to enable visually impaired people to gain access to their services. As a result, students demonstrate an appreciation of different cultures and relationships. They understand the concept of equal rights and the importance of being respectful to others.

- Teachers are highly qualified, experienced and trained in specialist qualifications. Managers provide staff with a highly effective continuous professional development programme. For example, topics include the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding, British values, using assistive technologies and the development of distance-learning resources for students.
- The self-assessment process is mostly accurate. Leaders and managers use feedback from students, staff, parents, carers and external professionals well to inform their assessment of the college's strengths and weaknesses, and to target further improvement. Through the quality-improvement plan, they effectively identify the progress that they are making in meeting their improvement targets as a result of actions taken. However, the plan does not explicitly identify the impact of the actions on students.
- Through the observation of teaching and learning, managers have provided effective support and coaching for a few underperforming staff, and improvements to their teaching practice. However, managers' feedback to teachers does not focus sufficiently on the progress, skills development and standard of work achieved by students in their lessons and over time.
- Managers undertake reviews of the quality and outcomes of staff's work biannually. However, when reviewing the work of teaching staff, managers do not make enough use of the findings from the observation of lessons. They do not focus enough on how teachers can improve the quality of their teaching and students' learning.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a clear understanding of their strategic role in the management of the college. They effectively support, challenge and enable the leadership team to make appropriate decisions that improve the quality of the service for students.
- Governors are well qualified and have a wide range of professional expertise that benefits the college. They use their knowledge well to provide increased rigour and challenge in holding senior managers to account, as well as providing clear strategic direction.
- Since the previous inspection, governors have taken strong and decisive action to secure improvements at the college. For example, they have changed the role of the principal and invested in the appointment of a charity chief executive, to allow for a greater focus on sustaining and improving the quality of the provision at the college, while providing additional opportunities for the college to develop and engage in new partnerships and projects locally and internationally.
- Governors have a very good understanding of the students' experience at the college, and of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They are supported in their governance role through the introduction of an education and training committee, improvements to the information and data provided to them by managers and their participation in 'walking

the floor' and 'shadowing a student for a day' activities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and focus strongly on the needs of the students.
- Staff and governors have regular training on safeguarding and the risks associated with extremism and exploitation. As a result, they have a good understanding of the potential risks to students and take appropriate measures to ensure that students are safe.
- Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe at college, in the residences and when using the internet. They feel safe and have a high level of trust and confidence in the staff. Staff regularly encourage students to raise any concerns or issues, and they deal with them promptly and effectively.
- Staff travelled to France to make a risk assessment of the exchange programme and to visit work placement providers prior to the students' visit. They have worked closely with French staff to make a risk assessment of the return visit to the college by French students.
- Records of checks on staff, including criminal records checks, are up to date and complete.
- Staff and students are trained in emergency evacuation procedures. They fully understand what they should do during an evacuation and regularly take part in practice drills. However, the recording of health and safety risk assessments is not systematic or detailed enough. For example, actions taken to control risks are not recorded clearly, do not have to be completed within a particular timescale and are not reviewed regularly to ensure that they are all completed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have appropriately high expectations of students. They challenge and support them well to achieve their goals. As a result, students are enthusiastic about learning and most make good or better progress.
- Teachers and support staff provide highly effective support for students so that they can engage fully in a wide range of learning activities, and are prepared well for their next steps. For example, the mobility staff team provides students with orientation on new learning environments such as college and university sites and work placements. Teachers and technology support staff provide work placement employers with adaptive and assistive technologies, so that a number of barriers to learning are removed before the student commences their placement.
- Teachers' use of assistive technology is effective. They plan learning activities well, using a wide range of specialist technologies, including the use of mobile telephones and tablet computers. As a result, teachers meet students' individual learning needs well and students develop valuable independent learning skills.
- Managers and teachers assess new students' skills and starting points well through the use of highly effective and detailed initial assessment. Prospective students are invited to attend a two-day assessment of their English, mathematical, information communication

technology, Braille, mobility and independence skills prior to application, so that staff can correctly identify their needs. All students starting their studies at the college take part in a comprehensive induction to set learning targets and agree longer-term outcomes, which reflect those identified in their education, health and care plans.

- In most lessons, teachers set students challenging academic targets. As a result, students have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and make good progress in developing further their skills and knowledge. However, in a few English and mathematics lessons, teachers set targets that are insufficiently well tailored to the needs of individual students. They focus too often on achieving the qualification, and not enough on developing a wider range of skills for personal and social use.
- Students develop their skills and knowledge well in a wide range of learning settings. For example, students on business courses develop transferable customer-service skills, dealing with customers when working at the college café and on stalls at the local market. Sports students conduct themselves in a highly professional manner when working as receptionists in the college sports centre and spa. They confidently make and receive telephone calls and book and record appointments using the computer.
- Most teachers provide students with clear and comprehensive feedback on their written work. For example, students studying media at level 3 receive detailed feedback from staff through an online 'blog' on the structure, content, use of language in and standard of their research work. As a result, all of the students studying media use the feedback to improve their written work, which is of a good standard. However, a minority of students do not receive sufficiently detailed feedback from teachers to help them improve their writing skills and the quality of their work.
- Most teachers use highly effective questioning to check students' prior learning and understanding, and to provide them with ample opportunities to reflect on new learning and skills developed during lessons and in other learning settings. For example, in a level 2 sports lesson, the teacher used skilful questioning to elicit from students what they had learned when they provided students from another college with personal training sessions. The students confidently described how well their 'clients' had performed during the session, the reasons for their chosen communication strategies and how this related to their own visual impairment. They also identified how this learning could be transferred to working with other disability groups.
- Teachers promote equality, diversity, safeguarding and British values very well on most courses. For example, students studying A-level French analysed the approach of the media to the terrorist attacks in Paris. Students studying sociology attended a film about Scientology. Many students are involved in the promotion of equality of opportunity and the celebration of diversity. A few students provided staff and students with training to develop further their understanding of matters relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students develop self-confidence, social skills and independent learning skills very effectively and are prepared well for their next steps.
- Staff promote a culture of openness and tolerance well. Students take part in a range of

college committees where they work with staff and governors to make joint decisions about the running of the college. Student ambassadors are highly visible and work with other students to provide the necessary support and advice. The highly effective LGBTQ group meets regularly, and students and staff work closely together to challenge any discriminatory comments or behaviour.

