

Royal National College for the Blind

Royal National College for the Blind, Venns Lane, Hereford HR1 1DT

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

The Royal National College for the Blind is an independent specialist residential college with charitable status and is a company limited by guarantee. The college provides education and training primarily for students who are blind and visually impaired. A number of students also have a hearing impairment and/or another disability. Some students have additional needs, which include medical and mental health needs. The college is located in Hereford and is in easy reach of the city. There are 78 residential students and three day students. At the time of the inspection, there were 14 students aged between 16 and 18.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 February 2018

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking in account **outstanding**

How well young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The college provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the college contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for young people.

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Date of last inspection: 9 June 2011

Key findings from this inspection

This college is outstanding because:

- Students make exceptional progress from their starting points. They make vast improvements in their confidence, social skills and independence skills.
- Students thrive in an inclusive environment.
- Staff have high expectations for all students.
- Students have access to a wide range of recreational and specialist facilities at this college. This helps them to make continued and sustained improvements in all areas of their lives.
- Students' voices, views, wishes and feelings inform all aspects of college life. Their feedback is used to continuously improve the opportunities and experiences offered by the college.
- Feedback from students, their parents and other professionals about the college is superb.
- Staff work tirelessly to ensure the safety of students within the college, the local area and the wider community.
- An extremely motivated, skilled and dedicated staff team delivers exceptionally high-quality, individualised care to students.
- Communication between managers and staff is excellent. This collaborative and seamless approach enhances learning experiences for students.
- Managers and staff use research to underpin their everyday practice. In addition, the college shares its specialist knowledge and pioneering work with other agencies.
- The college has an exceptionally ambitious, driven, innovative and experienced management team whose members drive continuous improvement.

The college's areas for development:

- For managers to develop and strengthen their approach to recording formal supervision with staff.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- To ensure that managers have clear arrangements for the supervision of contracted staff working at the college. (NMS 30.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: outstanding

Students strongly believe that since attending this college, their achievements have exceeded their highest expectations. This is echoed by parents and professionals. Students' comments include: 'I feel so much more confident and I am doing more performing arts', 'the learning here is fantastic and I would not have got this specialist support at any other college', 'I like being independent. That is the most important thing for me' and 'I would say the confidence boost and independence are the biggest things for me. I was not very confident in mainstream. I was so shy. The confidence boost I have had by coming here is huge and this has really helped me.'

The staff teams create a vibrant and nurturing community and environment. Relationships between staff and students are of the highest quality. Specialist staff teams work holistically across the residential and college day. As students' needs change, new teams (and skills within teams) are developed. For example, a well-being team is now in place, which supports students with specific individual needs such as physiotherapy, attending a community-based activity or reducing anxiety.

The whole college staff team is actively involved throughout a student's journey, from 'have-a-go' taster weekends (available to prospective students from the age of 13) to pre-admission assessments, new student conferences, induction programmes and then on to further education, employment or independence. All students receive an exceptional level of oversight and support from staff and develop transferable skills for a successful adult life.

Excellent partnership work with students, parents and professionals as well as skilful observation mean that staff ensure that the needs of each student are individually identified and sensitively met. Written records are exceptionally well presented and staff practice is thoughtful and transparent. Assessments are extremely comprehensive and there is a total focus on the needs of the students. This attention to detail and celebration of uniqueness ensure that students flourish. As a result, students successfully develop the skills needed to travel independently, undertake daily living tasks, manage personal finances, work independently and become more confident in social situations.

Student contribution and self-advocacy are promoted at all times and are integral to the day-to-day operation of the college. For example, there is student representation at a

significant number of college meetings and working parties. Collaboration between the senior management team and students is effective, with a well-established and proactive student representative group, which is attended by senior staff. The senior management team also ensures that students' views are heard at a national level. For example, they provided Dame Lenehan and her team with first-hand accounts of the impact that specialist residential education had made on students' lives as part of the Lenehan Review. A student said: 'Our voice is heard. We have no issues. We talk to staff and have student ambassadors too. This college is a positive experience for all students. It is a good stepping stone. It gives students independence and mobility. It helps you move on to the next stage of your life.'

Students' health outcomes are excellent because staff support students to understand their medical conditions and to access the help, support and services that they need. Students' emotional well-being and mental health are given a high priority. Liaison with mental health agencies and access to a college-based counsellor ensure that a range of support options are accessible to all students. Staff and students also contribute to promotion campaigns run across the college site, such as mental health awareness week, disability sport, disability rights and LGBT rights.

How well young people are helped and protected: outstanding

The senior management team has clear and meticulous arrangements in place to ensure that the safety of students is prioritised at all times. The preventative work that staff do in building relationships and developing awareness among students is key to students' safety and well-being. Staff are exceptionally confident in their safeguarding responsibilities and enable students to take positive risks in a secure and supportive environment.

