



Dilston College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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50006

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Dilston College
Type of college:	Independent specialist
Principal:	John Jameson
Address of college:	Dilston Hall Corbridge Northumberland NE45 5RJ
Phone number:	01434 632692
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Chair of governors:	Linda Cooper
Unique reference number:	50006
Name of lead inspector:	Margaret Hobson, ALI
Dates of inspection:	30 January – 2 February, 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Dilston is an independent specialist college situated in rural Northumberland. It is one of three specialist colleges that together form the Mencap National College (MNC). The other two colleges are Lufton Manor in Somerset and Pengwern in North Wales. The Royal Mencap Society is a registered charity which operates a limited company that includes the Mencap National College. Dilston offers full-time residential and day education for learners aged 16-25 with learning disabilities. Currently, there are 81 learners attending the college, of whom 59 are residential and 22 attend daily. Of these, three learners are of ethnic minority heritage, 17 are aged 16-19 and 64 are aged over 19. The spectrum of learning disabilities is wide, from 27 learners with moderate disabilities to those with complex needs, including five learners with autistic spectrum disorders. Most of the learners are from the north east region. The LSC funds 73 learners directly; the LSC and social services fund 7 learners jointly. One learner is funded by Scottish social services.
2. The college is in a nine-acre site of park, woodland and gardens. Dilston's mission is 'Preparing students for the next stage in their lives'. The college offers an educational programme with accredited and non-accredited routes across three main areas: social and life skills; practical and vocational programmes; and Skills for Life (communication, literacy and numeracy). In partnership with Tynedale Virtual College, the college offers a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 in catering and hospitality. Currently, 13 learners are working on a pre-entry level course, 68 are working towards entry level awards, two of whom are also working towards NVQ level 1 in catering. New on-site catering and hospitality facilities have been in use since Easter 2005 and include a training kitchen and dining room.
3. The college is supported and monitored by the MNC board of governors which has representation from learners across the three colleges as well as trustees from the Mencap board. The college employs 105 full-time equivalent staff (115 staff in total). The two assistant principals and six operations managers manage a team of 24 teachers, 13 senior learning support workers and 49 learning support workers, as well as one speech and language therapist and full-time assistant, one art therapist, a vocational development co-ordinator and a job coach. The principal has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the college and direct line management of the two assistant principals.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

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

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

5. This is a good college. Achievements are good and the standard of work is high. Learners make good progress especially in the development of practical and work-related skills. They make significant gains in personal confidence, social communication, life skills, and in adopting appropriate behaviour. In 2006, 24 learners achieved a range of nationally accredited qualifications. Target setting and the recording of learner progress are not consistent.
6. Teaching and learning are good and take place in practical contexts. Well qualified staff provide good opportunities for the development of literacy, numeracy and communication skills across the curriculum. The resources for vocational programmes are outstanding. Behaviour management is good. The use of targets in individual learning plans and in lesson plans as well as recording of progress are inconsistent.
7. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. An atmosphere of mutual respect between staff and learners prevails. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. It has good success in supporting learners with complex needs. The range of enrichment activities is wide and the links with the local community are effective. Good arrangements are in place to promote the safety and well-being of learners. The formal promotion of race equality and diversity issues within schemes of work and lesson plans is underdeveloped.
8. Support and guidance for learners are good. The comprehensive initial assessment and induction enable learners to settle quickly into college. The good level of specialist support enables all learners to communicate more effectively and to develop increased independence. Learners have good access to external specialist support services. Staff use behavioural strategies effectively. Tutorial records do not consistently record learners' progress.
9. Leadership and management are good. The effective management style is open and consultative. The quality assurance system is effective, particularly the lesson observation process. Individual learner risk assessments are well documented. The self-assessment report is satisfactory but overly descriptive. Minute taking is insufficiently detailed as a basis for audit of key actions. The quality of teaching accommodation varies. The college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

10. The college has a good capacity to improve further. The management of change is good and well supported by staff. Accommodation has improved with clear plans for further improvement. Significant developments in quality

assurance have supported a more consistent approach to improving the work of the college. Staff qualifications have improved. The self-assessment report is satisfactory; the grading of the report is largely accurate, although the college underestimated some of its strengths and did not identify some weaknesses. Target setting is a key area for development.

