



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards  
in Education

## Dilston College

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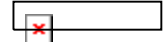
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## Basic information about the college

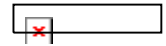


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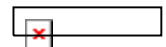
Name of college:	Dilston College
Type of college:	Specialist residential college
Principal:	John Jameson
Address of college:	Dilston Hall Corbridge Northumberland NE45 5RJ
Telephone number:	01434 632692
Fax number:	01434 633721
Chair of governors:	Linda Cooper
Reference number*:	Charity Number - 222377
Name of reporting inspector:	Joyce Deere
Dates of inspection:	20-24 October 2003

*\*charity or registered business number of the company running the college*

## Part A: Summary



## Information about the college

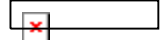


Dilston College is a specialist residential college situated in rural Northumberland, between Corbridge and Hexham. It is set in a nine-acre site of park, woodland and gardens. It is one of the three specialist colleges that together form the Mencap National College. The other two colleges are Lufton 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. All the colleges offer full-time residential and day education for students aged 16 to 25 with learning disabilities. Dilston's mission is 'to prepare students for the next stage in life by providing high-quality learning experiences'.

The college accommodates up to 54 residential students and currently has 16 day students. Of these, 39 are male and 31 female. All current students are white: 45 are aged over 19. The spectrum of learning disabilities is wide, from students with moderate disabilities to those with complex needs, including a wide range of syndromes such as Downs and Smith Magenis, as well as students with autistic spectrum disorders. In line with the college's mission, the curriculum is focused on preparing students for greater independence and involvement in the community when they leave the college. The students all take a Mencap award which consists of four elements: daily living skills; personal

care and presentation; community and leisure; and practical and vocational skills. A few students attend local provision in school or college on a part-time basis.

### **How effective is the college?**



Provision at Dilston College is satisfactory overall. The quality of education and training is satisfactory in social and life skills, and vocational studies. It is unsatisfactory in literacy, numeracy and communications. The quality of student support is good and students are well cared for in residential accommodation.

The main strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below:

#### ***Key strengths***

- very effective practical contexts for learning
- good achievement of students' long-term goals
- good overall support for students
- good behavioural management
- good operational management
- very effective links between the residential and educational provision
- good strategic guidance from the governing body.

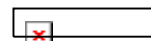
#### ***What should be improved***

- the strategic management of the curriculum

- the use of assessment
- provision to extend and develop students' knowledge
- provision for literacy, numeracy and communications
- promotion of equality and diversity
- specialist support to meet the needs of all students
- the consistency of quality assurance.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

### Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

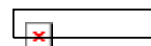


*The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)*

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Vocational studies	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Most learners develop confidence, skills and knowledge within vocational and practical contexts. Teaching in real-life situations is well planned and well managed. The reinforcement of learners' understanding of vocational topics, the standard of literacy and numeracy skills, and the preparation for employment are not adequate. There is insufficient opportunity to accredit vocational skills of students who could benefit so that they can progress between levels.
Social and life skills	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Teaching and standards of work in physical pursuits, pottery and creative dance are good. Liaison between education and care staff is good, and students are well supported. Target setting for individual students is not sufficiently specific or measurable, and does

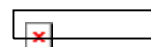
	not meet the needs of more able students. Specialist visual learning resources to develop the communication skills of students with complex needs are not sufficient. The curriculum is not appropriate for the more able students.
Literacy, numeracy and communications	<b>Unsatisfactory.</b> Students develop good group learning skills, but they make insufficient progress in literacy and numeracy, and more able students are not sufficiently challenged. There is insufficient staff expertise in teaching literacy and numeracy, and opportunities and resources to reinforce learning outside practical lessons are not adequate. Initial assessment is not effectively used in setting appropriate objectives for literacy, numeracy and communications in individual learning plans, and does not serve as a basis for measuring progress. Strategic planning is weak and insufficient attention is paid to the teaching of literacy and numeracy in lesson observations.

### How well is the college led and managed?



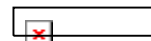
Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior management team and the governors provide a clear strategic direction for the college through thorough development planning. Communications are effective and staff have a voice in decision-making. Day-to-day operational management is good in educational provision and in the residences, but the strategic direction and management of the curriculum are weak. The majority of students achieve their long-term goals. However, quality assurance procedures are inconsistently applied. The self-assessment report in which members of staff were involved over-estimated the quality of teaching and did not give sufficient weighting to some of the weaknesses. There are good opportunities for staff development, although good practice is not always shared effectively. The college does not promote equality and diversity sufficiently. Financial management is good in all areas, but the procedures for monitoring expenditure in relation to individual schedule and purchase orders are not satisfactory. Two out of three areas of the curriculum are satisfactory and the college provides satisfactory value for money.

