

Dorton College

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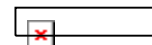
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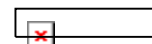
Basic information about the college



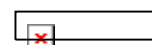
Name of college:	Dorton College of Further Education
Type of college:	Independent specialist residential
Principal:	Graham Williams
Address of college:	Seal Drive Seal Nr Sevenoaks TN15 0AH
Telephone number:	01732 592602
Fax number:	01732 592601
Chair of governors:	Mr C Shueppert
Reference number*:	
Name of reporting inspector:	Isabella Jobson
Dates of inspection:	8-12 March 2004

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

Part A: Summary



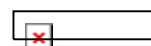
Information about the college



Dorton College of Further Education is an independent college, making specialist residential provision and day provision for students with a visual impairment who may also have additional learning and physical difficulties. Students have a range of additional disabilities such as epilepsy, physical disabilities and hearing impairment, but the college does not provide for students with severe and complex needs. The college is owned and managed by the Royal London Society for the Blind (RLSB) which is a charitable trust. It has a governing body to which the principal reports. The governing body is a sub-committee of the board of trustees of the RLSB. The principal of the college is line managed by the chief executive of the RLSB. The college is located on a 47-acre site at Seal, near Sevenoaks, Kent. The site also houses the RLSB head office, a community services department, a nursery and a non-maintained special school for pupils aged 5 to 16. The college provides further education (FE) and training for 75 visually impaired young people and adults. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds 67 students; 3 students are in receipt of joint funding with social services. The college has a contract with the residential training unit of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). There are currently six adults enrolled on this provision. Two students are privately funded.

Students can come from all areas of the country to attend the college, although most come from London and the Home Counties. There are 69 residential students and 6 day students. There are 28 female students; 20 of these are aged 16 to 18. Of the 47 male students, 25 are aged 16 to 18. Some 23% of students are from minority ethnic groups. The residential accommodation is situated at the college; 62 students live in 3 accommodation blocks, which are divided into 10 houses around a quadrangle. Five semi-independent students live in a detached house in Sevenoaks. The Mansion House accommodates one student in a specialist residential unit and one adult student in a self-contained flat. Educational provision includes a range of pre-vocational and vocational courses at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Individually designed programmes include therapy, literacy and numeracy, key skills, personal development, learning support and care. The residential training unit offers a vocational programme leading to qualifications in information and communications technology (ICT) and national vocational qualifications (NVQ) in administration at level 2. The main aim of the college is to enable blind and partially sighted people in London and the South East to develop their capabilities, fulfil their personal aspirations and ambitions and attain a satisfying quality of life.

How effective is the college?



The college provides good teaching and opportunities for learning for the majority of its students. The quality of the extended curriculum is good. Students make very good progress in the development of their social and life skills and independent living skills. They make good progress in their vocational studies and many continue into FE and higher education (HE). Provision for adult learners funded by the residential training unit is good. The provision of literacy and numeracy, vocational subjects and social and life skills is also good.

The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

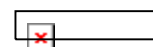
- progress in independence and in living skills as a preparation for transition
- the quality of teaching and learning
- the quality of accommodation and resources
- the assessment of the needs of students and the planning to meet those needs
- breadth of courses and programmes, including enrichment activities
- the guidance and support provided for students

- the students' involvement in the life of the college
- management of key functions of the college.

What should be improved

- academic links with local partner colleges
- the tracking of students' progress in all areas of the curriculum
- the failure of some individual learning plans to cover all facets of a student's experience
- inadequate monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in partner colleges.
- 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

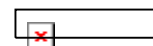


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Literacy and numeracy	Good. Students make good progress on their courses using the literacy and numeracy skills they develop. Real life teaching activities promote learning very effectively. Teaching and support staff respond well to the individual needs of students. In a minority of lessons there is ineffective linking of activities to individual students' targets and insufficient recognition of the progress made.

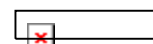
Vocational subjects	Good. Teaching is good and very effective support helps students to develop relevant work-related skills and vocabulary. All students, including those on residential training unit-funded provision, make good progress in developing the study skills to complete programmes successfully and achieve their qualifications. Teaching at partner colleges is often only satisfactory and information about students' progress in meeting their course objectives is not readily available to personal tutors at the main college site.
Social and life skills	Good. Students make very good progress in developing skills of independent living and effectively transfer these skills into other settings. Teaching and support for learning are very good and most sessions include opportunities for students to work towards their individual targets. In a minority of lessons, students' needs are not adequately met.

