

Dorton College of Further Education

Inspection report

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

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

Description of the provider

1. Dorton College of Further Education is an independent specialist college, which makes residential and day provision for learners with a visual impairment and who may also have additional learning and physical difficulties. The college does not provide for learners with profound and multiple needs, although it has started to provide for learners with more complex learning needs. The college is owned and managed by the Royal London Society for the Blind (RLSB), a charitable trust. It is located on a 47 acre site near Sevenoaks, Kent. The college provides further education (FE) and training for 76 visually impaired young people and adults. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds 74 learners, mainly 16 to 19 years of age and one adult is currently funded by the residential training unit of the

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Some 55% of learners attend three local further education colleges for their main education programmes, and one third study at the main site. At the partner colleges learners study courses up to level 3. Very few study at level 3. At the main site, most learners study courses at entry level, although a growing cohort of learners study pre-entry level courses.

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; attain a satisfying quality of life and make a successful transition to the next stage of their lives.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Satisfactory: grade 3</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

3. The college's provision is satisfactory overall. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Most learners on vocational courses achieve their primary learning goals well, but it is not possible to measure progress at entry and pre-entry levels because target setting is too general. All learners become more independent and develop greater social confidence. Achievement rates on basic and key skills courses are low. Learners make good use of the work experience opportunities provided for them. Standards of work vary significantly.
4. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons learners are actively engaged, but a common weakness is the failure to use small group or pair work to ensure that all learners participate. Teaching on the enrichment programme is stimulating. Resources are satisfactory, but not all staff have the specialist knowledge to support learners. Assessment is satisfactory, although checking of learning in lessons is a weakness.
5. The college's response to social and educational inclusion is good. The range of learners who participate on the programmes has widened and the college now provides for more learners with complex needs. The number of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is, at 20%, above that generally found in the sector. Learners can progress through courses at different levels. Provision for employer engagement has expanded significantly. However, provision for literacy and numeracy is still being developed across the college.
6. Support and guidance are good. The careers, transitions and work experience staff work well together, and the transition process now starts when learners are first interviewed. The provision of specialist equipment to enable learners to access the curriculum is good and the college provides a wide range of therapists. Behaviour management is good and the tutorial process works well, with residential and academic staff working effectively together.
7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has restructured at senior level to accommodate changes to the learner cohort and works well with a range of partners. Quality assurance arrangements are not always effective in bringing about improvements, and the college makes poor use of data to evaluate its performance. The college's response to equality and diversity legislation is satisfactory, finance is sound and governance is satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. The college has satisfactory capacity to improve. The partnerships that have been developed with other further education colleges, feeder schools and a number of other support agencies are well established. The college shows a good capacity to manage significant change. However, the quality assurance of some key aspects of the college's work is ineffective, and self-assessment lacks a critical edge, failing to identify a few key weaknesses and overestimating strengths. Learners' achievement is satisfactory overall, as are teaching and learning; the breadth of the curriculum and support and guidance for learners are good.

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

9. The steps taken by the college to improve since the last inspection have been unsatisfactory. Since then, the college has revised its mission and focus, restructured its management, and taken steps to meet the considerably more complex profile of need presented by current learners. However, the quality improvement arrangements have not identified some significant weaknesses. The college has not monitored its performance well, and some key strengths identified at the last inspection are no longer strengths. Several aspects identified as needing improvement have not been adequately remedied.

Key strengths

- good achievement of primary learning goals on vocational courses
- good personal and pastoral support for learners
- good range of learning opportunities
- good links with a range of partners
- good learning environments.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- achievement in basic and key skills provision
- the setting of targets
- the quality assurance processes
- the use of data to monitor performance
- the need for more specialist training for teaching staff.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners on vocational courses, including RTU trainees, make good progress and achieve their primary learning goals well. Those on entry level programmes are successful in achieving units of accreditation. The achievement of learners' basic and key skills is poor and, at pre-entry level, speaking and listening are not given sufficient emphasis. Pre-entry learners do not have a baseline from which to measure achievement over time. Many learners achieve their individual learning targets, but target setting is too general and the recording of progress in lessons is weak.
11. Learners at all levels make good progress in developing independence, social and living skills. Mobility skills are less well developed. Learners become confident in the use of adaptive aids and information and communication technology (ICT) to access information. Many learners have developed strategies to enable them to communicate more effectively with others.
12. The college fails to use achievement data to identify trends or areas for improvement. Achievement rates are not analysed by gender. The college has collated achievement data by ethnicity and has not found any significant difference in outcomes.
13. The standard of learners' work in lessons ranges from good to unsatisfactory. Rates of attendance and learner retention at the college are satisfactory, and in line with similar colleges.
14. During 2006/07, the college placed an increased emphasis on developing work related activity. Placement reports indicate good acquisition of workplace skills and knowledge. The college is in the early stages of developing pathways through types of work placement to facilitate progression for individuals.
15. Destinations for learners have shown a decline in the numbers moving into full-time study, employment and independent living, with more learners moving into unsupported employment and part-time study. The college has recognised that an increasing percentage of learners are returning home, with many not engaged in meaningful activity. In 2006/07, no RTU trainees gained open employment, the key outcome of the programme. This result is poor compared with similar colleges in this sector. However, of the nine starts, seven achieved their main qualification aim, one went on to an access course and four moved into supported employment.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

16. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons are generally well planned. Teaching on enrichment courses at Dorton is lively and stimulating.