### To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



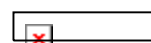
The college's response to social and educational inclusion is satisfactory. The college values each student individually and encourages an ethos that places students at the centre of its work. It is effective in enabling students to move on to living situations where they can have active involvement in the community. The complaints procedure is communicated effectively to students, who play an active role in the decision-making processes of the college. The college provides for students with a wide range of abilities and complex needs. However, it can not provide for residential wheelchair users and currently has no students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college and governors have not met the legislative requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (RRA) 2000 or those under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001. Staff receive initial training in equal opportunities as part of their induction, but there has been no training about the implications of recent equalities legislation. The college does not have an adequate strategy for developing the literacy and numeracy potential of students.

### How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support and guidance for students are good. Students' induction is effective and enables them to settle into college life quickly. Personal support for students is very good. Key workers in the residences and personal tutors work well together. Parents are contacted regularly and are encouraged to work with students in the vacations to reinforce their learning. Students are provided with good support to plan their future. Behaviour management is good across the college. However, speech and language therapy has not been adequately provided for a year and, as a result of this, the support needs of students with communication difficulties have not been fully met. Learning support staff usually provide good support, but there are instances of too much help being provided. Tutorial support is satisfactory, as is the support provided through the Connexions service.

### **Students' views of the college**



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

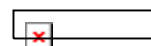
#### ***What students like about the college***

- making new friends
- practical activities and performing arts
- evening and weekend activities
- being treated as adults
- travel training for independence
- work opportunities
- going home some weekends.

#### ***What they feel could be improved***

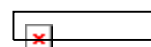
- having their own room
- less teaching of independent living skills
- more time on their favourite work
- gardening in the winter
- more opportunities to go out.

#### Other information

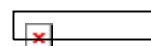


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

#### Part B: The college as a whole



#### Achievement and standards



1. Students are taught in mixed age groups, and there is no significant difference between students aged 16 to 18 and those aged over 19. Most students achieve their long-term goals. These focus appropriately on the students' possible destinations on leaving the college. Most students participate in community activities after leaving the college, and many move into living situations that involve greater levels of independence. Students' achievements from all aspects of college life are celebrated with internal college certificates.

2. Although many students achieve short-term goals, students do not always develop their potential

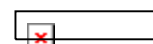
in literacy and numeracy, or in vocational subjects, where there is insufficient opportunity to accredit vocational work. Those with the most complex language needs are not sufficiently supported in developing independence by, for example, the use of pictorial communication systems.

3. Good standards of work are achieved in vocational lessons, and in performing arts and physical activities. Students develop good practical skills in a range of contexts, including the bakery, the café, the laundry and in horticultural activities. In dance and physical pursuits, students improve their own skills and learn to comment on the progress of their peers.

4. Students gain in social confidence, as much of the teaching is in small groups. They develop good teamwork skills, learn to respond and support each other, and develop skills of turn-taking and listening to others.

5. During the week of inspection, attendance was 93%, and students were punctual for their lessons. Rates of retention are high at 96%, which is in line with other specialist colleges.

### Quality of teaching, training and learning



6. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In all areas of the curriculum, most of the teaching was satisfactory, with very few lessons that were good or better, and at least one unsatisfactory lesson in each area. In vocational studies, students benefit from lessons based on practical, real-life contexts. In the best lessons, there is a clear focus on individual learning goals and students have to work in ways that reflect the working environment. For example, they have to prepare lunch for visitors on time, and to an expected standard. In the least successful lessons, the tasks were too easy for a significant number of more able learners. In social and life skills, the best teaching was in the performing arts and physical pursuits lessons, where students learnt to work well together and improved their own skills. In literacy, numeracy and communications, reinforcement of the learning of very basic skills, such as sight recognition of words and counting money, was satisfactory, but tasks for students above the basic levels were undemanding. Students who encountered new vocabulary, or a numerical concept in practical activities, were not provided with any additional tuition outside of that context. Students with the most complex needs, in particular those with little speech, did not have their needs met. Few teachers planned tasks in formats that helped students to improve their communication.

