

Linkage College

CONTENTS

[Basic information about the college](#)

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

[Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[How well is the college led and managed?](#)

[To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?](#)

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

[Part B: The college as a whole](#)

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of teaching, training and learning](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

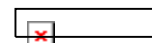
[Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[Pre-vocational programmes](#)

[Literacy and numeracy](#)

[Social and life skills](#)

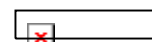
Basic information about the college



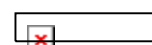
Name of college:	Linkage College
Type of college:	Independent specialist college
Principal:	Hugh Williams
Address of college:	Toynton Campus Toynton All Saints Spilsby Lincolnshire PE23 5AE
Telephone number:	01790 752499
Fax number:	01790 754058
Chair of governors:	Dr David Ferguson
Registered charity number:	504913
Name of reporting inspector:	Diane Stacey
Dates of inspection:	26-30 April 2004

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

Part A: Summary



Information about the college



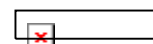
Linkage College is a part of the Linkage Community Trust, which was established in 1976. The trust currently provides further education (FE), care services and employment services for young people with learning difficulties and associated disabilities. Linkage College is a specialist residential college with two main campuses: Toynton Hall in Spilsby and Weelsby Hall in Grimsby. Each campus has an additional satellite site. There is a small factory unit on the Vale Industrial Estate in Spilsby and purpose-refurbished industrial premises in Grimsby. Both of these facilities are used predominately for the teaching of the pre-vocational curriculum. All accommodation is located to enable reasonable travel times to college. Residential accommodation at Toynton is based in the main hall, in purpose-built on-site houses and in the local, mainly rural, community. The accommodation at Weelsby is also based in the main hall, but the majority of provision is within the mainly urban community.

Currently the college has a total of 203 students; of whom 120 are aged over 19, and 67 are female. There are 94 students in residence at the Weelsby campus and 98 at the Toynton campus. Eleven day students attend the Toynton site. The college recruits nationally for approximately two-thirds of its students. The remainder are recruited locally, mainly within Lincolnshire. Students attending the college have a wide range of disabilities: from moderate to severe learning disabilities. The student

population includes students who have Down's syndrome, autistic spectrum disorder, epilepsy, speech and language difficulties as well as less overt emotional and behavioural difficulties. The college also has specialist support facilities for students who are visually impaired or hearing impaired, in addition to their learning disability. The college does not accept students who have significant personal care needs. The purpose and ethos of the college are set out in its mission statement. Linkage College 'seeks to provide individualised quality FE and care for students with learning difficulties and other associated disabilities'. The main aim of the college is 'to help every student develop towards adulthood and to achieve greater independence in preparation for his/her future life'.

The curriculum offers opportunities at various levels; for example, pre-entry level to level 2 as well as courses leading to a range of vocational qualifications. There are 21 students who attend local general FE colleges for part of their programme.

How effective is the college?



The quality of provision is satisfactory. It is good in pre-vocational programmes and satisfactory in both literacy and numeracy and social and life skills. The standard of residential provision is good. Students receive good support and care. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

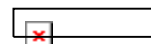
- good range of accredited achievements
- good teaching in art and drama and in vocational subjects
- good range and use of information technology (IT)
- very good work experience and work-based learning programmes
- wide range of enrichment activities
- very good support for students
- good leadership and management.

What should be improved

- setting of short-term core objectives in lessons
- inconsistent recording of incidental learning
- access to careers resources and other reference materials
- consistency of baseline assessments
- sharing of best practice.

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

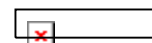


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Pre-vocational programmes	Good: Achievement is good and standards of students' work are high. There is good teaching of the extensive pre-vocational curriculum in a wide range of well-resourced learning environments. Incidental learning is not always recognised or recorded and the nature of learning is not sufficiently understood by some support staff. Work experience and work-based learning programmes are structured well.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: Achievements are satisfactory. The majority of teaching is satisfactory or better. In most lessons, learning is supported effectively where teachers share individual objectives with students and challenge them to achieve or improve their learning. Short-term objectives are underdeveloped in lesson activities and there is insufficient recognition and recording of incidental learning.
Social and life skills	Satisfactory: Students make satisfactory progress in independence skills and good progress in enrichment activities such as art, drama

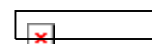
	and sport. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory; in art and drama they are good. The more able students are regularly challenged to achieve the standards of which they are capable. Support for students is effective. Good practice is not shared sufficiently among staff.
--	--