Many staff are skilled at helping learners to manage difficult behaviours. Dorton staff provide well informed and helpful support to learners attending partner colleges. Most materials needed by learners are efficiently transcribed into Braille, enlarged print or other formats. Learners usually have ready access to the hardware and software they need to take part in classes. Learners in partner colleges often work with concentration and interest when teachers understand and plan to meet their needs, but not all teachers in mainstream settings have been adequately prepared to adapt their methods of teaching to meet the needs of learners who are blind or partially sighted. In less successful lessons at pre-entry level, learners' targets are not used to plan learning activities. Across all of the provision, teachers do not focus sufficiently on learning, but do make sufficient use of small group or pair work to engage every learner. They do not check learning effectively.

17. Most teachers have teaching qualifications and attend specific training courses at Dorton. Learning support staff have considerable expertise. They have attended a wide range of specialist training events, although few have learning support qualifications. Teachers working with the increased number of learners at pre-entry level do not all have the specialist skills required for teaching learners at this level. Staff across the whole curriculum do not have sufficient expertise to enable learners to develop literacy and numeracy skills. In one partner college, there has been little formal training in relation to visual impairment since 2004. Although a support tutor has been appointed, not all teachers on mainstream courses feel confident about making suitable adjustments for learners, and not all met the learner prior to the first lesson. In a minority of lessons learners were not able to participate effectively. This area for improvement was not identified in the self-assessment report.
18. Initial assessment is satisfactory. A baseline assessment process for gathering additional information on the skills and needs of learners at pre-entry level has not yet been formalised. The college recognises that target setting is not always effective. Learners' targets are not always drawn together in an overarching individual learning plan. Targets are often too broad to be helpful to learners. Progress against these is not reviewed frequently enough to be helpful for all learners, although first term and annual progress reports are comprehensive.
19. The extent to which the college meets the needs and interests of learners is good. The college offers learners a very wide choice of vocational options in partner colleges, and is flexible in meeting their specific requirements. Provision at the Dorton site has increased significantly over the past few years. A new manager has recently been appointed to develop this provision, which ranges from pre-entry courses to entry level 3, and includes vocational options. This provision has recently been significantly changed, and is in the first few weeks of implementation. It is not possible fully to evaluate it. Provision for the development of independent living skills is good, but literacy and numeracy is still in the early stages of being integrated into the programme. The range of enrichment activities is very

wide. The college is currently working with learners who study in partner colleges so that the range of enrichment activities offered better reflects their interests. The work experience has expanded, with a significant increase in the number of employers offering placements. Risk assessments have improved and are now satisfactory.

20. Support and guidance are good. Support staff provide good support for learners to enable them to access the curriculum, and this usually works well. Enabling technology is up-to-date and learners use their equipment effectively. Tutorial support is good. Learners in partner colleges take part in the college tutorial systems, and also have a personal tutor and key worker from Dorton. Key workers and personal tutors work well together to provide pastoral support and oversee progress. A large number of therapists provide a wide range of interventions. An effective behaviour management group has been developed to support staff in managing learners whose behaviour is challenging. Not all learners have received the level of mobility training and speech and language therapy that they require. Arrangements for careers guidance and transition planning are good, as the college adapts its provision so that transition for each learner is considered from the start of the programme. The college works closely with Connexions in assisting learners to decide about future destinations. The new manager for this area recognises that more needs to be done to find suitable accommodation for learners with complex needs when they leave Dorton.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Satisfactory: grade 3

21. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has a clear mission and staff have a strong sense of shared values and purpose. Strategic leadership is good. Communications are effective. The student council plays an active role in contributing to the day-to-day management of the college. The college has recently undergone a restructuring of its senior management team, and these changes are being well managed. However, many are at an early stage of development and the impact upon learners is not yet apparent. Learners' achievements overall are satisfactory.
22. The college works well with a wide range of educational partners and other agencies to ensure that learners have good access to professional advice and support during and after their time at the college. Relationships with partner colleges of further education are well established and effective in providing learners with a wide choice of curriculum. Not all learners, however, enjoy equally effective teaching in these settings.
23. Quality assurance is ineffective and does not recognise deficiencies in a few routine operational aspects of the college's work. Most of the systems and procedures are followed, but they are not used rigorously to bring about improvements. The lesson observation scheme overestimates the quality of

teaching and learning and does not lead to effective actions to improve teaching and learning. Good practices are not effectively disseminated. The views of learners are sought, but not critically evaluated. Appraisals are linked to strategic aims and individual training needs, but outcomes do not demonstrably lead to quality improvement. The college's self-assessment process includes all members of staff, but the report fails to identify a few key weaknesses, and is of limited value in improving the provision. Inspectors found almost all of its graded judgements to be inflated.

24. The college makes poor use of data to make qualitative and comparative evaluations of performance and to inform planning. Data on learners' achievement, progress against targets, the impact of providing different types of support and learners' destinations are not analysed in ways that might indicate the effectiveness of what the college does, or reveal trends over time.
25. Staff are well qualified, although staff lack expertise in working with learners with more complex needs and in teaching literacy and numeracy. Current vacancies for mobility and lack of cover for an absent speech and language therapist have resulted in shortfalls in provision. Opportunities for staff at Dorton to refresh or extend their skills are good. However, not all teachers in the partner colleges are sufficiently prepared to make adjustments for the learners from Dorton in their lessons.
26. The college complies with equality and diversity legislation, and with safeguarding. All staff have been appropriately trained in these duties. A good balance is struck between ensuring that learners remain safe and empowering them to assess and manage risk. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The college challenges prejudice and works to modify attitudes and behaviours where necessary, but it is at an early stage of developing its active promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum.
27. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have a wide range of skills and experience. However, their capacity to hold the college to account for its performance is hampered by the dearth of evaluated data, and the incomplete quality assurance processes.
28. Accommodation and learning resources are good. They help create a secure and stimulating learning environment. Financial management is sound. The college provides satisfactory value for money.