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

11. The college has made good progress to address the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The consistency of quality processes has improved significantly. Management of the curriculum and residential provision is now more clearly defined. While initial and baseline assessment have improved, the quality of ongoing assessment remains inconsistent. The appointment of specialist literacy, numeracy and communication staff has contributed effectively to improved achievements. Provision for learners with complex needs is now good. The college has redesigned marketing materials to promote diversity better. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning is at the planning stage.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good development of learners' practical, work-related and independence skills
- excellent resources for vocational programmes
- good integration of communication, literacy and numeracy opportunities
- effective learner involvement in the community
- effective lesson observation process
- good management of change.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the consistency of target setting and recording of progress at all levels across the college
- the development of recording and assessment of progress and achievement (RARPA)
- the explicit promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

12. Achievements are good and the standards of work across the curriculum are high. Learners make significant gains in confidence and in social and life skills, such as independent travel. Many learners with challenging behaviours make significant gains in managing and controlling their conduct. Learners make good progress in their development of literacy, numeracy and communication skills across all areas. There are no differences between the achievements of different groups of learners. However, although learners make good progress, not all targets are sufficiently specific and progress is not recorded consistently.
13. Achievements are celebrated successfully within the college, through photographic displays of enrichment activities, learners' artwork, music and drama performances and the leavers' award ceremony. Access to national accreditation has increased and is now good. In 2006, 24 learners achieved a range of national qualifications at entry level, with two learners achieving a level one qualification in hospitality and catering.
14. Learners enjoy their time at college and make good progress especially in the development of practical and work-related skills. The practical nature of the curriculum increases learners' enjoyment, motivation and awareness of a safe and healthy lifestyle. Learners develop good levels of vocational skills in a wide range of options including estates management, car valeting, and catering, as well as through good access to well-planned external work experience. In the community, learners develop their skills and make a positive contribution through regular activities such as running a luncheon club for the elderly. Learners with complex needs make significant gains in their ability to make choices through the successful use of pictorial symbols and signing.
15. Attendance and retention rates are high as expected in a specialist college. Use of data to monitor attendance, retention, achievement and destinations is satisfactory. Of the 18 learners who left in 2005/06, ten progressed into employment or further education.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan good practical activities and manage support staff well. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of individual and pair work and use questions skilfully to establish understanding. Learners are actively engaged and enthusiastic about their learning. Schemes of work are satisfactory. The level of effective support in lessons is high and behaviour management is good.

17. The strategy to develop learners' literacy, numeracy and communication skills is good and integrated well across the curriculum. The focus on developing communication for learners with more complex needs is effective. However, learners' progress in literacy, numeracy and communication is not consistently recorded in sufficient detail.
18. The college has excellent resources for vocational programmes. Staff use the range of working environments effectively to develop learners' skills. There is a large site for estate management, horticulture and animal care; a car valeting bay; and a bakery, café and kitchens. Resources for learners with complex needs include increased information technology (IT) facilities and a specific communication skills base room. In lessons, teachers use a wide range of pictorial communication resources to promote decision-making and independence. Information technology is used appropriately in lessons to support learning.
19. Staff are well qualified and many have additional qualifications in literacy, numeracy and communications. Initial and baseline assessments are comprehensive and lead to appropriate long and medium term learner targets. However, the use of targets is inconsistent. While individual learning plan targets have improved following recent training many are still too broad. The self-assessment report identifies accurately that the Recording and Assessment of Progress and Achievement (RARPA) requires further development. In practice, however, teachers differentiate clearly between the support needs and the degree of challenge required by each learner during lessons.
20. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. Issues relating to personal relationships and sexuality are promoted adequately within the health education curriculum and on an individual basis. The student council provides learners with a good opportunity to have a corporate voice. An atmosphere of mutual respect between staff and learners prevails. The well planned integration of learners into the community has helped to raise their profile as people with skills and potential. Six residences in the local town are now home to 23 learners. However, the formal promotion of equality and diversity issues within schemes of work and lesson plans is underdeveloped.
21. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. Learners participate in a wide variety of activities, work experience and travel training which extends their community involvement and independence. Good links have been established with local organisations to provide opportunities for learners to progress onto level 1 courses. Opportunities for learners to participate in external work placements have increased and are now good. The extended curriculum is planned well and learners engage in a wide range of activities, including sports, music, dance and drama, and outings such as camping and hiking. Staff give good attention to health and safety as well as the promotion of healthy living. Learners make a positive contribution to the community through creative festivals, fundraising events and involvement in

