

New College Worcester

Inspection report

Provider reference 117064

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on students and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. New College Worcester is a non-maintained, residential special school for young people aged 11 to 19, all of whom are blind or partially sighted. A minority of students have additional needs, including complex medical conditions, hearing impairment and/or Asperger's Syndrome. The sixth form caters for students aged 16 to 19. New College Worcester is now fully independent from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) following the de-merger in July 2007. A total of 81 students attend the college, which includes 45 in the sixth form; seven of these students are funded by the LSC. Apart from a small number from abroad, and one student funded by the Welsh Assembly all other student placements are funded by their local authority.
2. Within the sixth form students study GCE A level subjects with the majority progressing to higher education; a small number study foundation courses. All

students have an individual programme of education which includes mobility and independent living skills. Training in information communication technology (ICT), Braille and social and communication skills is provided as required.

3. An inspection of the school and care provision was carried out simultaneously and the outcomes of this are contained in a separate report of the same date. The college's mission is to 'be a nationally recognised centre of excellence providing a caring and supportive environment in which blind and partially sighted students develop the knowledge, skills and personal qualities they need to succeed in education, work and life. Furthermore, New College Worcester aims to ensure an extensive and successful outreach programme providing informed support to visually impaired students and colleges.'

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good : Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good : Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good : Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good : Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good : Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good : contributory grade 2</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. This is a good college. The achievement levels and the quality of students' work are good. They make good progress in a range of A level and other national awards and make very good gains in self confidence, mobility, independence and social skills. Students are highly recognised for their achievement. Effective systems are in place to identify students' potential underperformance but there insufficient use of data to set targets for achievement and a lack of consistency in recording incidental learning across all areas of the curriculum.
5. Teaching and learning are good. Students benefit from small class sizes and the high levels of individual attention given by teachers. The teaching of Braille is highly effective and provides students with the necessary skills to succeed in all subjects. Mobility training and independent living skills provision is good and provides students with useful skills for their future lives. Planning for learning is good overall. However, in a few cases students are not provided with enough challenge and individual learning targets are not sufficiently precise or used to direct learning.
6. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion and meeting the needs and interests of students is good. Students follow individually tailored learning programmes which successfully includes all aspects of their academic, social and personal development. They benefit from the extensive range of enrichment activities on offer. Employability skills are effectively developed through opportunities for work experience.
7. Guidance and support are good. The college provides a wide and comprehensive range of specialist support services. Very good support is provided to those students with additional learning needs such as literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Staff expertise in dealing with the support needs of students with visual impairments is highly effective. Transition arrangements, including careers guidance for students progressing onto higher and further education, are good. Although many students achieve well the quality of target setting varies too widely for progress to be consistently and accurately tracked.
8. Leadership and management are good. The principal provides open and consultative leadership; she is ably supported by other managers. The recent change of ownership was very well managed. Quality improvement processes effectively cover most of the work of the college. Self-assessment procedures are comprehensive but the use of a range of data to monitor performance is underdeveloped. Partnerships with other schools and community groups are wide ranging and very successful. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Governance is satisfactory but there is a need to further scrutinise overall achievement. The college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The college demonstrates a good capacity to improve further. The senior leadership team has been recently strengthened and all posts are now filled. Quality assurance is effective overall but the analysis of a range of data to set targets for improvement is insufficiently rigorous. There is a well established culture of continuous improvement which includes regular lesson observations. These, along with high quality staff development opportunities, have been successful in improving the quality of the provision. Self-assessment processes are comprehensive; the report is largely accurate but overly descriptive. Effective actions have been taken to improve issues raised at the last monitoring visit. The curriculum is effectively modified in response to students' needs. The board of governors and trustees have recently recruited new and appropriately experienced members to support their work and the needs of the college. Staff have confidence in their own ability and that of managers to bring about the planned improvements.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

10. The college has made good progress to address the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Achievement in the extended curriculum is adequately monitored and staff are better trained in the recording of progress. Students have additional literacy and numeracy support. All students now have a clearly identified provision map which has led to improved coordination of independent living skills. Target setting remains an area for development. There are clearer links between pre-entry assessments and individual programmes. Staff are encouraged to share good practice. New College Worcester is now compliant with the legislative requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2002. The LSC individual student schedules are regularly monitored.

