

Dorton College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

12–14 September 2018

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 make good progress and achieve well; the vast majority progress to destinations appropriate to their individual needs.
- Learning programmes are highly individualised and planned to meet the needs and aspirations of each student; students can access a broad curriculum offer.
- Students gain in confidence and increase their self-esteem through a wide range of enrichment and enterprise activities within the community.
- Students develop good English and mathematical skills, which tutors reinforce well in both the college and residential settings.
- Students enjoy their learning in a highly respectful and safe environment.
- Very effective specialist teaching and therapy have a positive impact on the development of students' independence.
- Governors and leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for the future of the college.
- Staff receive a wide range of relevant training and development. Opportunities for staff progression and promotion are very good.
- Too few students access an external work placement even when they are ready to undertake one.
- Students do not have access to an impartial careers advice specialist.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Dorton College is an independent specialist college in Bromley, Kent. The college provides education, residential provision and specialist therapies for young people who have visual impairments and other additional needs. The college is one of the services run by the Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC). Students from the college access core programmes of study in partnership with further education colleges (London South East Colleges and Croydon College). In addition, students access specialist support to develop their study, educational, mobility, communication and life skills within the college house and newly developed day hub in Bromley.
- The college has recently undergone a restructure and is phasing out its residential provision at the end of the academic year 2018/19.
- At the time of the inspection, nine students, from eight local authorities, were studying at the college. Of these, four attended daily and five lived in the college's residential house.
- Students from the college study a broad range of curriculum areas including media, music, drama and sport.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should:
 - develop relationships with a range of businesses in the local area to offer a wider range of opportunities for work-related activity and work experience that include access to external work placements for students who are ready
 - prioritise putting in place good-quality impartial careers advice and guidance for students to ensure that they are fully aware of the full range of progression opportunities open to them, including supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors are ambitious for the young people at Dorton College and are fully committed to providing high-quality education for blind and partially sighted young people in order that they can take up their role in society. They have high expectations of what their students can achieve and as a result, the vast majority of students make good progress and achieve their learning goals.
- The new principal and senior leaders have worked hard and successfully to put in place most of the recommendations made at the previous inspection. Students now develop good mathematical skills in their sessions at the partnership colleges. Improved quality assurance arrangements ensure that leaders share the good practice seen in the college house with the wider provision.
- Leaders and managers have maintained the good quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the support that students receive. Students access an extensive life skills curriculum and a wide range of enrichment and enterprise activities that develop their skills for life after college. Leaders and managers make effective use of funding to put in place highly individualised and tailored programmes of study for each student. These are based on their prior experience, level of attainment, support needs and ambitions.
- Leaders and managers know the college well and have accurately assessed the provision and identified the areas that still require further development. They have put in place an effective quality improvement plan with appropriate actions and timescales for achievement.
- Leaders and managers have worked hard to improve and extend the opportunities for external work placements for students, but they have not been successful in securing placements for all students for whom it would be appropriate. As a result, they have introduced a new dedicated role of transition and employability coordinator this academic year. It is too early to assess the impact of this new post.
- Students receive help from effective careers advice and guidance through their life skills curriculum and employability sessions. In addition, they access support and guidance from subject specialists as part of their programmes at the partnership colleges they attend. However, leaders have struggled to secure an impartial careers advice and guidance specialist who has enough knowledge and understanding to fully support students who have vision impairment. This continues to be a high priority for the college leaders.
- Leaders make effective use of performance review and performance management procedures to drive improvement and keep standards high in teaching, learning and assessment. Staff receive help from generous and regular staff training to improve the quality of their practice and the wider support their students receive. Opportunities for internal development, progression and promotion are very good. For example, staff who started at the college as support workers are now working as managers and two former support workers have qualified as specialist teachers of people who have visual impairment.
- Leaders and managers have built very good relationships with several partner colleges to

enable their students to access a broad range of specialist curriculum areas. Students study for accredited qualifications from entry level to level 3 in specialisms such as sport and exercise science, media, performing arts, business and massage. As a result, students have access to a broad curriculum offer that enables them to pursue their career aspirations.

- Leaders closely check the quality of the provision the students receive in the partnership colleges. Through liaison and collaborative working with the quality managers at the partnership colleges, they maintain a robust oversight.
- Leaders and managers have created a highly respectful and safe learning environment for the students. Students behave very well and demonstrate British values in their everyday behaviours and interactions.