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. The principal has ensured that the many issues raised in the last inspection are being addressed to very good effect. Since the last inspection the college has made significant improvements to quality and outcomes. These improvements continue to gather pace. Strategic plans across the Linkage Community Trust are coherent and are linked to good operational processes and outcomes. Staff are fully involved in decision making. Staff and students are committed to the organisation and its objectives. Very good working relationships with local agencies broaden opportunities for students. Quality assurance arrangements are robust and have a positive impact on outcomes. Key performance indicators are clearly defined and regularly monitored. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are managed well and staff appreciate the regularity and care of the process. Trustees have restructured their work to respond to the issues raised in the last inspection. However, they still lack clarity as to how best to hold the college to account for its outcomes. The trustees do not yet rigorously monitor the quality of their own performance. Financial management is now satisfactory.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



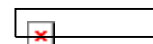
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. It offers an inclusive learning environment that matches the provision to the individual students' needs. The college offers places to students with moderate to severe learning difficulties. Some students have additional disabilities such as visual and hearing impairments. Individual care and learning programmes are designed to meet the specific needs of students that are identified through comprehensive assessment procedures. There are high expectations of students to achieve independence skills in budgeting, catering, personal care and mobility. The majority of students achieve these skills. Good use is made of provision in the local community. Students have opportunities to attend local FE colleges, which are close to both sites, for part of their programme. There are good arrangements for students to practise their skills through a range of work experience placements. Students use their local communities for an extensive range of enrichment activities. Literacy and numeracy provision is effectively integrated into programmes and promoted in the college. Meeting the communication needs of students with more complex problems is underdeveloped on the Weelsby site. The college is sensitive to issues surrounding equal opportunities and the promotion of equality of opportunities within the curriculum is developing well. The college's race relations policy has recently been updated and adequately takes into account the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Ethnicity is monitored effectively and staff challenge racial or gender stereotypes as they occur.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Support and guidance for students are good. Students are well cared for and benefit from the wide range of specialist provision and facilities. Interventions from specialists are very effective and integrated well into students' programmes, although not all students receive adequate support for speech and language therapy on one campus.

Transition arrangements into, within, and out of, the college are very good and independence skills are developed and encouraged at every opportunity. At the last inspection, support for students was managed well and that is still the case. All students have risk assessments associated with all their main activities. The support provided by personal and independence tutors is valued by students and is good. Links with the local Connexions partnership are not fully developed. Parents, and those with a legitimate interest, are well informed about life at the college, students' progress and achievement.

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

- learning things they did not have the opportunity to learn at school
- it's 'excellent' and 'great'
- feeling at home amongst lots of students with disabilities
- learning how to understand people
- increasing confidence, feeling able to talk to people they don't know
- the help they get and being able to help each other
- travelling alone on the bus
- the houses they live in.

What they feel could be improved

- more computers and internet access after 9pm
- some classes which are boring
- more toilets at Weelsby
- going home - because its boring and there's nothing to do.

Other information

Part B: The college as a whole

Achievement and standards

1. Students achieve are good standards, overall. They acquire a good range of qualifications for accredited courses and through enrichment activities. Pass rates are good for units of accreditation and for full awards. For example, one student achieved a grade A in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) art. During 2002/03, 23 students gained units of accreditation in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT); one student gained a distinction in initial text processing; 41 students achieved literacy qualifications; and six students were awarded their national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 in administration. Students attending local colleges achieve well. They have successfully gained qualifications in food preparation and cooking, basic food hygiene, Open College Network (OCN) vehicle maintenance, childcare and the Football Association (FA) assistant club coach award. Retention rates are good and are comparable with other specialist colleges nationally; they have been around 98% on both campuses for the past three years. Students are punctual to most lessons and work placements; when they are not, tutors effectively challenge them.

2. The local newspaper recently included an article celebrating the achievement of young people gaining the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, which involved two students from Linkage College. These young people had planned and carried out the award tasks at different levels and in their own time.

3. Students are achieving satisfactory progress over time in their life and social skills. There is a high expectation by staff that students will work towards developing independent living skills within their residences and develop their mobility and use of public transport to college and work placements. For a small number of students, supported accommodation is arranged in the main buildings of each campus. The majority of students live in independent houses, either on the campus or in local towns,

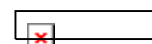
and make progress in looking after themselves. They are encouraged to develop their social and language skills through peer assessments. For example, a group of students rehearsing for a show made confident, well-constructed comments and gave a mature critique of one student's solo song performance.

4. Students have good opportunities to gain access to a variety of work placements with local employers. These placements challenge students and provide them with the opportunities to practise skills learnt as well as developing additional skills.

5. Achievements are appropriately recognised and celebrated through a variety of means such as photographic displays, certificates, performances, reviews, annual reports, tutorials and progress records. The construction workshop has introduced a student of the month award. Peers and staff vote for the student and a photograph of the winner on a certificate is displayed in a frame in the workshop.

6. The breadth of learning that occurs for many students is not always captured or recorded. In some lessons, only a narrow range of achievement is identified and recorded. Smaller, incremental steps of subject-related achievements are not always recorded. There is an over-reliance by teachers on general core objectives as a basis for recording achievements.