Key strengths

- good levels of achievement and progression to further education and higher education
- good development of independence skills, confidence and mobility
- extensive range of enrichment activities
- wide range of multidisciplinary support and staff expertise
- very good management of change
- very good links with other providers which brings about benefits for students.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the rigour and use of target setting
- the consistency of challenge for all students
- the use of data to monitor performance.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. The achievement levels and the quality of students' work are good. Students make good progress in a range of A level and other national awards and make very good gains in self confidence, mobility, independence and social skills. Very good pass rates on A level awards have been maintained over the past three years; in 2007/08 all students passed and of these 30% gained grades A to C, thus enabling all students applying to higher education to progress to their first choice university. Several students obtained grade A in all their subjects. Managers recognise that outcomes for AS levels in 2007/08 are an area for improvement, when compared to results from previous years. Analysis of data indicates that there is no significant difference in achievement according to gender or ethnicity.
12. Students successfully develop their independence and personal skills. Following a series of multidisciplinary assessments each student is provided with a comprehensive personal mobility programme; most are assessed as being independent travellers by the time they leave New College Worcester. Students are encouraged in the development of independent study skills. They also learn to cook for themselves and others, and manage their money effectively. This increased independence has a major impact on the quality of their lives and their confidence and self-esteem grows significantly. Most students are very articulate and confident in expressing their views and wishes and in seeking help and advice when appropriate.
13. There are effective systems in place to identify students' potential underperformance but there is a lack of consistency in recording incidental learning across all areas of the curriculum. Insufficient use is made of summary data to inform planning and to set targets for increasing achievement. Both of these areas for development are acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Where relevant for individuals, a range of additional vocational learning opportunities are accessed through local general further education colleges.
14. Students are highly recognised for their successes in regional and national sports awards and other areas, such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Achievement is very well celebrated in morning assemblies, annual reports, speech day and 'student of the week' award. Employability skills are effectively developed through opportunities for work experience. Students successfully develop the underpinning skills of literacy, numeracy, communication, Braille and ICT to enable them to effectively achieve on all courses and to prepare them well for their future life.
15. Destination data indicates that most sixth formers successfully progress onto higher education degree courses or where appropriate further education courses. Students enjoy their work and are very proud of their achievements. The curriculum increases their motivation, enjoyment and understanding of a healthy and safe lifestyle. Students are closely involved with their immediate and local community and are helped to make a positive contribution. Retention,

punctuality and attendance are good, well monitored and any issues are dealt with swiftly as they arise.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. This agrees with the college's self-assessment. Assessment processes are comprehensive and successfully identify students' needs including their requirements for specialist resources and equipment. Teachers know the students well and small class sizes enable them to provide high levels of support. Students are well motivated and enjoy the individual attention teachers are able to give to them during lessons. Teachers demonstrate high levels of expertise and knowledge of their subject areas. The teaching of Braille to students is of a consistently good quality. This enables them to achieve well across all subject areas. Independence training is successfully matched to students' individual skill requirements, for example, to enable them to wire an electric plug or to cook their own meal. Students benefit greatly from mobility training and are successful at negotiating the college site and in accessing local community facilities.
17. The college's lesson observation process provides an accurate evaluation of the overall quality of teaching and learning. During joint observations, inspectors agreed with the outcomes and grades awarded by members of the college observation team. However, not all lesson evaluation reports are sufficiently informative about the specific actions required to improve the teachers' performance. There is also inconsistency in the way individual students' assessment outcomes and learning objectives are used to plan lessons. In a few lessons observed the pace of learning was too slow with insufficient challenge for more able partially sighted students.
18. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion and meeting the needs and interests of students is good. Students follow individually tailored programmes which successfully includes all aspects of their academic, social and personal development. The college arranges courses that enable students to work towards qualifications that are best matched to their long term goals and aspirations. This is achieved very effectively by providing students with a wide range of choices to study at GCSE, A and AS levels. Literacy and numeracy needs are well met. Students' skills in financial management are developed well within the independent living skills curriculum and practised effectively within residences. The link between college day and residential provision has greatly improved since the last inspection.
19. A greater focus is now given to the development of students' mobility, communication skills, including Braille and personal development. This provides a more holistic approach to learning. All students have access to education and training in these areas. All have excellent opportunities to develop their social and personal skills through the extensive range of enrichment activities on offer. Many take full advantage of the sporting and leisure opportunities and the residential and field trips organised by staff across the college and residences. There are very good links with local further education colleges which enable students, where appropriate, to follow vocational courses. These