7. The college has continued to improve the standard of accommodation since the previous inspection. More students live in cottages in the college grounds, and a residential house for four students has been opened in a local town. This enables more students to live and learn in small units away from the main house. However, not all students have single rooms. As part of its planned programme of improvements, the college has developed vocational opportunities on the site. These include a bakery and café, with industry-standard equipment, that provide vocational experiences for students. The college has made improvements to its buildings, including ramps and toilet facilities for wheelchair users, but none of the residential units has been adapted for wheelchair users.

8. The qualifications of the staff are satisfactory overall. The majority of teaching staff, and some learning support staff, have teaching qualifications, although very few staff have any specialist qualifications. Members of staff teaching in the vocational areas have extensive experience, although they do not all have recent vocational qualifications. No member of the college staff has a qualification in care above level 3, although two members of senior staff are planning to be qualified by 2005. Most of the senior learning support staff have achieved National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 in care. The comprehensive staff induction programme provides a very good introduction to working with people with learning disabilities, and the ongoing staff training programme includes a large number of topics that are relevant for staff.

9. The teaching resources are satisfactory or good for much of the curriculum. However, few



resources are available to help students to develop their theoretical understanding, particularly when they are taking vocational options or developing literacy and numeracy skills. There are few printed materials and little software on computers to develop literacy and numeracy, and no time is allocated for students attending courses provided elsewhere, to practise or consolidate their learning. There has been considerable, very recent investment in information and communications technology (ICT) facilities, with personal computers in all of the residences and a well-equipped teaching room. However, this resource is not used sufficiently as part of a student's programme of learning. Students with complex language needs are not all provided with the resources to create an environment where a range of communication tools and methodologies are used.

10. Initial assessment is comprehensive and includes a week in residence for residential students. The college carries out a comprehensive review of information provided by the students, their parents, carers and other agencies. From these procedures, each student's individual learning programme is developed, and learning targets are devised. During the first term, assessment continues and additional information is used to develop the baseline assessment. This process may include amendments to the individual learning plan, and modifications to the students' targets, as additional learning needs or achievements are identified. However, these assessments are not always well used. For example, many students have targets on their individual learning plans that they can already meet. The targets are too general and insufficiently demanding. They are not revised sufficiently regularly, and students' progression is hampered as they continue for too long on targets they have achieved.

11. The systems in place for reviewing students' progress are comprehensive, but are not yet consistent. All staff working with the students monitor progress against the targets in the individual learning plans. They record progress after lessons and other college activities. However, the records of progress are often insufficiently detailed. They describe what the student has been doing in lessons, but do not clearly record what the student has learned. The tutorial system has been recently revised so that students can assess their own progress against their individual learning plans and across all the college activities. It is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of this system. The frequency of the tutorials is variable, but the outcomes are used to inform the individual learning plans, and they form the basis for students' six-monthly reviews.

12. Parents are kept well informed of the students' progress by personal tutors. Some day students are using a daily communication book. During college holidays, parents and carers are actively involved in reviewing students' progress against their targets. Parents speak highly of this inclusive process. Their observations contribute to the six-monthly formal reviews. The annual reviews provide a good record of students' main achievements, although they do not always show distance travelled by students since starting at the college.

13. Transition planning is at the centre of the college's mission. Programmes are intended to develop students' skills to live as independently as possible once they leave the college. The college bakery, refectory and 'organic box' scheme enable students to improve their practical, social and living skills. The bakery is used by visitors to Dilston Castle, a tourist attraction which is on the college site, and provides a realistic work environment in which students can develop their catering skills and improve their interpersonal skills. However, the curriculum is not always appropriate for students with more complex needs, or for those who are more able. The achievements in vocational areas are not appropriately accredited at entry level, and students are not receiving adequate support to develop and extend their literacy and numeracy skills. Those at early stages of language development require more expertise in the development of communication to enable them to become less dependent on the direct support of the staff.

14. Although work-experience links have been established in the local area, the support for the transition of more able students into employment has not been adequate, and the college has very recently appointed a vocational preparation tutor to develop and improve these opportunities. At the start of this term, the college extended its links with land-based and general further education (FE) colleges, so that more able students can take courses leading to NVQ awards. It is too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness of these links. There are 12 students that currently have work experience as part of their programmes.