Quality of teaching, training and learning



7. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The majority of teaching and learning is satisfactory or better. The teaching of pre-vocational programmes is particularly effective and good use is made of realistic vocational and working environments and situations to develop students' skills.

8. In the best lessons, teachers adopt a variety of teaching approaches that encourage active and enjoyable learning. Teaching is challenging and expectations of students' involvement in the learning process are high. Students are encouraged to develop advocacy skills and make choices about their provision. There is good teaching in art and drama, where students are encouraged to give peer assessments of the lessons' activities. Through their programmes, students are able to build on their potential and extend their aspirations. There are many opportunities for students to exercise choice, appropriately guided to ensure a coherent programme. However, the range of choice available to students at level 3 is sometimes limited and does not always present them with the reality of complete independence. Timetabled allocations on some courses are too long and students find it hard to maintain their concentration. In a small number of lessons, students' interest was not maintained and tasks set did not always meet the individual needs of the students. Some tasks are not always designed to challenge the more able students and are well within the capabilities of those students whose skills are less developed. Some incidental learning was not recognised or recorded. For example, where students have demonstrated improved communication skills either through group discussions or solo performances.

9. A standardised lesson plan is in use. In many cases, lessons were managed effectively and supported by clear objectives. There is a clear link between the overall organisation of lessons, individual learning plans and lesson activities. Individual learning plans have improved considerably since the last inspection and now draw together most aspects of the students' experience. For example, education and independent living objectives are incorporated into every individual learning plan. However, broad learning objectives are not always broken down into small and easily recognisable steps or subject-specific goals. For example, in literacy and numeracy, incidental learning is not always acknowledged and insufficiently frequent reviews do not always give students enough positive feedback on the progress they have made. There are good, positive working relationships between staff and students. Most students receive good care and attention. Not all support staff have a clear understanding of individual students' needs.

10. There is a good use of ICT. This enables students to access course materials, for example, to use interactive white boards, specialist keyboards and symbol software. Paper-based and software learning resources are insufficient to support lessons in literacy and numeracy and independence skills.

11. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified. Many have, or are working towards, specialist qualifications, for example, a masters degree in dyspraxia or counselling skills. There are sufficient staff to effectively support students in both the education and residential provision. Staff benefit from good opportunities for professional development to gain additional skills and qualifications as well as to update their knowledge and expertise. Independence tutors are currently upgrading their qualifications to NVQ level 3 in promoting independence. Registered managers are working towards NVQ level 4 in care management. College staff also gain access to a wide range of corporate training associated with Linkage Community Trust. This includes Midas vehicle training, management training, management of challenging behaviour, fire safety and first aid. Staff have received awareness training in equal opportunities, but there is insufficient attention to detailed training relating to the implications of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Training programmes for staff teaching literacy and numeracy have not been fully implemented. Half of the staff involved in the teaching of literacy and numeracy have undertaken initial diagnostic training, with the remainder planned for this year. Three learning assistants have gained an NVQ level 3 in literacy and numeracy.

12. The college has developed its information and communication technology (ICT) resources and they are now good both in teaching rooms and residences. All classrooms have at least one computer. There is a well-resourced networked IT room and interactive whiteboards in some teaching rooms, which are used effectively and encourage student participation.

13. The college accommodation strategy is being implemented successfully. A development on the Weelsby campus is currently being built and is scheduled to open in January 2005. This building will house a kitchen and teaching rooms. There are good vocational resources at the King Edward Street site, including for catering, car valeting and maintenance, woodwork, administration and reception skills as well as for a variety of arts and craft studies. Teaching rooms within the college sites are generally resourced well, although some are too small for the numbers of students.

14. A small number of students requiring more intensive independent living support are housed within the main halls of residence at both sites. The rest are accommodated in houses within the grounds or in the local community. Accommodation is mostly inviting and comfortable. Some of the communal lounge areas are old fashioned in their decor and furniture. Students at the Weelsby campus are housed in one of the 13 external houses situated in local towns and with easy public access to the college. On the Toynton campus, accommodation is provided in four houses within the grounds. There are also six houses in local towns. Residences provide a good focus for students to develop and acquire independence skills. Students personalise their own rooms. There are areas in each house for learning sessions with access to at least one desktop computer and laptop.

15. There are insufficient teaching and reference resources. Some resources for literacy and numeracy are out of date. No central library facilities are provided on either site, although a room has been allocated for this purpose at the Toynton campus. Career resources are limited and those that are available are not easily accessible to students. The college employs a speech and language therapist, who is involved very effectively in students' pre-entry assessment when relevant. However, students have insufficient access to ongoing support on one site. The college currently has a vacancy for an additional speech and language specialist.

16. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. The pre-entry assessment is very thorough. Effective use is made of the multidisciplinary team to produce a constructive report that aids planning for individual students. It takes account of information from previous schools and specialist support services to form a realistic basis for identifying the programme for each student.