provide good additional progression routes for those not seeking future places at universities. Employability skills are effectively developed through opportunities for work experience.

20. Guidance and support for students are good. There is a comprehensive range of specialist support services available to all students. Students' medical and health needs are well met and are monitored effectively. Their emotional well-being is given a high priority and all have an entitlement to counselling services. Very good support is provided to those students with additional learning needs such as literacy, numeracy and communication skills. A particular strength is the support given to students who enter the college late within the academic year, many of whom have low self esteem and confidence due to unsuccessful previous educational experiences. Staff demonstrate heightened awareness and high levels of expertise in dealing with these issues. They provide the sensitive support required to enable students to achieve well and make good progress. Although many students achieve well, the quality of target setting varies too widely for progress to be consistently and accurately tracked.
21. Transition arrangements are good and provide students with the necessary support to progress onto further and higher education courses. Careers guidance is effective in helping students to make the right choices for their future careers.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

22. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear and energetic commitment to improve and develop the provision. Leaders and governors managed the de-merger from the RNIB very well. They have a good overview of the needs of individual students which is underpinned by a strong will to promote excellence in education and care. The principal provides open and consultative leadership; she is ably supported by senior and middle managers. Lines of responsibility and accountability are clear.
23. Quality improvement processes effectively cover most of the work of the college and have improved since the last inspection. Self-assessment procedures are comprehensive and involve all stakeholders. The report, although mostly accurate, overestimates the quality of a minority of areas and is not sufficiently evaluative. There is insufficient use of accurate and timely data to inform target setting at whole college level. There are appropriate and regular arrangements for observing lessons but little external scrutiny to moderate these judgements. The strategy for the implementation of literacy and numeracy is effective. The college systematically uses the views of students, parents and other stakeholders and staff to identify and address areas for improvement.

24. Communication within the college is good. Teams meet regularly to facilitate consultation and future planning. Staff are very well qualified and have high levels of specialist expertise in teaching students with visual impairments which they use to good effect. Partnerships with other providers and community groups are wide ranging, very successful and bring about benefits for students. An increasing number of professionals working with visually impaired students are accessing support from New College.
25. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The equal opportunity policy is detailed and covers all relevant legislation. A firm stance is maintained in relation to eliminating bullying and harassment with an effective system of peer support for students. Complaints are dealt with effectively and in a timely manner. Concerns regarding health and safety matters are addressed well. There is a clear commitment to meeting the diverse needs of students; all are treated with the highest respect. The college meets its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and has adequate policies and procedures for the protection of young children and vulnerable adults. The legislative requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 are met comprehensively. An equality and diversity working group regularly monitors this aspect of their work. However, the college acknowledges that there is further scope to actively promote equality and diversity through the curriculum.
26. Managers and governors share a clear vision for the development of New College; financial plans support college priorities. ICT facilities have been extensively developed and are used well to meet the needs of students with visual impairments. The residential accommodation is now fully networked. All students in years 10-13 have their own lap-top computer or appropriate access technology.
27. The framework for governance has been recently changed to reflect the school's independence from RNIB and provide good support for senior managers. The board of governors and trustees have recently recruited new and appropriately experienced members to support their work and the needs of the college. Governance is satisfactory overall. Governors understand fully the college's context and challenges and are aware of the need to further scrutinise overall achievement. Improving the outcomes for students underpins all decisions relating to resources and expenditure. The college provides good value for money.