How well is the college led and managed?



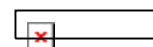
Leadership and management are good and the leadership and management of key functional areas of the college are very good. Strategic and operational planning is linked to the self-assessment process, which is well managed. The college curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of individual students comprehensively. The college's own quality assurance mechanisms are evolving, but are not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure the very best provision for students in partner colleges. Appraisals and opportunities for staff development are good. There is little sharing of good practice across the college. The oversight of the educational provision by the governors is good, as is financial management. The college provides good value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to social inclusion is good. Students come from diverse backgrounds. The complexity of students' needs has increased since the last inspection and the college has planned and developed its provision well in order to meet those needs. Accommodation and residential arrangements take full account of the complex needs of students. Through its curriculum, the college effectively promotes an understanding of aspects of disability other than visual impairment, and of issues of ethnicity and gender. Through the development of relevant policies and related staff training, the college has responded well to its responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). Provision for literacy and numeracy is good.

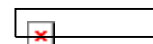
How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



The guidance and personal support provided to students are outstanding. Induction provides a careful and sensitive introduction to college life. Students enrolling at local partner colleges

advice on entry, on programme and on exit. They make well-informed and thoroughly researched choices. Tutorial support is good. Specialist equipment to assist students who have a visual impairment to gain access to the curriculum is very good. The college is aware that students face significant challenges in finding employment, and works hard to support them. Students have good access to a wide range of effective specialist support, including mobility, art and music therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Occupational therapy is less effective when it is provided away from the realistic residential setting.

Students' views of the college



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

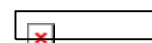
What students like about the college

- good facilities and accommodation
- learning to take responsibility for their work
- the support provided by all college staff
- learning new things
- the opportunities for employment
- the friendships they build
- feeling part of a community where people relate to each other
- the chance to grow up and be treated as an adult.

What they feel could be improved

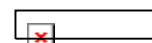
- the rule about having your door open when you have visitors
- more choice about when to have mobility training
- reduce the amount of formal recording of what you are doing in the residences
- more frequent transport to and from partner colleges.

Other information

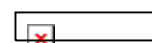


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once the report is published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will 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. It is inappropriate to separate provision for students aged 16 to 18 from those over 19. Judgements are made in relation to the student group as a whole, with separate judgements on the provision for residential training unit students where appropriate. The retention rate for students, at 96%, is comparable with other specialist colleges nationally.

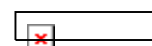
2. Achievements for students over time are good, with the majority being successful in meeting appropriately challenging long-term targets. On vocational courses, most students achieve their primary learning goals and most students make good academic progress while at the college. The college has detailed information relating to the destinations of students after leaving: 33% move into employment, and many move on to FE or HE. Students improve their literacy and numeracy skills, such as developing clarity in spoken communication and make the required progress with key skills. They make good progress towards targets identified in their individual learning plans; achievements are underpinned by good progress in the development of study skills. The achievements of

residential training unit-funded students are good. Most achieve their qualification aim and develop good work-related skills. They gain self-confidence and self-esteem and their work is of a high standard with well-presented portfolios.

3. Students successfully communicate their skills, knowledge and understanding through a range of media, such as Braille, speech output and voice-activated software. They gain in social skills such as turn-taking and listening to others. The development of individual living skills is very good. Once independent living skills have been developed, students progress to semi-independence and independent residency as appropriate. Students have the confidence to discuss their visual impairment with other students at the local partner college which they attend, thereby raising awareness of the disability.

4. Attendance is good overall. Punctuality is good and is monitored very closely. Where a student fails to attend a lesson, there is a well-co-ordinated response by staff.

Quality of teaching, training and learning



5. Teaching is good. Of the 50 sessions observed, almost two-thirds were very good or better and a third were satisfactory. Only three sessions were unsatisfactory. Other sessions, including tutorials, extra-curricular and residential activities, contribute to the judgements relating to teaching and learning. The graded sessions included provision at two local partner colleges, a private provider and at Dorton College itself.