17. Annual review reports are detailed with comprehensive information from the multidisciplinary team. Effective risk assessments are in place for each student's daily timetabled activities as well as for the evening and weekend extended curriculum. Those who have a legitimate interest are well

informed of the progress students are making.

18. The college has initiated an analysis of the performance of those students undertaking the independence curriculum. Their initial achievement is recorded and reviewed at intervals. The results clearly indicate the progress made by these students. A summary report is used to inform staff of students' progress. The results have also been useful in creating internal college benchmarks.

19. A basic assessment for literacy and numeracy is made at the pre-entry stage. A diagnostic assessment tool is not currently used, but it is to be introduced from September 2004 once all staff have completed the training in its use. Individual students' targets are specified on every lesson plan but these do not always relate to the lesson.

20. A baseline assessment procedure is used for continuous assessment over the first term. This is not being used consistently by all staff. No baseline assessment process exists for the enrichment programme and progress in enrichment activities and independence skills are not always captured or recorded. The formal reviews of students' progress are insufficient. These take place termly and individual learning plans are not updated regularly enough to reflect students' progress.

21. Many improvements have been made to the curriculum since the last inspection so that provision is now good. The college offers a good range of courses. External qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT are offered. There are 20 students studying towards NVQ level 1 in business administration, hotel and catering, vehicle valeting and horticulture. There are 21 students currently taking courses at local partner colleges in media studies, fabrication, life drawing, basic food hygiene and sport with. Good use is made of residences and the community for students to practise and develop their independence skills.

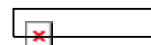
22. Students have a broad range of opportunities to engage in work experience in real and challenging circumstances. The college offers a comprehensive range of activities in the evening and at weekends. Students are encouraged to become Millennium Volunteers, participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and enjoy many sports and community-based recreation activities. Work experience opportunities are good. Students undertake work in national department stores, production companies, and service industries as well as in more sheltered working environments.

23. Transition arrangements both into and out of the college are well managed and give students the opportunity to influence their programmes and destinations. Good links with general FE colleges and employers benefit students and increase their options. Of the 40 leavers in 2003, 20 went on to study at general FE colleges and 8 into employment or Linkage occupational services. Four moved into independent living and 16 into supported living environments.

24. The support and guidance students receive are good. All students have independence tutors who live and work with them. Personal tutors work directly with students to support them through their learning programmes. Students receive regular individual and group tutorials. Specialist support meets the differing medical and learning needs of students, although support for speech and language therapy is inadequate for students who require it on one campus. A specialist team provides psychiatric and psychological support where appropriate. Induction, participation and transition are all managed well.

25. Students' attendance is closely monitored. Links between the residential staff and the teaching staff have been strengthened since the last inspection. Students are increasingly able to exert an influence over the choices they make and the options available to them. The student council is developing as a valuable mechanism for self-advocacy by students. A transition team supports students as they go through their final year at college. Work experience placements for students are good. For many students, work placements are good opportunities for working within the community and gaining valuable independence skills. Students speak highly of these opportunities, which build self-esteem, confidence and enthusiasm.

Leadership and management



26. Leadership and management are good. Management in the key functional areas of the college is good and overall the new leadership has very effectively brought significant positive change. The Linkage Community Trust has been active in supporting improvements.

27. Weaknesses apparent in the last inspection have been addressed effectively. For example, a new permanent principal is in post; strategic plans are co-ordinated and coherent; and well-considered quality assurance arrangements are in place. Work on performance indicators is beginning to have an impact; the quality of teaching accommodation is much improved; health and safety issues have been addressed; and staff training is linked to performance and monitored to ensure maximum impact on standards and quality. Improvements to the quality of teaching have had a positive impact on the students' learning. Curriculum provision judged unsatisfactory in the last inspection is now satisfactory or better.

28. Strategic plans across the Linkage Community Trust are coherent. Strategic planning identifies key priorities and direction for staff teams. The trust has been restructured to better reflect its responsibilities for the outcomes of the college. Its members are active in developing an accountability framework within which to continuously evaluate the work of the college. As yet, this work is not fully co-ordinated between the trustees, chief executive and college advisory group and the college management remains unclear as to which performance indicators will be consistently applied by the trustees in the future. The trustees do not rigorously monitor the quality of their own performance.

29. Operational targets are set within the framework of strategic plans. Planning objectives are clear and broken down into targets that carry accountability, success indicators and costs. The principal leads this process effectively, giving staff space to contribute their own ideas and priorities. Regular team meetings and circulation of minutes promote team building. Since the last full inspection, there have been a significant number of staff and role changes at the college. Almost all Linkage College staff are highly committed to ensuring the best outcomes for students.