15. The enrichment curriculum offers students the opportunity to develop their interest in leisure activities, such as the physical pursuits, creative music and dance. It is well managed and students choose their own schedule of activities. Many of the activities take place in the college, but some, such as shopping and swimming, take place in the local community. Students in the music group perform at different venues in the Northeast. Additional trips to performances and events in Newcastle and throughout the region are also arranged. The students make good use of local shops and public transport to improve their existing skills and develop new ones. Four students live in a house in the local community, which enhances their experience of living independently. There is an increase in the number of day students attending the college. These students can participate in the enrichment activities, and a separate common room has been made available for them.

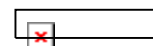
16. Initial and continuing guidance is good. The college holds several open days a year which parents and prospective students find informative. There are established and developing links with the local Connexions service. Specialist careers advice is used, where possible, in the annual review process. The college works with Mencap services and other agencies to ensure that students have the opportunity to move into appropriate living and working environments when they leave the college. This has been introduced in response to students' wishes and parental comment.

17. Personal support for students is good. The comprehensive induction procedure enables students to settle quickly into the college. Attendance and punctuality are monitored effectively. Staff know the students well and students are confident to approach different members of staff for support. The college counsellor and residential care staff provide help and advice for personal issues. A women's group and a men's group are offered in alternate terms to those students who wish to discuss and obtain advice about gender issues and relationships. The college policy on personal relationships is currently being revised.

18. There is effective communication between the members of staff in the residences and those who teach formal lessons that ensures a consistent and supportive approach to learning. A computerised system is used to provide access to relevant information on students. The staff provide good learning support for students and enable them to take an active part in their programmes and to develop their interpersonal skills, although examples were found of work being done for students. Behaviour management is unobtrusive and effective.

19. Last year, the college was unable to support students with speech, language and communication difficulties, because it had difficulties in recruitment. A speech and language therapist has now been recruited to the permanent staff and is in the process of developing a total communication policy. It is too soon to judge its effectiveness.

## Leadership and management



20. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal and senior management team have a strong commitment to the college's vision and values. Dilston College's current mission 'to prepare students for the next stage in life by providing high-quality learning experiences' is recently established. The philosophy and values of the mission are shared and demonstrated by governors and staff. There are clear strategic objectives developed by the board of governors of the Mencap National College. These, together with the key outcomes of Dilston College's own self-assessment process, contribute to the college's development plan. The objectives are well understood by staff and have clear timescales for monitoring progress and implementation. Responsibility for the achievement of the objectives is clearly indicated.

21. Communication is good. The management team have an open and consultative style that is appreciated by staff who feel well supported. As well as informal opportunities to communicate, there are regular full staff meetings, team meetings and newsletters. Staff work well together in teams and there are productive links between members of the care staff and teaching staff. An active student

council meets weekly. A representative from the council attends management team meetings. Communication with parents/carers is well structured, and flexibly adapted to meet their needs and expectations. There are a variety of formal mechanisms to involve and include parents/carers in care, social, welfare and educational aspects of the learner's progress and experience. Feedback from parents/carers indicates very high levels of satisfaction with the college.

22. The operational management of the curriculum and of care and support is very good. A recent review of management responsibilities has resulted in the establishment of clear line management and accountability that benefit learners, provide support to staff and identify responsibility for the overseeing of allocated elements of the curriculum. However, the curriculum strategy lacks coherence. There is a curriculum policy, but no formal strategy to develop the curriculum. This weakness has resulted in the college failing to anticipate the need to adapt the curriculum and accreditation to meet the needs of all students. The skills and qualifications of the staff are not sufficient to meet the full range of learning needs over the medium term. Processes are being developed to share good practice, but these are not yet fully effective. The college learning and teaching group has met once. The college procedures for dealing with complaints and significant incidents are thorough and speedy. The college has appropriate policies for the welfare and care of students and meets the requirements of the National Care Standards Commission.