6. Where teaching is good, the teachers have high levels of expertise and knowledge in their own subject and share an enthusiasm and love for the activity with their students. They plan sessions well and ensure that individual needs are addressed in each activity. Individual learning plans and outcomes for personal development inform lesson plans. Positive reinforcement is used very effectively to manage behaviour and refocus students, and good use is made of problem-solving and questioning approaches. Good use is made of practical activities to reinforce learning and to introduce new concepts. Resources are adapted to suit the needs of students and appropriate aids are utilised. Teaching on the residential training unit programmes is good. In the less successful lessons, mainly in the partner colleges, students were not given sufficiently demanding tasks. In others, resources were not sufficiently individualised or adapted to promote students' independence. Students apply every effort to succeed in their work and make good use of their time.

7. Staff have up-to-date expertise and a good understanding of the impact of visual impairment on learning. They have sufficient experience, knowledge and skills to meet the students' additional learning difficulty and disability needs and have developed appropriate strategies and resources for learning. The good staff-to-student ratio enhances learning. Well-qualified specialist staff provide students with access to speech and language therapists, mobility training, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Good links have been made with external support services, such as the mental health team. Most teaching staff have qualified teacher status or are working towards this qualification. All staff have undertaken training in visual impairment. The head of care is well qualified. The deployment of some support staff at Dorton College is not always effective, with too many support staff in some lessons and too few in others.

8. Staff training contributes successfully to their continuing professional development and has a positive impact on students' learning, such as the whole-college approach to promoting positive behaviour. Annual staff training includes good opportunities for staff to update their knowledge and understanding of visual impairment, including developments in adaptive technology. Appropriate progress is being made towards care staff achieving the required NVQ in care. The provision meets the standards of the National Care Standards Commission.

9. A wide range of specialist resources for visual impairment are specifically matched to individual

students' requirements and their preferred way of learning. Students have access to appropriate ICT throughout Dorton College and at local partner colleges. Technical support is good. Accommodation for teaching and the residences is of a high quality. Students live and work in very pleasant and well-maintained surroundings. The accommodation for students with a high level of support needs is of an exceptional standard, with all amenities promoting as much independence as possible. Provision for independent study and access to library facilities are good.

10. Comprehensive initial multi-disciplinary assessment provides a good basis upon which to plan each student's programme. The college responds to the changing needs of students through on-going assessment and monitoring of progress. Individual learning plans are monitored rigorously and additional resources are provided and changes made to students' programmes as necessary. Assessment results are discussed with the students and form the basis for sound planning. Procedures for recording achievements overall are effective. The annual reviews involve multi-disciplinary contributions and are comprehensive. However, the monitoring of students' progress across the extended curriculum is occasionally not sufficiently detailed and information from partner colleges on academic progress is insufficient. On programmes provided at Dorton, staff systematically record progress against learning targets. Regular communication of the students' progress to their parents and external agencies is well organised and effective.

11. The curriculum provided by the college is outstanding. A detailed curriculum plan creates the framework for teaching and learning. The guidance on teaching and learning that supports curriculum documentation is a valuable asset for staff. Schemes of work routinely map appropriate learning pathways. Students have access to a 24-hour curriculum designed to promote the full range of skills and abilities required for independent living. All students have access to courses leading to external qualifications, an impressive range of enrichment programmes, adaptive technology, career advice and post-college planning for independent living. The majority of students undertake their academic programme in one of the three partner colleges. Courses available to students range from pre-foundation through to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). On the Dorton site, skills for life and individual programmes constitute the provision for students with additional learning needs.

12. Within their residences, all students are able to develop their independent living skills through good opportunities to explore social, personal and ethical issues. Individual learning and support plans are based on identified needs and are reflected in appropriate provision. The extended curriculum promotes social inclusion. Students are offered a very good range of activities which encourage their interests and enthusiasms. These include physical activities such as sailing, jogging, shooting and skiing; visits to the cinema, garden centres, shopping centres and bowling alleys; and more cultural outings such as theatre visits and musical events. Many of the students participate in these activities and enjoy them thoroughly.

13. Dorton College works very closely with Workbridge, an RLSB organisation dedicated to offering employment for visually impaired people. The link with Workbridge is very effective. Structured work experience encourages the development of work-related skills, whilst also raising awareness of employers' expectations. Liaison with the Connexions service is working well.