30. Quality assurance procedures are developing effectively and are much improved since the last inspection. The practice of the college reflects the aims of the policy. Quality assurance procedures take account of the standards of other stakeholders and funding bodies, are based on robust data, and use improved management information systems. Development planning and staff training take account of the outcomes of quality measures. Action points from provider quality audits are acted upon. The cycle takes into account student surveys, regular observation of teachers at work, achievement data and leavers' destinations. Not all staff are sufficiently active in applying and using the quality processes. Grades are generally realistic although inspectors judge teaching quality as more uneven than the self-assessment gradings suggest. Developments in some areas of the college, for example, vocational work, are not yet subject to quality assurance processes. Work is under way to ensure staff can gain swift access to data on students' performance.

31. The college's self-assessment provides a good framework against which progress can be measured. Self-assessment is part of the defined quality cycle and is the outcome of work by curriculum and programme teams. Key strengths and weaknesses identified are picked up in the development plan. These strengths and weaknesses reflect the outcomes of the March 2002 inspection as well as subsequent monitoring visits. The grades the college awards in the self-assessment report are similar to those found by the inspection team.

32. The college's appraisal system is linked to the outcomes of lesson observations and training opportunities. Careful planning ensures that appraisal and lesson observation outcomes contribute to college development planning objectives. Lesson observations have recorded outcomes based closely on the criteria from the common inspection framework. The sharing of best practice is

underdeveloped. For example, in the best lessons, skills used to plan and teach effectively have not been shared with other teaching staff. Some good practice taking place on one site is not being shared with the other campus. Staff have well-managed access to a wide range of training and development activities, some leading to high-level qualifications. There are weaknesses in the training and deployment of some learning support staff.

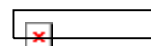
33. The college makes excellent use of most advanced teaching practitioners. There are 13 staff who have been developing learning-related initiatives over the current year, and their teaching, professional sharing and expertise are brought together to enrich quality across the whole college. Projects include assessments for dyspraxia, training for visual impairment and evaluation of behaviour programmes. Particular strengths of this work are its initial open access, the range of work being undertaken, and the links made through the work to developing the quality of teaching of all staff.

34. Students have very positive views about their experiences at Linkage College. The college has recently become more active in seeking students' views about their experiences and acting upon those views. Since the last inspection, the role of the student council has been strengthened. Representation is now comprehensive and students are able to use the council as a mechanism for influencing decision making at management level. One current concern that has been taken to senior management is the levels of personal allowances. A Lincolnshire-wide advocacy service for young people is available at the college.

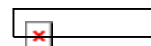
35. The race relations policy has recently been updated and takes into account the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The college applies this policy conscientiously and is beginning to assess its impact. It monitors achievements by ethnic group and staff recruitment by racial group. The SENDA policy has been reviewed and takes account of recent legislation. Whilst most staff have undertaken awareness training in these areas, formal training for all staff in the implications of these policies is still under way.

36. Since the last inspection, the college has made significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning, the monitoring and review of outcomes for students, assessment and quality assurance procedures, the standards of some teaching accommodation, and strategic planning. Some of the issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed and many more are in the process of being tackled by staff with determination, enthusiasm and commitment. The board of trustees and the chief executive of Linkage Community Trust have acted swiftly and appropriately to recognise their responsibilities for students. The college now provides satisfactory value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Pre-vocational programmes



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

Strengths

- majority of teaching that is good or better

- very good work experience and work-based learning programmes
- good levels of achievement across pre-vocational curriculum
- good management of curriculum development
- good learning that is promoted through real work environments
- strong promotion of health and safety.

Weaknesses

- inconsistent awareness of the nature of learning by learning assistants
- limited access to careers material
- inconsistent recording of incidental learning.

Scope of provision

37. The college provides a good range of pre-vocational programmes. These courses currently extend from entry level to NVQ level 1 in administration, horticulture, food service, food preparation and cooking and foundation food hygiene. Some students attend local general FE colleges for a range of vocational taster programmes at entry level and level 1. Others attend courses run by local training providers. Recent introductions to the range of courses include fork-lift truck operations and City and Guilds preparation for employment. Other pre-vocational programmes, including vehicle valeting, construction, bicycle maintenance and art and craft, provide students with opportunities to acquire vocational foundation skills and develop personal and core skills through practical and experiential learning. A strong and extensive work experience programme provides realistic employment settings. Placements include sheltered and open employment within the local community. Work experience is an important element of these programmes and forms part of the transition process.

Achievement and standards

38. Achievement across the pre-vocational curriculum is good. Nine students have completed full NVQ level 1 awards in different subjects since the start of the academic year. During the spring term,

13 students achieved the foundation food hygiene certificate; 7 students completed the recently introduced preparation for employment certificate level 2 and there are a further 125 students registered, 55 of whom are on target to complete the certificate by the end of the summer term. Students effectively acquire transferable skills and personal skills. They develop a range of transferable skills through their external work experience placements. These experiences promote self-confidence and independence. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own travel arrangements, arrive on time, dress appropriately and make arrangements for their own lunches. For example, one student makes his own sandwiches before leaving his off-campus accommodation in time to catch the bus to his placement.