23. Arrangements to monitor and assess the quality of provision are inconsistently applied. A member of the senior management team has recently been allocated overall responsibility for quality assurance across the college, but there is no college-wide forum specifically for quality improvement. No specific targets have been set for retention, achievement and progression in the context of specialist provision. For example the governing body does not receive regular reports on students' destinations. Whilst the quality assurance processes for the provision of care are well established, some of the arrangements for the review and evaluation of the curriculum are less robust. Regular observations are undertaken of college-based learning and teaching, but the monitoring of the quality of the students' experience in the developing activities with the local providers of FE and work experience is ineffective. Whilst staff value the feedback from regular observation and supervision, the college classroom observation grades are higher than those given by inspectors. The college gathers the views of parents/carers and students regularly through structured surveys, meetings and informal feedback and implements improvements. A well-structured staff appraisal and supervision process is linked to a good programme of planned opportunities for individual staff training, which is used well by staff. The college has a well-used and comprehensive management information system that supports students' achievement and progress. Staff frequently access and update information on students' progress and achievements. This provides an extensive and valuable information and communication system that can be accessed across the college. However, although the system records students' progress against targets, it does not currently record students' progress in literacy and numeracy on a day-to-day basis. The self-assessment report was comprehensive but overestimated the quality of teaching and learning and did not give sufficient weighting to some weaknesses in the curriculum.

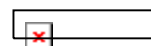
24. Equality and diversity are poorly promoted. Students are treated with respect and dignity by all staff. There is a culture of inclusion and support for students, but the college has failed to respond adequately to recent national legislation. It had not made a formal response to the RRA 2000 by the required date of May 2002. The college produced an anti-racist policy during the week of inspection. It has recently developed an equal opportunities policy to supplement the Mencap personnel procedures, but this policy has not yet been approved by the governing body. There are, therefore, no published assessments of the impact of such policies. A response to the SENDA 2001 has only recently been formulated. The governors have not made any strategic response to the anticipatory duty on governors as required by September 2003. The college cannot currently accommodate students with mobility difficulties at any of its residential houses. No action plan has been agreed to show how the college is approaching its requirement to promote non-discriminatory practices. There are few examples of diversity and equality being promoted through the curriculum.

25. Governance arrangements are good. The Mencap National College board of governors oversees the college. The board consists of representatives from Mencap trustees, a student from each of the three colleges that constitute the Mencap National College, and external representatives. One of the termly board meetings is held at Dilston College. The board has recently instigated a programme of

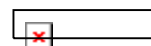
governor visits to each of the colleges to supplement the contact with learners and staff. The governors are informed about students' personal achievements at each of its meetings. This information is enriched by oral or video presentations from student representatives. A member of the college staff provides support by colour coding agenda papers, by varying the pace of discussions and by confirming with students that they understand the decisions that have been made. Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Dilston College, and this knowledge informs planning and the annual strategic review.

26. Financial monitoring is good. The college benefits from well-established budgeting and accounting procedures instigated by Mencap. The governors receive regular management accounts of Dilston College which are supported, on occasion, both by internal and external audit reports. The college had a difficult financial position five years ago. It has been able to remedy this situation and has achieved a balanced budget in 2002/03. It is also making considerable investment in the development of accommodation and good standard realistic vocational learning resources. Overall, the college provides satisfactory value for money. However, there are no systems to monitor the actual delivery of planned programmes of individual students' learning and support as specified in the learner's schedule and purchase order with the LSC. For example, in the year 2002/03, a significant number of learners were assessed to need speech and language support. This support could not be provided and no amendment to the schedule and purchase order was sought from the LSC.

### Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



#### Vocational studies



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

#### **Strengths**

- good achievement of individual goals and skills
- good development of communication skills
- creative strategies for learning in vocational contexts
- good facilities for vocational training and experience.

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of challenge for more able students
- insufficient learning resources to support learning
- insufficiently detailed assessment of learners' progress
- too few opportunities for progression within entry levels and foundation level.

### ***Scope of provision***

27. The college offers a range of opportunities for vocational and practical learning. All students are offered tasters in various areas. These include catering, laundry and housekeeping, horticulture, small-animal care, vehicles, workshop skills and willow weaving. Thereafter, students select their favoured areas. Students at level 1 remain at a taster level while students at level 2 are offered between four and seven lessons of vocational activity. Level 3 students can undertake up to 10 sessions per week. Nine students have off-site work placements and three have placements on-site. As a result of recent developments, the catering department delivers the college lunches and provides a café service for staff, students and outside visitors. The laundry services the needs of the college and the catering department. The horticulture section provides organic vegetables for the kitchen, a 'boxed vegetables' scheme, and the local farmers' market. Six students attend local provision in schools and colleges to take NVQ level 1 units in catering, horticulture or childcare, and four attend an entry level work-preparation course.