14. The guidance and support provided to students are outstanding. Induction provides a careful and sensitive introduction to Dorton College life. Students enrolling at local partner colleges participate fully in their induction processes. Learners have access to good independent careers advice on entry, on programme and on exit. They make well-informed and thoroughly researched choices. The staff work hard to support students through the challenges they face in finding employment. Students have good access to a wide range of effective specialist support, including art and music therapy, although occupational therapy is provided away from student residences, and this hinders the development of their independence. Some students would like more opportunities to visit the community independently.

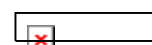
15. Tutorial support is good. Individual learning plans are reviewed through regular and formal monitoring. Personal tutors meet frequently with students to provide support and direction. Issues of personal support are thoroughly monitored and discussed with all students. Students value their participation in the organisation of their learning. Academic links with local partner colleges do not

always ensure that students are making maximum gains in their learning, however. The quality of the work of support staff is very good; they understand students' needs and work well with them to support their progress. Support staff at Dorton College are not always well deployed.

16. Staff and students work well together to deal with any issues of poor punctuality or inappropriate behaviour. Issues of equal opportunities, race and ethnicity are dealt with effectively within the curriculum. The college is very active in encouraging external visits from friends and family.

17. The student handbook is provided in standard print, Braille, large print and on tape. Students are guided through the handbook during induction and parents are encouraged to read and discuss it with students. The handbook provides a comprehensive introduction to college life.

Leadership and management



18. Leadership and management are good. The college principal and senior management team are responsible for the management of the college. Key functional areas of the college are managed very well. The college governing body includes staff, student and parent representatives. Governors determine college policy and strategy. They meet four times a year to monitor and evaluate the direction, development and progress the college is making. They are closely involved in college life. The college has responded well to the issues raised in its last inspection.

19. Strategic planning is good and identifies key priorities and direction for staff teams. However, strategic objectives in the operational plan are not always costed or tied into detailed success criteria. Operational targets are set within the framework of the strategic plans. Regular staff meetings and circulation of minutes promote team building. Thorough induction provides staff with a good understanding of the needs of learners and of the impact of visual impairment on learning. Staff are supported by a detailed and helpful staff guidance document.

20. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive and are effective in monitoring much of the provision. They include observation of teaching and learning, the coherence of the curriculum, monitoring of individual learning plans and progress made by students. They are rigorously applied and monitored by senior staff. However, mobility and therapy plans are not fully integrated into the individual learning plans, and the college is insufficiently rigorous in monitoring all aspects of the provision in partner colleges. Once a student's programme is underway, tutors do not have a regular formal opportunity to contribute to their tutees' individual learning plans. Although there are joint meetings and Dorton receives reports on students in partner colleges, Dorton has no formal links with the observation schemes of partner colleges.

21. All staff and governors are involved in the construction of the self-assessment report. The college identified good practice in teaching, but was less accurate in the assessment of learning, and overall grades given by the college were higher than those awarded by inspectors. Weaknesses are picked up through the three-year development plan, and targets for individual staff are set in relation to this plan. Performance management focuses on raising standards of achievement for students, and provision is good. The college follows the RLSB appraisal policy. The Dorton College performance appraisal system is linked to lesson observations. The sharing of good practice is underdeveloped, however. The outcomes of appraisals do not always link with strategic targets. Life skills tutors and support staff are supported well through a supervision system.

22. Students have very positive views about their experiences at Dorton. Their views are sought and acted upon. For example, the opening hours of the block for private study were extended at the students' request. An elected student representative gives feedback at governors' meetings. Student representatives attend programme team meetings. Meetings in the residential units explore students' perceptions, which are then recorded. Students also complete questionnaires on their perceptions of the college.

23. The college complies with recent equalities legislation. As a result of RLSB strategy, the college follows the RLSB equal opportunities policy for staff. Dorton College has its own equal opportunities policy for students, known as the racial equality and cultural diversity policy; this has recently been updated and is comprehensive. It takes into account the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. A detailed action plan, dated January 2004, relates directly to this policy and a member of staff has been identified to take the plan forward. The college applies this policy conscientiously and is beginning to assess its impact. Students' achievements are monitored by ethnic group, and staff recruitment by racial group. The SENDA policy has been reviewed and takes full account of recent legislation. All full-time staff are trained in its implications. The college meets recent legislation relating to adult and child protection issues.