Quality of education and training

39. Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, different teaching approaches are used and opportunities are available for students to make choices and develop independent learning skills: learning is enjoyable and suitably challenging. Teachers encourage active learning and participation in a range of activities. They use a range of teaching methods not only to accommodate preferred learning styles but also to meet specific learning needs. For example, green text on a white background is used to address scotopic sensitivity for one particular student.

40. The standardised lesson plans, which include individual learning objectives and core objectives, are used well. The majority of sessions are planned well and the session plan includes feedback to inform the setting of objectives for future sessions. Effective planning incorporates a clear focus on literacy and numeracy targets within lessons. Students demonstrated effective skills arising out of subject-specific activities in a majority of lessons. Tracking and assessment methods are not yet fully developed across all programme areas. There is some inconsistent recording of incidental learning. Lesson aims that are achievable and appropriate to students are relevant to students' needs and aspirations and to their planned destinations; for example, one student, who is taking NVQ level 1 administration and undertaking work experience as a receptionist, hopes for a job as a receptionist at the end of her course.

41. A diversity of locations within and beyond the main college site enables students to learn within real environments and situations. Opportunities to learn in this way promote independence and prepare students for transition to careers. The well-structured and supported work experience programme uses college work areas for internal work placements. Students are able to apply for vacancies within the work experience programme through different channels, including the job club, with an authentic application procedure and interview. External work experience provides valuable work practice within the type of employment that may be a final destination for some students. One student on a placement as a waitress is hoping to gain employment in a similar position when she returns home.

42. Students are involved in setting up new courses; for example, four horticultural students wanted to become fork-lift truck drivers and the college explored the availability of a local course and, once this was located, enrolled the students. One student has achieved the qualification and the other three students are on target to achieve it by the end of the term.

43. The transition programme is structured well and supports students through the required procedures. A post-college follow up monitors students' progress to the next stage of their lives. However, the college lacks adequate library facilities, including an appropriate range of easily accessible careers advisory material, to support this programme.

44. The most effective support staff have a clear understanding of the learning needs of the students and know how to support the teacher. However, support staff's understanding of the nature of learning is variable and results in some inappropriate support or unsuitable activities. For example, one student who was unable to write an answer was instructed to trace round the letters written by the learning support assistant.

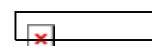
Leadership and management

45. The management of the pre-vocational curriculum is good. New courses are appropriate to students' needs and aspirations. Introduction of the preparation for employment programme has provided good opportunities for pre-vocational students to gain vocational foundation skills.

46. There is strong leadership in developing effective health and safety practices and high standards of basic health and safety are promoted and observed in classrooms and workplaces. All students have an individual risk assessment and all vocational areas work placements and work-based activities have a formal risk assessment.

47. There are rigorous quality assurance systems with comprehensive external and internal verification procedures. Some courses and programmes are recent innovations and have yet to be subject to the overall quality cycle. Staff are actively involved in the self-assessment process. Equal opportunities and diversity are promoted well in the curriculum and gender and racial stereotyping is challenged when appropriate.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- effective integration of literacy and numeracy into vocational subjects
- good use of IT in lessons
- wide range of ICT resources.

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of short-term objectives in lessons
- inconsistent formal review of progress
- insufficient recognition and recording of incidental learning.

Scope of provision

48. The college provides discrete courses for literacy, numeracy and ICT and offers a new media

studies course which develops literacy, numeracy and communication skills through the study of modern media technology. In addition, students receive integrated literacy and numeracy support through their pre-vocational and social and life skills curricula.

49. The learning range is from pre-entry level to level 2. No student has been assessed below milestone 6 in the pre-entry curriculum and the majority of students are at entry level for both literacy and numeracy. A small number of students are studying at level 1 and at level 2. Six students are enrolled on a literacy and numeracy programme in a local FE college.

Achievement and standards

50. Standards of work are satisfactory or better in the majority of lessons observed. Students improved their use of descriptive vocabulary through the creative use of an interactive whiteboard programme. They were shown a range of portraits and had to decide how to describe them, using age, expression and clothing as descriptors. In another lesson three versions of the same simple questionnaire on entertainment opportunities had been produced. Two were text based and used simple and more complex sentences and the third used symbols. They were at a level and standard to support learning effectively.

51. Students' achievements are satisfactory and are cross-referenced to the standards of the adult core curriculum. Externally accredited programmes are used appropriately to recognise progress. A significant number of students have achieved, or are working towards, IT qualifications and literacy and numeracy tests.

Quality of education and training

52. The majority of teaching is satisfactory or better. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. In the better lessons, the learning content is contextualised so that students can see the relevance of the tasks they are to complete. In one lesson, students were developing their literacy and numeracy skills through an integrated cross-college learning theme on entertainment. They researched local tourist attractions to identify opening hours, entrance costs and concessionary fees.

