

Inspection of Royal National College for the Blind

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 March 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
------------------------------	-------------

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) is a specialist residential college of further education for visually impaired students aged 16 to 25. It is a registered charity. Students study qualifications from entry level to level 3 which are taught alongside a specialist curriculum, which develops students use of Braille, assistive and digital technologies. Learners also undertake mobility, and independent living training.

The college is a national provider, with students from England, Wales and Scotland. At the time of the inspection, 89 students aged between 16 and 25 years attended the college, 80 of whom were in scope for the inspection. Eight students funded by the Welsh and Scottish government, and one international student were not in scope. Approximately half of students have additional learning needs in addition to their visual impairment. Most students are residential.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students enjoy studying at the RNC. Students appreciate the positive relationships they have with staff members, which help them improve their confidence and independence. Students benefit from the teaching and support they receive in both the residential and college settings in which they thrive and develop their skills. For many, this is the first time they have felt accepted in an educational setting where they are allowed to fully express themselves.

Students are taught effectively by staff who are experts in teaching students with visual impairments. Staff work well with students to provide the support they need. This includes individualised support and teaching in their academic and vocational courses as well as their independent living skills sessions. The college has developed highly individualised curriculums in which students work towards their academic and personal goals. Staff teach students to use adaptive technologies and Braille. As a result, most students progress in their studies and are prepared well for their next steps.

Students access a range of specialist resources and equipment that enhance their learning. These include sports facilities that are adapted for those with visual impairments, professional music production studios and a complementary therapies suite which is open to the public. Students use these areas to gain vocational work experience which enables them to move into their chosen careers. Students work with members of the public in commercial areas such as reception and catering facilities to develop their customer service skills.

Students are respectful towards each other, staff and the people they work with. They frequently demonstrate respectful behaviours during their studies and support each other sensitively. Attendance is high. Staff encourage students to take personal responsibility for their timekeeping, including when they participate in work experience.

Staff provide activities which support students' personal development particularly regarding sports. These include goalball, acoustic shooting archery and adapted gaming, which enable students with visual impairments to compete in regional and national sporting tournaments. Students are encouraged to take part in charitable events, including providing complementary therapies to those that are homeless and raising funds to develop onsite guide dog grooming facilities.

Students feel safe at college. Staff create a calm and nurturing culture in which there is an emphasis on students' safety and welfare. Students are aware who to speak to if they are worried, and have access to residential support officers and a counselling service if required.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for their curriculums that enable students to develop their skills, knowledge and behaviours for their next stage of training or employment. They focus firstly on developing students' independence, communication and social skills to ensure they can successfully access their teaching sessions while at college. Each student follows an individualised timetable based upon their learning and support needs which is aligned to their career goals. As a result, students quickly orientate themselves to their new surroundings, start their studies with confidence and actively take part in college life.

Teachers plan their teaching to carefully introduce activities which previously would have been considered a risk to students' welfare due to their visual impairments. Leaders and managers understand the challenges that students face when studying and working towards employment and further training. Teachers have built curriculums not only to ensure students develop the skills they need but also the confidence to become independent in their daily lives. Teachers teach students cooking, budgeting and independent travel skills to help them prepare for their next steps.

Leaders and managers have developed curriculums that enable students to improve their independent travel skills. Alongside their academic studies, students are encouraged to attend training to help them learn to navigate the places where they learn and socialise. Students learn how to use a range of assistive and digital technologies, including long walking canes to navigate unfamiliar places. As a result, students improve in their abilities, widen their social networks and can travel independently to use facilities outside of the college.

Teachers and learning mentors understand students' starting points and abilities well. They use pre-assessment effectively to find out what students know and can do before they start at RNC. Staff work with students before they start college and provide a thorough transition process to get them ready for their studies. Most teachers use this information to plan their teaching and support strategies to meet the needs of individual students effectively.

Teachers plan their teaching to ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve. For example, students studying on level 3 business courses improve their public speaking by delivering business presentations. However, a few teachers do not sufficiently share students' small steps of learning with other teachers, to ensure they reinforce and develop the skills that students have learned in other sessions.

Teachers and staff use their subject-specialist knowledge and their expertise to teach and support students effectively. On level 3 vocational courses, teachers skilfully adapt their teaching, so that students develop industry-standard skills and the technical language needed for the workplace. On level 3 massage courses, students learn specialist towel folding techniques to protect clients' dignity. In A-level

biology sessions, teachers use models to represent muscle fibres and have created a Braille-adapted reference library to ensure that students can access the curriculum.

Leaders and managers have developed a careers programme that provides students with independent careers education, information, advice and guidance throughout their studies. Students have access to employer engagement events, training providers and work experience. Leaders and managers have recognised they need to further develop their links with higher education to ensure students successfully move on to higher education when they complete their course.

Governance is strong. Governors provide effective support and challenge to senior leaders. They are experienced and qualified in working in further education settings and universities. Governors provide helpful support to senior leaders to focus on developing new areas of learning and modernise college facilities, including residential facilities. This has enabled senior leaders to refocus their attention to develop their curriculums, to ensure it meets the needs of future students and developments, such as T-level courses.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that teachers use students' starting points to plan teaching and support to meet the needs of individual students, particularly on level 3 courses.
- Ensure that students' small steps of learning are shared among all staff to enable students to demonstrate and practise their newly acquired skills to make progress towards their education, health and care plan outcomes.
- Ensure that students who intend to move on to higher education benefit from effective careers education, information, advice and guidance to ensure they successfully move on to their next steps.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133108
Address	Venns Lane Hereford Herefordshire HR1 1DT
Contact number	01432 265725
Website	http://www.rnc.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Lucy Proctor
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 March 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality and curriculum, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Steve Kelly, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Angela Newton-Soanes

Ofsted Inspector

Jane Young

Ofsted Inspector

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 <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

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 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024