24. The college evaluates its cost-effectiveness by monitoring outcomes for students in relation to their individual learning plans. Support provided, as required on the schedule and purchase orders, is rigorously monitored. The provision of accommodation, support and training is under constant review. The management information system is very good and reports can be provided for all aspects of students' programmes or destinations. Financial management is good. All areas of the curriculum are good and Dorton College provides good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Literacy and numeracy

Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**.

Strengths

- good individual progress
- excellent staff response to individual students' needs and preferences
- comprehensive initial assessment
- realistic learning activities that promote individuals' independence
- excellent integration of assistive technology and specialist resources to aid learning.

Weaknesses

- insufficient recognition and celebration of progress

- ineffective linkage of individual targets to activities in a minority of lessons.

Scope of provision

25. There are 19 students following 2 programmes of study - skills for life and the individual progression programme - which formally include literacy and numeracy. Much of the literacy and numeracy teaching is embedded in learning designed to promote independence. These students, and those on vocational programmes, participate in additional workshops on a voluntary basis or whenever an area of development has been identified.

Achievement and standards

26. Students make good progress on their main programme, using the literacy and numeracy skills they acquire. They develop good listening and verbal communication skills, and are able to articulate their opinions well. Relevant and challenging individualised learning goals are achieved. This achievement leads to progression to vocationally linked courses and to further independence. Where literacy and numeracy are embedded in other learning, some progress is not sufficiently recorded or celebrated. For example, in one lesson, students worked with spreadsheets entering numbers and ranking the results, but their successful acquisition of the skills necessary for carrying out this task was not formally acknowledged.

Quality of education and training

27. Teaching is good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching and two-thirds was good or better. Staff respond well to individual students' needs and preferences and encourage students to become independent. Real-life activities are used for teaching purposes. For example, students built on the experience of a library visit to improve their communication skills and to enable them to gain access to the range of services offered by a library. In the best lessons, the content is well matched to the specific needs of the students and there is good use of questioning and problem solving. In a successful lesson, students improved their sequencing skills. They produced a clear set of directions, checking that they understood a route, and also improved their mobility skills. In a minority of lessons, there is ineffective linkage of individual targets to activities. For example, in a literacy workshop, students worked on producing an advertisement and reviewing their writing skills. Most of the students were studying on a media course and participated enthusiastically. However, there was no formal link between the workshop and the students' targets on their individual learning plans.

28. Most staff are qualified teachers and many have received additional training in literacy and numeracy. Enthusiastic teachers and support staff work effectively together in lessons, although there is some uneven allocation of support in a few lessons. Students benefit from excellent integration of extensive resources including assistive technology. The deployment of braille and allocation of adapted computers are effectively planned in advance for each student. The accommodation is pleasant, with appropriate adaptations and resources for students with visual impairment.

29. Initial assessment is thorough and comprehensive and includes literacy and numeracy skills as well as learning needs arising from visual impairment. The resulting individual learning plan for the development of literacy and numeracy fully involves the student. Targets are specific, linked to

learning activities and are communicated effectively across the teaching team. Frequent reviews of students' performance take place in lively group and individual tutorials. Students participate in the tutorial process and assess each other on how well they perform. Assessment is accurate and informs planning for each student.

30. The diagnosis of individuals' needs is comprehensive and includes specialist and multi-disciplinary information about individual students. A support plan is agreed and resources, including assistive technology and other aides, are allocated. A hoist was purchased for one student whose need was identified as the result of a review after her pre-entry assessment had been completed. Effective arrangements to support students with literacy and numeracy are made through a range of workshops.

31. A well-structured and coherent curriculum provides effective development of literacy and numeracy at entry and pre-entry level. Programmes are socially inclusive, often individualised and available to all. The extended curriculum is managed well and offers further opportunities for the development of literacy and numeracy. The individual progression programme, coupled with the wider enrichment provision, enables students to exercise choice from a range of opportunities. A significant number of previous students have made a successful transition to vocational courses, including those at other colleges. Support for transfer to the world of work is effective. A well-organised programme of work experience within the college enables the students to gain an insight into the world of work.