The governance of the provider

- Governors know the college well and recognise the challenges that leaders and managers face. They have been decisive in recommending the recent restructure to secure its future. To ensure the long-term viability of the provision, the board of governors has secured the agreement of the trustees to phase out the residential provision. This is to ensure that leaders and managers can focus fully on providing high-quality day provision, without disadvantaging the current residential students.
- Governors make effective use of unannounced monitoring visits to seek the views of, and gather feedback from, students and staff. Governors make good use of the learner voice to support leaders and managers to drive improvement.
- Members of the board have a broad range of relevant experience, and as a result can successfully scrutinise, challenge and support the work of leaders and managers.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers give safeguarding a high priority. Students feel safe within the college premises and within the partnership colleges they attend. All staff are clear about their responsibilities and the processes to follow if they have any concerns.
- The designated safeguarding lead keeps secure, up-to-date records of all safeguarding concerns and effectively tracks any actions and outcomes. Staff deal with concerns swiftly and where necessary external agencies are involved, for example social services.
- Students feel safe and know whom to speak to if they have any concerns.
- Effective recruitment processes are in place to ensure the suitability of all staff and volunteers. Staff receive thorough and regular safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training and updates, as well as training that covers a wide range of relevant topics to enable them to support young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff have high expectations of their students and know them well. Students make good progress in developing their social interaction, self-esteem and confidence. Many have aspirations to progress to university or further education and to live independently.
- Effective teaching creates a positive learning environment, both at the partnership college and in the students' residence. Tutors use verbal imaging and questioning very effectively to check students' understanding. Partnership college resources are good and tutors use them well to support students.
- Assessment of individual students' starting points is very effective. It includes the views of parents and carers and ensures a smooth transition into the college along with accurately identifying the student's abilities and specific support needs. Students attend an assessment and taster session at the college, and where appropriate also attend taster sessions at the partnership colleges.
- Students make good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics and their vocational programme of study. Tutors reinforce English and mathematical skills in both the residential and college settings. The vast majority of students progress at the pace and level expected and enjoy their lessons.
- Experienced support and advocacy staff support the development of students' independence skills well. Students highly value staff who allow them to learn at their own pace and do not intervene unnecessarily. For example, a learning support assistant removed herself when it became clear that a student was developing good social links with others and no longer needed her help for support with mobility. However, new or agency support staff do not always know the students well enough to judge when to intervene and when to hold back. As a result, a small minority of students become frustrated when new support assistants are too eager to help them.
- Tutors receive good-quality training to support students who have visual impairment. They have good subject expertise and various specialisms related to supporting students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Specialist teaching and associated therapy are very effective and have a positive impact on the development of students' independence, and communication and mobility skills. Students enjoy speech and language therapy and use their communication skills well in classes and with their peers. Mobility training is used effectively by students to enable them to independently access known areas. Specialist teaching by a Braille specialist and qualified teacher of people who have visual impairment supports students' communication and academic development well.
- Students who have challenging behaviours, high anxieties and emotional and behavioural difficulties are supported well by staff. Staff focus on providing support to enable them to access learning and also to improve their behaviour at home. Support includes behaviour management, emotional literacy and working in very small groups in a supportive and safe environment.
- Tutors undertake effective annual reviews, with representation from a range of agencies. However, a very small minority of students find these reviews daunting due to the large number of people in attendance, and do not always feel that their views are sufficiently

considered.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students benefit from a comprehensive and extensive independent living curriculum that fully contextualises their English and mathematical skills development. As a result, students take part in the community, improve essential personal, social and practical skills, increase their confidence and self-esteem, and develop greater personal autonomy in preparation for life after college.
- Students take pride in their work and have good attendance and punctuality. Their behaviour is good. They show high levels of respect towards each other and the staff with whom they work.
- Students undertake a wide range of suitably tailored, work-related learning activities that support their development towards undertaking external work placements. For example, students have undertaken gardening, supported in a day-care centre, and have produced a radio show on bullying. Throughout the year, they also run several enterprise activities including Christmas and summer sales. These activities involve them in making a range of goods, creating a catalogue to market their produce, taking orders and distributing the goods. As a result, they gain valuable skills in running a small business, including managing a budget, delivering within set timescales and ensuring that their products are of a good quality.
- A minority of students attend external work placements. Those that do attend benefit from these experiences. Students work with their tutor and workplace supervisor to set clear targets for their work placement, which they evaluate effectively afterwards. Students who have undertaken placements at the local theatre or for a large transport network have gained skills in customer service. Owing to a shortage of businesses willing to take a student with visual impairment on placement, not all students are able to access an external work placement even if they are ready to undertake one.
- Students take part in a wide range of enrichment activities and experiences that help prepare them for life after college and broaden their social interactions in a wide range of settings. For example, students enjoy trips to the cinema, music sessions, swimming, having lunch in a restaurant with friends, cycling, cooking, and theatre visits. One student went on a college residential trip to Amsterdam. As a result, students develop their independence, improve their communication skills and make relevant personal choices.
- As part of the independent living programme, students access the employability department of the RSBC where they receive help from sessions on CV writing, personal tutoring and scenario-based learning, for example mock interviews. These activities help prepare them to confidently apply for jobs and undertake interviews.
- Students receive effective advice and guidance on career pathways and options from their tutor and from the subject specialists at the partnership colleges. However, they do not currently have access to an impartial careers advice specialist.
- Students feel safe and understand the importance of keeping themselves safe, particularly online. They know how to protect themselves from bullying and from the risk of radicalisation and whom to talk to if they have any concerns. Students receive help from the services of an independent listener, with whom they can share their feelings and

thoughts in a safe and confidential setting. Students value the advocacy the college provides.

- Students are supported well by a range of specialist staff, including in speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and a habilitation and mobility specialist. The services provided are bespoke to the needs of the individual student and coordinated well to avoid clashes with their main programme of study.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Students enjoy their learning and make good progress from their starting points. They achieve their learning goals and successfully progress to the next stage.
- The vast majority of students who enter for accredited vocational qualifications achieve them, with some achieving high grades at level 2 in music and media and level 3 in massage.
- Achievement of English and mathematics qualifications is good, with students making good progress from one level to the next. Students achieve qualifications from entry level to level 2, including GCSE, at the partnership colleges.
- The majority of students progress successfully into independent supported or semi-supported housing and either paid or voluntary employment. The remainder go on to further education or training. Opportunities for students to move to supported internships are not yet in place.
- Students develop increased confidence and a range of strategies and skills to enhance their prospects for employment and independence. The vast majority of students are able to explain the progress they have made and how their time at Dorton College has increased their self-esteem and self-awareness.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133001
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	11
Principal/CEO	Josie Grainger
Telephone number	0203 198 0229
Website	www.rsbc.org.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 learners (excluding apprenticeships)	1	5	0	0	3	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	9							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	London South East Colleges (LSEC) Croydon College							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, 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, parents and the local authority; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and assessments. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Judy Lye-Forster, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alun Maddocks

Ofsted Inspector

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