

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 within easy reach of the city. There are 97 residential students and one day student. At the time of the inspection, there were 22 students aged between 16 to under 18.

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 January 2022

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The college provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 5 February 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: good

Young people receive good-quality tailored care. There are pre-admission assessments and induction programmes that help the young people to settle into college life quickly. These processes also enable the staff to develop good partnership relationships with parents and other professionals. As a result, where a need is identified, staff quickly ensure that the young people are appropriately supported and enabled to make good progress.

Young people have clear plans, with targets that are regularly reviewed. There are strong links between the health, education, well-being and residential professionals who work at the college. This ensures that the young people learn and master skills in all settings. For example, a cooking skill learned in a classroom setting will be practised in the residential accommodation. As a result, the young people progress in all areas of their lives, but especially in developing independence. This enables them to successfully reach their end destinations of further education, university and employment.

Young people enjoy their time at the college and have good-quality relationships with their peers. They value the diverse friendships they form.

Qualified nurses support the young people to understand their medical conditions, to access appointments and become able to make good long-term decisions about their health. Emotional well-being and mental health are given a high priority. For example, the young people have access to a college-based counsellor and all residential staff have completed training on understanding and supporting young people who self-harm.

The senior leadership team and staff promote the involvement and voice of the young people through questionnaires, representatives on committees and at meetings, a student rep group and a student ambassador group. Young people are articulate. They are good ambassadors for the college and the wider visually impaired community. They act as positive role models and mentors to younger peers. As a result, the senior leadership team have a good understanding of the young people's views and are taking actions where areas for improvements have been identified.

Young people feel that the food served at the college bistro is not of a consistently good quality and does not provide enough choice. Managers, the young people and the catering company have discussed this, and new menus were due to be launched at the start of the week following the inspection.

Young people feel that there are some good sports activities and enjoy using the on-site gym and leisure facilities. However, they feel that there are not enough evening or weekend activities. The senior leadership team has just appointed an activities

coordinator, who on the week of the inspection was consulting with the young people to identify what activities they would like to participate in.

How well young people are helped and protected: good

Strong governance ensures that safeguarding practice is monitored and reviewed. Senior staff regularly meet with the safeguarding governor to review safeguarding incidents and to ensure that policies and procedures are fit for purpose. For example, the senior leadership team has revised the college's mental health policy. There is now a whole-college approach to improving staff and young people's understanding of mental health.

The designated safeguarding lead ensures that staff follow procedures and that safeguarding matters are appropriately dealt with. Feedback from partnership agencies and external audits identifies where practice could improve. This is carefully considered and addressed by the senior leadership team. This ensures that staff practice is constantly reviewed and the safety of young people remains a priority.

All members of the residential staff team receive safeguarding training that they apply in their everyday practice to keep the young people at college safe. Staff are present 24 hours a day to monitor the whereabouts of the young people and to help them safely develop their independence. Risk assessments are regularly revisited and updated. Young people are supported to take on appropriate age-related risks. For example, staff assist and supervise young people with their independence skills and mobility routes until they are confident and capable. As a result, young people become increasingly independent and can keep themselves safe, in line with their age and abilities.

Young people state that they feel safe. Incidents of harm are generally low. There have been low level incidents of bullying and they have all be effectively managed. The have been no incidents of going missing from the college or child sexual exploitation. Staff do not use physical restraint and sanctions for inappropriate behaviour are rare.

The college site is safe. The premises and grounds are well maintained and repairs are speedily undertaken when necessary. Good recruitment procedures mean that only suitable checked adults have contact with the young people. These measures help to keep young people safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Governors and the senior leadership team have faced a challenging time and have successfully steered the college through a period of change encompassing the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are good procedures to monitor and review the care and support that young people receive. These systems ensure that the senior leadership team and board of

governors have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development.

Governors and the senior leadership team are working to a long-term development plan, which includes the continuing development of the college's residential services. The plan has identified that the residential accommodation for students aged 16 to 18 needs to be refurbished. The decor is tired. Kitchen work surfaces are chipped. There is not enough seating in common rooms for the number of young people sharing the space. It does not have some of the aids for blind and visually impaired young people available in a newer adult block. The intended refurbishment would raise standards to ensure a consistency of residential accommodation for all students.

There have been changes to the senior leadership team and staff since the last inspection. During this challenging period, existing staff have worked tirelessly to ensure that there has been consistent staffing and extra-curricular activities available to young people. This focus meant that one new member of staff did not complete all the elements of the college's induction, although they did develop skills by shadowing experienced staff. They will now be completing the specialist training to ensure that they have the in-depth skills and knowledge to support young people who are blind or partially sighted.

The recent appointment of a new manager and new team members means that the residential team is now fully recruited to. These staff are undertaking the full college induction and feel well supported by managers and peers.

There are good staff support systems, which are being regularly reviewed and developed. For example, a matrix of mandatory and additional training has been introduced for all staff across site. However, this is not yet ensuring that staff receive all the specialist training they need. This is because courses such as attention deficit disorder and supporting young people who are hearing-impaired are not mandatory courses. The senior leadership team told the inspectors that they would address this issue.

Governors, the senior leadership team and staff have an ambitious vision for all young people. The inclusive atmosphere means that there is continuous communication between managers, residential staff, teachers and others, with the young people's safety and progress in mind. The college continues to develop the skills of staff and the resources available to young people.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that all residential and other accommodation provided is appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, cleaned and maintained, and reasonable adjustments are made to provide adequate accessible and adapted accommodation for any residential students with restricted mobility or other impairment. (NMS 5.5)
- The registered person should ensure that there is an appropriate range and choice of activities for residential students outside teaching time. (NMS 10.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the staff supervising residential students outside teaching time are sufficient in number, training and experience for the age, number and needs of residential students, and the locations and activities involved. (NMS 15.4)
- The registered person should ensure that residential students are always under the responsibility of an identified member of staff who has appropriate skills, training and experience to carry out the role. (NMS 15.5)
- The registered person should ensure that all residential students, including those with special dietary, medical or religious needs, are provided with means to access meals which are adequate in nutrition, quantity, quality, choice and variety. (NMS 8.1)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people, 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

Principal/CEO: Lucy Proctor

Inspectors

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector

James Tallis, Social Care Inspector

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