53. Literacy and numeracy are integrated effectively into vocational subjects. In a bicycle maintenance lesson, students demonstrated effective numerical skills through the selection of appropriate gauge spanners. In a catering lesson, students accurately checked the required quantities of packaged table condiments using a product template.

54. There is consistent planning across both sites. Teachers use an agreed college format and cross-reference individual learning objectives to elements of the adult core curriculum. In most lessons, teachers share individual objectives with students and challenge them to achieve or improve their learning.

55. Where teaching is less effective, lesson activities are not related to recognised themes or contexts, and the literacy and numeracy tasks are presented as stand-alone activities. There is insufficient development of short-term objectives in lessons. The objectives of the adult core curriculum are agreed and set for all students. In discrete literacy and numeracy lessons, they are transferred to lesson plans but are not broken down into short-term learning objectives. Some small steps in learning are not always planned or recorded and evidence of progress towards the larger, medium-term objectives is missed. In some lessons, individuals' achievement is limited by the focus on the learning objectives of the core curriculum. The lesson plans do not capture or record the breadth of incidental learning occurring for many students. For example, in a communication lesson, students demonstrated the ability to analyse and form a reasoned argument, but this was not recorded.

56. ICT resources to support teaching and learning are good. There are a number of interactive whiteboards, flat-screen computers, laptops and specialist keyboards on each site and each residential house has been equipped with a desktop and laptop computer. Dedicated base rooms for literacy and numeracy have been refurbished and the introduction of a broadband connection has

enabled effective use of the Internet as a learning resource. Additional widget licenses have been purchased and symbols are used extensively in appropriate contexts. Some staff have attended dedicated training, and professional support is provided through the appointment of a specialist advanced practitioner and an ICT mentor and co-ordinator. In some lessons, teachers used interactive whiteboards to explain concepts and demonstrate skills. In others, alphasmart keyboards and desktop computers were used to develop free-writing skills, and a range of literacy and numeracy tasks and the Internet were used extensively to promote research.

57. Pre-entry assessment is thorough and comprehensive. On entry to the college, the majority of students complete an initial assessment to establish their learning level. Baseline assessment has improved, but the process lacks clarity and there is confusion about its timing and purpose. Some objectives on individual learning plans are inappropriate and vary from baseline judgements. There are inconsistencies in the formal review of progress. The agreed procedure is for teachers to provide a progress report each term to the students' personal tutors. Some students receive more frequent reviews. However, in a significant number of individual records, there are lengthy gaps between review dates. In addition, little evidence of evaluative feedback is available and review information is not dated or is of variable quality.

58. Opportunities for staff training and development are good. All staff have completed training in the adult core curriculum and two staff are trained in life leadership and management. Two dedicated literacy and numeracy learning assistants are currently undertaking a specialist level 3 qualification. The majority of staff have teaching qualifications, but few teachers have specialist qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

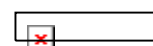
59. Several teaching rooms and a few of the residential houses timetabled for lessons are too small to effectively accommodate the activities and the number of students and staff involved.

60. Students feel well supported, and positive, constructive relationships promote learning and confidence. Learning assistants provide a high level of in-class support. They receive a copy of the lesson plan from the teacher and, in many cases, work effectively with individuals and small groups to promote learning. In addition, there are two dedicated literacy and numeracy assistants and two ICT assistants that provide specialist support to teachers and students in class. A speech and language therapist provides specialist support on one campus but his/her availability is limited at the other.

Leadership and management

61. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements in the co-ordination and organisation of literacy and numeracy across the college. A cross-college manager co-ordinates provision across both campuses and the two staff teams are starting to work and plan together. Communication has been improved; staff attend both site-specific and cross-site meetings on a regular basis. Staff are committed to improving the learning experiences of students and morale is high. Quality assurance procedures are good. There is good involvement of staff in the self-assessment process and all staff have annual appraisals. The lesson observation procedure is comprehensive. All members of staff are observed three times a year and receive constructive feedback which specifies areas for improvement. However, some internal observation grades are higher than those given during the inspection. Staff are sensitive to, and promote, equal opportunity and diversity across the curriculum.

Social and life skills



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

Strengths

- good teaching in art and drama
- wide range of enrichment activities
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- incomplete assessment practice
- insufficient sharing of good practice.

Scope of provision

62. Students develop social and life skills through the college's independence and enrichment curricula. All students follow the appropriate level of an accredited independence curriculum that covers social, domestic and mobility skills, personal presentation and development and citizenship. The curriculum is taught through lessons in students' residences, personal tutorials and the extended curriculum. In the enrichment curriculum, students choose from a range of daytime and evening courses in creative arts, health and fitness and leisure pursuits. The college provides weekend courses and extra-curricular activities, many of which lead to national awards.