### ***Achievement and standards***

28. The standards achieved by many students are good. Learners within vocational and practical sessions clearly demonstrate gains in confidence, skills and knowledge. Prompt arrival at workplaces features in many individual learning goals and is frequently well achieved. Communication skills are effectively developed alongside the individual acquisition of practical skills and knowledge, as students often work in small groups. However, more able students are not always given the opportunity to achieve more challenging learning goals within the vocational areas. No vocational qualifications at entry level are offered by the college, and there is insufficient formal recognition of the skills that students develop.

### ***Quality of education and training***

29. Most teaching is satisfactory or good, and creative strategies are in place to maximise the use of vocational and practical facilities. The majority of lessons are well planned and well managed. They clearly detail the sequence and nature of activities, although there is little development of associated literacy and numeracy skills at higher levels. Students have experiences of working within the constraints of real situations. For example, students planning, preparing and serving meals to pensioners in a community hall must keep to the published lunch time; maintain ongoing relationships; provide high-quality food; and leave a clean environment. The good relationship between staff and students encourages the development of co-operative working. In the best lessons, there is clear focus on individual learning goals which are contextualised for each lesson, and which change over time as each small step is achieved. However, tasks are too easy for a significant number of the more able learners. The college does not provide sufficient support for students who attend local colleges. Where students learn new skills or technical vocabulary, there

are no arrangements to reinforce this learning outside of the practical lessons.

30. Teachers are knowledgeable about the practical subjects they teach. They are encouraged and eager to undertake updating and professional training, although not all have immediately relevant or recent specialist vocational qualifications for the areas they teach. Not all teachers show a full understanding of the vocational level framework, or of the literacy and numeracy resources needed at various levels. Teaching resources to reinforce practical learning across all the vocational areas are insufficient. ICT resources are not routinely used as part of teaching.

31. The facilities for vocational and practical learning are very good. The catering department has recently refurbished buildings to house a café and bakery as well as re-organising the housekeeping and catering arrangements in house. This development now allows full and effective learning opportunities in the day-to-day tasks required in the college. The horticulture provision enables students to follow the process of production from planting to retailing.

32. Baseline assessments are detailed and provide a sound basis for the identification of individual learning goals. The systems to track and record students' progress against these individual goals are good. However, staff assessment of lessons is often insufficiently detailed, and does not always identify the level at which the students are operating. The monitoring of students' development of literacy and numeracy skills, relevant to vocational areas, is haphazard and not routine. There is insufficient recognition of the variations in learners' ability and performance in vocational activities. In best practice, the assessments are used as a starting point, with individual targets changing as each one is achieved. At the end of the better lessons, there is a well-managed evaluation period which allows a review of each learner's performance and suggestions for the next lesson. At lower levels of achievement, goals are too broad for accurate assessment and reduce the opportunity for recognition of progression. Overall, there is little encouragement of self-assessment or peer assessment.

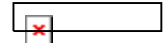
33. Provision in the college has recently expanded and now provides flexible opportunities to encourage choice and develop the strengths of individuals. However, whilst the use of other local providers enables a few students to gain entry level vocational qualifications or NVQ units at level 1, the college itself offers no accreditation for vocational skills and has few identified levels of attainment at entry level. The progression routes are not clear. Attendance at other institutions and the use of work-experience providers extend the experience of the more able learners, though there is limited coherence between these areas of provision and the college programmes.

34. Personal support in lessons is good, as is support for the varying learning needs of individuals within the vocational and practical courses. The advice, guidance and support students receive for the next stage in their transition to further training or employment are not well developed. A new member of staff has been recently appointed to address this aspect of work. Support for the needs of vocationally relevant literacy and numeracy for those working at foundation level or at entry level 3 is insufficient.

### ***Leadership and management***

35. Management of the area is satisfactory. Effective strategic planning over the past few years has led to the current and continuing improvements and expansion of vocational opportunities within the college. There is a clear recognition of the value of vocational activities for students, and the operational manager has provided a clear lead in improving the range of opportunities for students, in particular for those who are more able. The quality assurance arrangements for monitoring the provision with local providers are being developed, and have not yet been implemented. Not all staff have a full understanding of the details and implementation of the curriculum framework, particularly in relation to target setting. There is little promotion of diversity in the day-to-day activity and environment. Weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were not given sufficient weighting in the overall grading of this area.

## Social and life skills



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### ***Strengths***

- good achievement of long-term goals
- good standards of work in physical pursuits, pottery and creative dance
- good personal support for students.