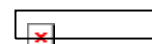
32. General information about the college is clear and is available in a variety of formats, including audio. This is currently being updated by students to enable easier and more inclusive access to this information. Effective specialist guidance enables students or their advocates to select an appropriate course and there is high-quality in-class and tutorial support.

33. Open and supportive relations with staff enable students to seek and receive support on personal issues in a timely and positive way. Students value participation in the organisation of the learning through class and tutorial discussions and enjoy expressing their opinions. Punctuality and attendance are excellent. Lateness is always challenged and any missed classes are followed up.

Leadership and management

34. Management of the provision is good. Strategic planning is purposeful and effectively integrates present arrangements with future developments. Students are pivotal to decision making. Literacy and numeracy are promoted across the college by a senior manager. Informal communication and sharing of resources are good and ensure that students are supported in their learning and for their wider needs. The self-assessment report overestimated the quality of provision. Individual learning plans are monitored rigorously. However, there is little sharing of good practice across the staff team. Equality of opportunity and recognition of diversity are valued within individual interactions and foster social inclusion.

Vocational subjects



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**.

Strengths

- good development of students' study skills

- good knowledge of work-related skills and vocabulary
- good teaching at the Dorton College site
- very effective arrangements to provide support for students
- good range of vocational programmes which meet students' aspirations for the future.

Weaknesses

- insufficient adaptation of materials in a minority of lessons at partner colleges
- too little information about students' progress in partner colleges.

Scope of provision

35. There are 49 students are enrolled on vocational courses. Most of the programmes are provided at local partner colleges. Students taught by teachers in these colleges are supported by staff from Dorton College. Students can study practical subjects, such as catering and hospitality, or more theoretical subjects, such as business administration. Programmes range from entry level to level 3, which match the wide range of ability of students at Dorton. Qualifications achieved include NVQ, GNVQ and vocational A levels. Dorton College offers a BTEC national diploma in media, as well as an Open College Network (OCN) level 2 media waves course. Six students are studying on these courses. The residential training unit-funded students are taught at the Dorton site. One client is enrolled on a course to become a personal assistant in legal studies. The remainder are working towards NVQ administration level 2 and CLAIT qualifications.

Achievement and standards

36. Students' achievements are good. Nearly all students gain nationally recognised vocational qualifications and many move from one level to a higher qualification during their time at the college. In 2002/03, 75% of students gained their full awards. Students make satisfactory progress with key skills and good progress in developing their awareness of the requirements of the workplace. They know of the importance of organisation, safe practice and good working methods. They are also well placed to make realistic choices about future courses and vocations.

37. In practical areas, students demonstrate how well they have understood instructions and how they overcome difficulties presented by their limited vision. Where they are unable to undertake a task fully, such as a health and safety check, they are able to explain the importance of such tasks and how others carry them out. Many students have a good knowledge of office practice. For example, those students who are funded by the residential training unit are making good progress in

using office applications of information technology. Those working at higher levels explain how an office can be organised efficiently. Students use the correct terminology to describe workplace practices and make good use of this knowledge in their written work.

38. The achievements of residential training unit students are good. With little experience of office-related work before attending college, they rapidly gain confidence in using office applications of ICT. Most make good progress in achieving external qualifications. During the last 4 years, 27 of the 32 students who completed the course gained marketable qualifications in administration or ICT. The standard of students' work in lessons is good.

39. Students develop their study skills well. They know the importance of meeting deadlines for the completion of units and assignments. Those who fall behind frequently request help from support staff, which enables them to organise their work more effectively. Students know the importance of good presentation and will often review their work to make sure it is of sufficient quality. The portfolios of residential training unit students are presented well. As they progress in their courses, students take increasing responsibility for their own work and are less reliant on support staff. They make good use of the readily available IT facilities to organise and improve their work.

Quality of education and training

40. Well over half of the teaching is good or better, and very little is unsatisfactory. Teaching is good at Dorton College and support staff make a substantial contribution to learning at the local partner colleges. Support in evening workshops is well related to students' main course of study. Teaching and learning for residential training unit students are planned particularly well in order to take account of students' varied starting points, rates of progress and individual abilities. Teachers plan thoroughly to meet the varying needs of students, taking into account their degree of visual impairment and their range of ability, and provide clear instructions, which are listened to carefully by students. Good judgements are made about when to intervene in students' learning and when to allow them to learn from mistakes. Students are provided with the confidence to proceed, but are also encouraged to tackle weaknesses in their work.