environmental activities. The college supports the economic well-being of learners well.

22. Advice, guidance and support for learners are good. Pre-entry information and guidance provides learners with good opportunities to make an informed choice. A thorough induction using adapted materials enables learners to settle into college quickly and understand their rights and responsibilities. A comprehensive initial assessment, including a speech and language assessment, identifies specific support requirements. The wide range of support includes speech and language therapy, counselling and art therapy. Good links have been established with external agencies to provide physiotherapy, psychology and psychiatric support. Behaviour support is good and managed well. The communication strategy is used effectively to support learners with complex needs. Learners' progress is monitored through tutorials, although the records do not always state clearly the progress learners make. Transition arrangements are good. The links with the local Connexions service are effective and provide a clear focus on life after college. Where appropriate, learners are supported to live with increasing independence. Staff also support learners to increase their work-related skills in order to progress into work experience in the community. Some learners receive additional support from the job coach. Communication with parents and carers is good.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

23. Leadership and management are good. The managers, staff and governors have a strong commitment to the MNC vision and mission. While the strategic plan identifies key priorities for Dilston, the performance indicators are insufficiently rigorous. The college recognises this. The management of information systems are satisfactorily developed and used. Key weaknesses identified at the last inspection have mainly been rectified and the required change has been managed well. The open management style of senior managers is valued by staff and morale is good.
24. Quality assurance arrangements are good and have a high priority. A range of quality assurance standards provide a systematic approach to quality monitoring across the college. However, minutes of meetings are insufficiently detailed and do not form a basis for audit of key actions. The self-assessment report, while satisfactory overall, is insufficiently evaluative, although staff are now more involved. An effective lesson observation process has improved teaching and includes clear written feedback to support development. The grades given by managers were broadly in line with those awarded by inspectors. Individual learner risk assessment is well documented.
25. Management of the curriculum is good. All teachers have appropriate teaching qualifications and most staff are well deployed. However, the use of unqualified staff to deliver massage therapy is not appropriate. Learners contribute to the decision-making process through the student council,

perception questionnaires and representation on the board of governors. Parents value the recent introduction of a questionnaire. Links with other education providers and agencies are good and benefit the learners.

26. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than that in the local population. The new prospectus and website highlight learners from more diverse backgrounds. However, the routine promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning is underdeveloped. The college meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. The Disability Equality Duty Statement is in draft form and is subject to staff consultation. The arrangements for safeguarding learners are appropriate. Learners feel safe in the campus and residences. Work experience documentation promotes key aspects of equality and diversity appropriately.
27. Financial planning and management are good. Governors of MNC are highly committed, well informed and monitor the college's performance effectively. Significant improvements have been made to the fabric of the campus. However, the standard of classrooms varies and temporary accommodation provides a dull environment. Access for those with restricted mobility has improved and clear plans are in place for a lift to be installed in the near future. The college provides good value for money.