All residential care staff receive a range of mandatory and enhanced training in key topics, including safeguarding, around child sexual exploitation, e-safety, female genital mutilation and 'Prevent' duty. There are well-coordinated internal safeguarding meetings to develop awareness of any issues or incidents and to monitor staff responses to improve their practice. In addition, managers ensure that case reviews take place of all safeguarding incidents to consider lessons learned. This exceptional practice means that managers constantly keep safeguarding at the forefront of the care that they provide. A student told the inspector: 'We feel safe in general, in all areas... We get advice where we need it.'

There is a designated residential manager who leads on safeguarding for the college. He is highly experienced and has received advanced training in safeguarding. He has an effective working relationship with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and is a keen participator in local authority training. The designated officer in the local authority speaks extremely positively of the managers at the college and feels that they have an excellent understanding of safeguarding issues. This well-developed partnership approach ensures that staff are kept up to date with new developments. It also means that staff have an excellent knowledge of safeguarding issues within the local area as well as an understanding of the specific issues faced by blind and visually impaired

students.

Staff work tirelessly to ensure that students understand the rules in place at the college. Exceptionally high levels of staff support promote students' well-being. Staff are present 24 hours a day to monitor the whereabouts of students and to help them safely develop their independence. Staff use their well-developed skills and experience, as well as their enhanced local knowledge, to prepare students for the potential challenges that they may face in the community. As a consequence, incidents of harm are generally low. There have been no significant incidents relating to bullying, going missing from home or child sexual exploitation during the past two years. Staff do not use restraint and sanctions are rare.

There are vigorous policies and procedures in place that give staff clear guidance when managing child protection issues. Staff complete daily records and excellent communication about students ensures that staff respond swiftly to any potential issues. Staff team meetings and management steering groups all prioritise the safety of students, while skilfully balancing this with the need for students to develop their independence.

Detailed assessments, individual learning plans and comprehensive reviews provide staff with a substantial understanding of each student's needs. This means that staff develop an exceptional understanding of students' behaviour and the associated risks. Wide-ranging risk assessments are in place that protect young people at college and in the community. Environmental risks and risks associated with individual activities are intricately considered.

There are rigorous recruitment procedures in place. Managers, along with the college's human resources team, are vigilant in ensuring that all necessary identity, employment, qualification and disclosure and barring service checks are in place. Any investigations into staff conduct are dealt with swiftly and with the utmost professionalism. The records of investigations and disciplinary actions against staff are exemplary. As a result, young people are cared for by appropriately skilled and safe adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leadership is outstanding because the senior management team implements excellent procedures to monitor and review the care and support that students receive. These systems ensure continuous improvement in the quality of support provided to students and the experiences that they have. Managers work with other agencies effectively to develop resources and skills further. All objectives set by managers consider issues within the wider community and nationally. Managers and staff are exceptional at identifying and meeting the evolving needs of blind and visually impaired students and adults.

All college departments, the governing board and students actively contribute to the strategic management plan. There are clear, well-planned approaches to achieving short-term and long-term goals. For example, a major road development in Hereford has

had a significant impact on the ways that students access the train station and town centre. All students received additional mobility teaching, which required an increase in staff hours. This was highly successful and helped staff to assess individual student's abilities to transfer other skills and coping strategies to learning new travel routes.

The outward-looking management and staff team are routinely asked to give specialist advice to organisations outside of the college. Students are proactively involved in these ventures, for example, by volunteering their experience and knowledge to influence environmental designs, access to information and travel resources. Students are also involved in trialling and developing resources within the college. For example, evaluating a new digital Braille e-book reader, which could have implications for using Braille in mathematics.

The care that students receive and the outcomes that students achieve are excellent because of the support that they receive from staff. Staff practice is built on a firm foundation of well-understood policies and procedures, which are consistently reinforced through effective induction and probation processes, mandatory and refresher training, annual appraisals and focused team meetings. Staff supervision sessions are held by managers. However, routine supervision sessions that allow staff the opportunity to reflect on their practice and review learning objectives are not yet established practice. This has had no impact on the quality of support that students receive.

Managers deal with safeguarding issues competently and confidently. Records of incidents are exceptionally thorough. Managers keep in-depth chronologies of incidents and report safeguarding concerns immediately. Staff are exceptionally knowledgeable about the processes for referring safeguarding concerns and prioritise the safety of students at all times. When incidents of concern do occur, staff manage these in a very well-coordinated and professional way. Students receive intensive support from staff to alleviate their concerns. Comprehensive and thoroughly evaluated risk assessments highlight the potential risks to students. As a result, staff are clear and self-assured in how to meet the individual needs of each student. Managers give robust challenge to professionals when this is required, including challenging the police about investigations and their outcomes.

Proactive work with other organisations and universities, locally, nationally and abroad, continues to raise the college's profile. It also ensures that students are confident, skilled and instrumental in raising standards across the sector and into employment.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of young people. They watched how professional staff work with young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the college knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Further education college with residential accommodation details

Social care unique reference number: SC050563

Inspectors

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Anna Gravelle: social care inspector

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