41. The impact of teaching at local partner colleges is more variable. The majority of lessons are planned carefully and, where there is close liaison with Dorton support staff, teaching is effective. Students are enthusiastic about their learning. In these lessons, teachers include students well in all aspects of learning, including practical activities and discussions. In a minority of lessons, there is too little advance planning for the needs of visually impaired students. Dorton students are provided with the same photocopied materials as the rest of the group. Support staff work hard to compensate for this shortcoming, compiling detailed notes for students and offering them suitable advice, such as interpreting the teacher's instructions. Requests for advice and information are acted upon promptly; this helps students to put their study time to good use. Particularly good support is provided for students who are struggling to cope with their courses and practical solutions are offered which help students to overcome difficulties.

42. Resources are used effectively to support students' learning. There are appropriate numbers of staff to support students in lessons in other colleges. The support they give is effective in enabling students to make progress both on their course of study and in their social development. Students following vocational courses in mainstream colleges have good support during private study time in well-resourced base rooms. Students following vocational courses on the main site use a good range of equipment for their visual impairment. Classrooms on the main site are comfortable, though a few are too small for the number of students who wish to use them.

43. The skills of the residential training unit students are carefully assessed on entry, and the outcomes influence their programme of study. Detailed learning plans for individuals do not always show planned outcomes or expected dates of achievement, however. Students' work for NVQs is mainly assessed in the workplace. Internal verification is planned carefully, comprehensive and results in clear guidance to assessors.

44. Students' general approach to learning is monitored carefully. Their attendance, concentration

and attitudes to work at partner colleges are carefully recorded by support staff and reported to personal tutors based at Dorton College. Prompt adjustments are made to the level of support when necessary. Personal tutors receive far less information about students' progress from partner colleges, however. There is no system for the regular reporting of this information from teachers at partner colleges to tutors at Dorton College.

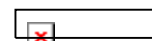
45. Students have access to an impressive range of vocational programmes. They can make choices which suit their ability and interests. A good balance is achieved between more demanding courses, usually run at the local partner colleges, and basic courses more frequently run at Dorton College. Students usually have a clear idea about how the programme they are following will help them achieve their career goals. Dorton College's clear commitment to increasing the range of vocational programmes has helped to widen the opportunities available to all students. This helps to sustain students' interest and provides a good basis for the students to make informed choices.

46. Students are well inducted onto courses and support arrangements are managed well, enabling students to succeed in often quite demanding circumstances. The frequent review of arrangements ensures that the high quality of support is sustained. Students are well prepared for life after college. Students recognise the relevance of the courses they are following and few withdraw from them before completion.

Leadership and management

47. Vocational programmes at Dorton College are well managed. Strategic objectives for the development of the residential training unit provision are comprehensive. However, strategic planning for the links with partner colleges is less effective. Dorton College's managers have less information about teaching quality at partner colleges, which means that it can be difficult to monitor how successful teaching arrangements are. Dorton College's managers are informed if students fall behind or do not submit their work. However, there is too much reliance on the support staff to provide information about the classes. There are few arrangements for the sharing of good practice with the partner colleges. The promotion of disability equality is satisfactory. The self-assessment report identified the weaknesses, but overestimated the strengths.

Social and life skills



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**.

Strengths

- very good development of skills for independent living

- very good teaching

- very good tutorials

- good support for students

- good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient adapted aids to encourage independence in daily living
- lack of challenge for able students.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers both a formal and informal programme of living skills to all students in order to maximise their independence. The programme for independent living includes personal care and domestic skills, cookery and budgeting and planned participation in recreational activities and takes place mainly in the residences. Mobility training and occupational therapy are an integral part of each student's programme. The range of accommodation at the Dorton College site and within the locality allows students' progression towards independence with appropriately decreasing levels of support. Other aspects of the programme promote active participation in the wider community through shopping, attending local colleges and using recreational facilities.