Achievement and standards

63. Students make satisfactory progress in developing independence skills. They speak confidently, promote themselves well, and their personal presentation has improved. They become able to look after themselves at home and to travel more independently. They can shop for themselves and for their households and handle relationships with others. However, not all of the more able students are sufficiently challenged to achieve the standards of which they are capable. On the enrichment programme, students make good progress in art, drama and sport. A group was observed rehearsing at performance standard for a summer production. Students on national voluntary service award schemes achieve high standards.

Quality of education and training

64. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching was good in half of the lessons observed. Teachers make good use of practical and creative activities to interest and involve students. Students are asked to think about the reasons behind effective ways of doing things and there is much effective use of humour. Students are encouraged to respect each other and allow for differences of belief and opinion. The best independence lessons make good use of small-group work. Not all lessons are varied enough to maintain students' interest. Tasks are not always designed to extend the learning of the more able students or are within the capability of those whose skills are less developed. Such lessons often involve copying text, which some students may not be

able to read, in order to produce evidence for accreditation. Teachers are beginning to incorporate literacy and language development into lessons, but few staff have any specialist training.

65. Resources are satisfactory. Most staff have experience of working with students with learning difficulties and the few staff involved in teaching who do not have teaching qualifications are working towards them. Students have good access to the community using public and college transport. Sport and drama use public venues for productions and competitions. Resources for art and drama include good sound equipment and a wide variety of art materials. Art rooms are well decorated with students' work. ICT facilities are available in most classrooms, although they are not always used fully. In residential accommodation where teaching takes place, good use is made of computers but there is a shortage of software for teaching the independence curriculum. Residential accommodation is designed and decorated well, although a few rooms that are used for teaching are not large enough. There is a shortage of good paper-based materials for teaching independent living skills and a few materials are not appropriate to the age(s) of the students. A few teaching rooms are bare of stimulating decoration.

66. There is a wide range of courses and learning opportunities for independence and enrichment. Students develop their independence skills in residential accommodation and on shopping and leisure trips. They attend courses on personal presentation, personal development, relationships, citizenship, leisure, health and fitness. Day and evening courses in drama, sports, art, music, cookery and ICT offer students opportunities to further develop their skills. A wide range of sporting and leisure activities is available at evenings and weekends and many students take part in community service awards. However, some lessons are too short to develop students' skills fully while others are too long to sustain their interest.

67. Support for students is good. Support staff are well informed about students' needs and abilities and use effective strategies to develop their skills. Teachers and support staff work together effectively. Staff receive good guidance on strategies for working with students with visual impairments.

68. Most learning assistants are active in contributing positively to students' learning. Independence tutors support the development of independence skills in domestic and community environments. Support for students has a very high profile with all members of staff, including catering, driving and administrative staff, all of whom help to facilitate the development of social and life skills outside of the classroom. There are effective systems for pastoral care. Students benefit from effective guidance and support on personal issues and have weekly meetings with their personal tutors. They can also usually meet with tutors whenever the need arises. Specialist medical, psychological and speech and language support is also provided.

69. Assessment of progress is incomplete. Staff keep thorough and detailed records of students' progress towards their core targets in independence and behaviour. However, the college has yet to establish a baseline assessment process for the enrichment programme. Progress towards important subject-specific targets in both the enrichment and independence programmes is not always recorded, even when this is significant. For example, students' ability to cut a template accurately or to project their voice in performance is not identified formally. Teachers give satisfactory verbal feedback on students' contributions in class but do not generally record this.

Leadership and management

70. Leadership and management of social and life skills are satisfactory. Staff meet weekly with other colleagues whenever possible and share information. They have regular meetings with programme managers. There are good opportunities for staff to receive training in restraint, health and safety, inclusion, the management of vulnerable adults, issues relating to abuse, and equal opportunities. The enrichment programme is managed well. However, curriculum development of the independence programme lacks direction. Meetings of the cross-site curriculum team have recently started and the impact is not yet fully evident. In both programmes, achievement is inconsistently recorded between and within sites and good practice is not shared sufficiently. There is insufficient direction on ensuring that literacy and numeracy are incorporated into social and life skills and few resources are available to support teaching and learning in these areas.

71. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Teachers challenge gender stereotyping wherever it is observed and promote positive attitudes towards disability. Cultural diversity is addressed particularly well in drama and art. Issues of sexuality are handled sensitively. However, teaching materials are not always appropriate to adults and do not generally reflect ethnic diversity. Staff have received training in awareness of equality and diversity but have not yet been fully trained in how to incorporate these into their teaching and choice of material.

72. Quality assurance is satisfactory. Most members of staff are observed termly and receive feedback on action points which are followed up on subsequent visits. Results of observations inform annual appraisal and staff development plans. Appraisals are reviewed termly. Staff contribute to the self-assessment process.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated. Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Office for
Standards
in Education