### ***Weaknesses***

- underdeveloped target setting
- inadequate specialist resources for students with complex needs
- inappropriate programme for more able students

### ***Scope of provision***

36. The social and life skills curriculum is a key part of the college's curriculum, and all students participate. Its aim is to help students to develop the skills for independence for adult life. The opportunities afforded by the residential experience form a significant element of each student's programme. Day students, who do not benefit from the residential experience, use a designated day student centre. The curriculum elements include daily living skills, such as planning meals, budgeting, shopping, cooking and domestic hygiene, as well as personal care and presentation, and access to the community. The social curriculum includes a range of activities in the arts, physical and outdoor pursuits both in the college and the wider community, during the day and evenings, and at weekends.

### ***Achievement and standards***

37. Most students achieve their long-term goals, which are to move to greater independence in their living situation, and have greater involvement in the community. Students' work in physical pursuits, pottery and creative dance is of a good standard. The students have made good progress in these areas since joining the college. Students are highly motivated, enjoy these lessons and develop good confidence. Many students make satisfactory progress in developing their independent living

skills. However, there is insufficient rigour in the review of targets, and insufficient demands are made of more able students. Students are happy at the college, attend regularly and punctually, and retention rates are satisfactory.

### ***Quality of education and training***

38. Teaching is good or better in the majority of the physical pursuits, pottery and creative dance lessons. In the best lessons, students had demanding targets, and practical activities were planned well. Literacy, numeracy and communication skills were well integrated, and there was a good range of learning activities. In a creative dance lesson, students improvised to a range of different music styles, and were encouraged to analyse their own strengths as well as those of other students. The majority of teaching and learning is satisfactory in the daily living skills lessons. Students make satisfactory progress in residential facilities where the learning takes place in a realistic context. Where lessons were less effective or unsatisfactory, the less able students could not take part effectively, and additional support workers intervened too much. There was insufficient time allocated to activities to allow learning to be reinforced. More able students did not have demanding tasks: they could complete those they were set with ease and had been able to do them for some time.

39. Resources for the minority of students with complex needs are inadequate. Whilst there is some satisfactory use of visual and photographic materials for planning and discussing daily living, these are not comprehensive, and not used effectively to develop communication skills, or to promote independence. Members of staff rely too much on verbal prompts, with no identified visual communication strategy to facilitate independent choice, or to expand receptive communication skills. Teaching staff do not have the relevant specialist skills or guidance to support appropriately the students with little speech.

40. The initial assessment identifies students' levels effectively, but target setting is underdeveloped for independent living skills. Targets identified are not sufficiently specific, or individualised and are not easily measurable. Individual targets are not always demanding enough for more able students. The review of individual objectives in lesson plans is not always sufficiently evaluative in identifying barriers to learning, or specific aspects of skills development.

41. Leisure and social activities play a significant part in the daily lives of many students, enriching their experience and enabling them to become involved in the local community. However, the independent living skills curriculum is not well matched to the needs of the more able students, who continue to have formal lessons, even when they can complete tasks with ease, and have been assessed as working independently on them.

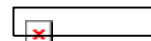
42. Personal support for students is good. The liaison between education and care staff is very effective. Staff have worked well with students to encourage their personal development and provide sensitive support for those with challenging behaviours and health support needs.

### ***Leadership and management***

43. Operational management is satisfactory. There are regular meetings, and staff teaching independent living skills have worked together to produce task checklists for assessment. Members of education and care staff work closely together to provide good support for students and this is helped by the staffing structure. Regular staff development has been provided to support staff in developing competence in a range of issues such as behaviour management. Teaching observations have taken place, but they have not identified key weaknesses in target setting, assessment and the need to meet the needs of all students. These weaknesses were given insufficient weighting in the self-assessment report. There is little promotion of diversity.

### **Literacy, numeracy and communications**





Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

### ***Strengths***

- good development of group learning skills
- good use of vocational contexts to motivate students
- good support for students with challenging behaviour.

### ***Weaknesses***

- insufficient progress in literacy and numeracy skills over time
- insufficient staff expertise in teaching literacy and numeracy
- insufficient opportunity to reinforce learning outside practical lessons
- ineffective use of initial assessment in the development of individual learning plans
- weak strategic planning
- insufficient attention to literacy and numeracy in lesson observation.

### ***Scope of provision***

44. Literacy, numeracy and communications provision is integrated into all programmes and taught by teachers of vocational skills, and social and life skills. There is no discrete on-site provision. There are 10 students with higher level skills who attend a weekly 90-minute lesson at a local FE college.