49. There are 19 students on formally taught programmes of skills for life and individual progression and working towards accredited awards. The skills for life curriculum covers community, environment, home management, leisure, the world of work, ICT and basic skills. Students following the individual progression programme are able to develop literacy, numeracy, IT, vocational and work-based skills. Students participate in links with partner colleges and community projects. An extensive extended curriculum is available to both residential and day students to support the development of social skills.

Achievement and standards

50. The acquisition of skills for independent living is very good; students are successful in developing confidence, personal skills and greater independence. For example, one student has a system for identifying bank notes by size and texture and folding them in different ways to identify them in her purse. Other students, having passed the required mobility assessments, are able to travel independently into the local town. Students develop laundry skills and some are able to successfully use the requisite machines in other environments. The assessment of these achievements consistently informs the design of individual learning programmes. The measurement and tracking of students' progress are good and inform the regular review of students' objectives and achievements.

51. External accreditation is used where appropriate on the skills for life programmes, utilising the OCN pre-foundation progression award at entry level and level 1 and OCN accreditation for life and living. Most students achieve a full award over two years, with others achieving unit accreditation as appropriate.

Quality of education and training

52. The teaching and learning of social and life skills are very good. Half of the teaching and learning was very good or excellent. Staff have a good knowledge of the individual needs of students and

understand the impact of their visual impairment on learning. In the most effective lessons, teaching is planned to meet the requirements of individual learners and is focused on preparing for the future. In these lessons, the aim is to encourage students to play a full part in lively activities that help them to develop and reach their personal targets. In one lesson, students explored a range of communication strategies, including finger spelling and five different embossed systems, and had a lively discussion about the inventors. All the students arrived at the lesson well prepared. In all lessons, techniques are adapted and devised to suit the needs of students, developing independent and confident learners. In the less effective lessons, planning does not include activities to stretch the more able students.

53. All staff are well qualified and experienced in supporting the needs of students who have visual impairment. The overall ratio of staff to students is good although, when students are undertaking activities such as cooking a house meal, there is insufficient staffing for all students to play an active part simultaneously. A wide variety of specialist equipment is generally available for promoting learning and independence. Learning resources are of a high quality and suitable for the needs and abilities of the students. A minority of students do not have access, however, to the necessary adaptations and aids to support their independence, such as a pouring aid for a kettle or the appropriate iron. Students' tuition in occupational therapy is not provided in their living accommodation, which is confusing for students. Accommodation is of a high quality and provides a good living and learning environment.

54. Initial assessment is very effective and results in good baseline assessments against which progress can be measured. Students are fully involved in setting targets and have a clear understanding of the progress they make. In group and individual tutorials, the monitoring of progress is good. In the most effective tutorials, students outline their individual targets, present evidence to justify their achievement and critically assess their progress. The achievement of the targets is strengthened by peer and staff assessment. Success is celebrated and areas for further development clearly outlined. If a student's progress is causing concern, effective supportive action, such as additional individual teaching or support, is put in place.

55. The curriculum and specific programmes are designed well in order to meet the individual needs of students, as identified at initial assessments. Each student's programme includes academic, independent living and social opportunities. Mobility training and occupational therapy are available to all students. Residential and day students have access to the same elements within their programmes, with many day students participating in the evening and weekend activities. The curriculum is responsive and programmes are changed and adapted to meet the needs of individuals.

Support for students is good and the college promotes a strong ethos of dignity and respect for all. A multi-disciplinary team gives students support with academic, independent living, social, mobility and occupational therapy needs. Students speak very highly of the support they receive from their life skills tutors and the teaching and support staff. Some support workers give too much support, however, for example, removing students' coats when they can do this for themselves and leading students who have the skills to use long canes, specifically to enable them to move about independently.

Leadership and management

56. Curriculum management is good. Communication between care and education staff teams is good. The application of quality assurance processes has resulted in improvements in most areas, with particularly good outcomes in the curriculum for independent living. All staff are aware of each student's entitlement and how this drives the design of individual programmes. Inspectors agreed with the overall outcomes of internal lesson observations in this area of learning. All staff are involved effectively in the self-assessment process. The grade awarded by the staff was higher than that awarded by inspectors. Managers respond well to the views of staff and students. Staff show respect for each student, but do not explicitly promote diversity.

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