- Staff have high expectations of students at all levels and abilities. They promote a 'can-do' approach which is highly valued by the students. Only a few students are supported by learning support assistants, as most attend classes with small numbers. The teachers' focus is on increasing their independent learning skills. As a result, students become more independent and are prepared well for higher and further education, employment and life.
- All students attend work experience for one week per year. In addition, most benefit from an external placement in the community or in the workplace that is directly linked to their vocational study or an area of personal interest. For example, students on sports programmes provide personal training sessions to clients. This includes working with students who have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities from another specialist college, to help them to become more mobile and to improve their social skills. Entry-level horticulture students have designed and are constructing a sensory garden at a local housing estate for the community to enjoy.
- Students participate in a wide range of enrichment activities at the college and in the community. For example, sports students attend national training camps for 'goalball'. Students take part in an exchange with French students, including work placements in France, and in themed events linked to Spanish culture, including Hispanic Day celebrations, the Mexican festival 'the Day of the Dead' and a Cuban film day.
- Staff build strong partnerships with a large number of organisations so that students can take part in a wide range of work experience placements. In return, staff at these organisations benefit from awareness-raising activities led by students on a number of topics, including health and safety in the workplace, improved accessibility for clients and customers and the understanding of visual impairment. For example, a student presented information to school pupils and staff on visual impairment and how to write an accessibility policy.
- Most students develop their communication skills very well. However, a few English and mathematics teachers do not provide students with sufficiently detailed feedback on their written work to help them to improve continually. As a result, a few students do not make sufficient progress in improving their writing skills and a few students studying functional skills mathematics are not making fast enough progress.
- Most students attend well and arrive punctually to lessons. Managers and residential and teaching staff use data effectively to monitor students and to take remedial action where necessary. As a result, students with significant health needs receive appropriate support and adjustments to their timetables.
- Staff promote very effectively equality events and celebrations of diversity within local, national and global communities. As a result, students have a good understanding of British values and the cultures of other communities. Students prepare and provide information-sharing events to their peers and to staff on topics such as World Mental Health Day, International Women's Day and AIDS awareness. Staff successfully engage students in classroom discussions covering a wide range of topics, such as President Trump's 'fake news' and comparisons of the position of Roman Catholics in England after

Henry VIII's religious Reformation with the position of Muslims in Britain today.

- Students feel safe and know how to stay safe online. They are confident about talking to staff about concerns and know how to keep safe in college and at work. One student who is a member of the safeguarding and 'Prevent' committee said 'the college is a very safe place to be, help is available even if you need help at two o'clock in the morning.'
- Careers information, advice and guidance are effective. In addition to advice given by staff, students receive impartial advice on progression into employment or further study from the National Careers Service. The college provides students with mobility support on visits to universities and colleges and shares information on technology, for example, with other providers to ensure that the correct equipment is in place before a student starts their new course. Staff work closely with parents and external professionals at local authorities to ensure a successful transition for students into and out of the college.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The large majority of students achieve their personal goals and make good or better progress from their starting points. However, a few students studying performing arts, music and media do not achieve as well as their peers.
- Students develop skills that prepare them well for life after they leave the college. Last year, the large majority of students progressed on to employment, further or higher education or voluntary work. The number of students moving into paid employment has significantly increased. On leaving the college, the majority of students returned home and did not progress into independent living. However, managers do not measure how this correlates with the students' aim to live independently or semi-independently.
- Most students develop valuable work-related skills that prepare them well for future employment. All students take part in work experience placements, many of which are with external providers and link carefully to students' career goals and aspirations.
- Many students develop new and useful leadership skills when participating in enterprise activities, such as providing sports massage and working as personal trainers, and also through organising and presenting information-sharing events for their peers, which are linked to their studies and personal interests. In a few cases, these activities have helped students to achieve paid employment after leaving the college.
- Students' achievement of accredited qualifications is good, with many students gaining qualifications in line with their ability and the aims of their programmes. Nearly all students gain highly relevant qualifications in the use of Braille. Students on vocational courses such as business administration, sport, information technology and performing arts attain well at all levels. However, although the achievement rate has improved, students studying functional mathematics do not perform as well as their peers.
- Almost all students have a positive attitude towards learning and develop good levels of confidence and independence. They are rightly proud of their achievements. In lessons, students settle quickly and work cooperatively with staff and other students. They sustain their concentration and respond well to questioning from teachers. Many students know their strengths and weaknesses, and how they need to improve their skills. Students on level 3 courses make good use of the college's virtual learning environment to complete assignments independently outside of lessons.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133108
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of	16+
Approximate number of all over the previous full contract year	83
Principal/CEO	Mark Fisher
Telephone number	01432 265 725
Website	www.rnc.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of (excluding apprenticeships)	7	9	11	12	21	19	–	–
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	79							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency The Welsh Government							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Hereford Sixth Form College							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of student support services, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students 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.

Inspection team

Denise Olander, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anthony Mulcahy	Her Majesty's Inspector (Estyn)
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Ofsted Inspector
Andrea Dill-Russell	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Brennan	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017