### ***Achievement and standards***

45. Students attend regularly and are punctual. They develop good group learning skills and become co-operative and supportive learners. More advanced students help those with less well-developed skills. There is genuine celebration of each others' achievements at whatever level. Learners in the early stages of numeracy, speaking or literacy development make satisfactory progress. They are able to count, tell the time and allow enough time to complete tasks. They can estimate, weigh and measure the materials needed for catering or horticultural work. They make progress in calculating costs and handling money in working and domestic situations. Students who find speech possible, but difficult, become able to name significant items in their working and residential situations and to articulate what they want. Students with severe communication difficulties do not make the same degree of progress. A lack of communication aids limits their ability to convey meaning and choice. Students do not make enough progress over time in higher level literacy and numeracy skills. Many tasks required of them in their working and residential situations do not sufficiently extend their skills.

### ***Quality of education and training***

46. The college makes good use of vocational contexts to motivate students. Students willingly and eagerly engage in reading, writing and practical numeracy tasks directly related to the job in hand. In the best teaching of skills for independence, this keenness is also marked. Students are genuinely interested in acquiring the literacy and numeracy skills for shopping, travelling and physical or creative activities. However, the current arrangements are not sufficiently robust, resulting in students not always developing skills in different contexts. There are few opportunities and resources outside practical sessions to reinforce what students have learnt. No opportunity is available to introduce or extend skills that are difficult to teach in a practical context. No software is provided for students to develop their skills independently of teachers. There are 10 students who attend a local college, but there is no liaison between the 2 colleges over students' targets or vocational interests. No on-site provision is made for these students, or for those preparing for work experience. No literacy or numeracy support is provided for students studying at other schools or colleges, so there is insufficient opportunity for reinforcement of new vocabulary or numerical concepts that students may meet in the lessons at local colleges.

47. Members of staff have insufficient expertise in teaching literacy and numeracy. While most teachers have a teaching qualification, only one member of the teaching staff has a specialist literacy qualification. Targets set in students' individual learning plans often lack detail, and are not updated frequently enough. Calculation methods for multiplication and division, decimals and percentages needed in many vocational and domestic situations are sometimes introduced as appropriate with some students, but seldom reinforced. Spelling strategies and techniques for continuous writing are rarely learnt. However, most teaching focuses on more basic needs, and is satisfactory at this level. Teachers concentrate on simple mental calculations or sight recognition of words which can be taught while students are working in their vocational areas.

48. Initial assessment is not used effectively in the development of targets on students' individual learning plans. High-achieving students have targets which do not stretch them. Annual reviews of progress in literacy and numeracy are insufficiently frequent, and inadequate when they do occur. Targets for students at all levels are often too general to measure progress against. Many students retain the same target on their individual learning plans for a whole year. Teaching staff keep daily records of detailed progress, but these are not currently included in the informal termly review of the individual learning plan. A student's progress in a specific skill, such as counting to four for the first time, is not always shared quickly enough amongst all members of staff, to allow them to reinforce it in other contexts. The college has recently adopted a useful system of making available their evaluations of students' progress on the college intranet but, at the time of inspection, literacy and numeracy records were not entered on the system.

49. The college provides good support for students with challenging behaviours. Teachers and support staff are skilled at providing intelligent, informed and unobtrusive support for students who would otherwise find it hard to take part in learning. Staff help students to focus and pace themselves. They support students by containing anxiety and diverting aggression.

### ***Leadership and management***

50. Strategic planning for literacy, numeracy and communications is weak. The college has taken a variety of actions, since September 2003, to improve recognised deficiencies, but there is currently no coherent strategy shared by governors and staff. A draft plan does not address several important issues including learning resources, programme structure and target setting. Teaching observations pay insufficient attention to literacy and numeracy. Very few of the observations conducted by external consultants as well as college staff in 2002/03 address teaching, learning and attainment in literacy, numeracy and communication. Monitoring of the provision of support specified in schedule and purchase orders is insufficiently rigorous. Students identified in 2002/03 as having speech and language therapy needs did not receive this specialist support owing to difficulties in recruiting staff. The college has recently appointed a speech and language therapist to provide support for staff working with students with communication difficulties. However, no member of the senior or operational management staff has specialist experience of numeracy and literacy to support staff and develop the curriculum. Teaching and support staff have had little training in literacy and numeracy. There is little overt promotion of equality and diversity issues. The weaknesses in the provision were not all identified in the self-assessment report.

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