

West of England College for Young People with Little or No Sight

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. The West of England College is an independent specialist residential college for learners with sight loss and complex needs, situated in 16 acres of land in the city of Exeter. It provides further education and independence training for young people aged 16 to 25.
2. Currently 71 learners attend the college. There are 54 residential learners and 17 attend daily. Currently 28 learners are fully funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and 6 are in receipt of joint funding. There are 35 learners funded by Local Education Authorities, 1 is privately funded and another solely funded by a Health Authority.

3. The college offers four curriculum pathways: 'Impact and Impact +' which offer accredited and non-accredited opportunities for learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties; 'Highways' which offers accredited and non-accredited opportunities for learners with moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities; 'Vocational' which offers accredited and non-accredited opportunities for learners who have moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities; and 'Partner Colleges' which offers accredited or full qualifications opportunities for learners who, if they were not visually impaired, would attend their local sector college without specific support.
4. The majority of learners progress to employment, voluntary work or further education courses. A high number of the learners go into independent living. Learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties progress into suitable lifelong placements. The college's mission is to 'challenge each learner to be as active and independent as possible, whatever their ability'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: Contributory grade 2</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The college's overall effectiveness is good. The learners make good progress with their accredited and non-accredited courses. The majority of learners go into further education or employment. Most learners progress successfully into supported or independent living environments.
6. Teaching and learning are good. Learners are encouraged to take an active role within their learning journey. Baseline assessment is detailed and rigorous and the outcomes are successfully used to inform individual learning programmes. The lessons are well planned and address individual needs. Sharing of teaching and learning best practice is in its infancy. Learning support assistants are effectively deployed. However, a minority of learning support assistants are either over or under directive. Learning resources such as information and communication technology (ICT) are used well by teachers and learners to promote learning. Termly learner centred meetings and annual reviews are effective.
7. The college offers a good range of courses which allows for progression and recognises individual needs and interests. Increased work placement opportunities for all learners reflect the college's emphasis on training and employability. The college actively promotes enterprising ventures. A wide range of enrichment activities, including sport, is available to all learners.
8. Support and guidance are outstanding. The college provides an excellent range of specialist support staff. The integrated provision from care, therapy, mobility, health and teaching ensures highly detailed individualised learning programmes. Careers education and guidance are personalised and well planned. Transition arrangements are very good. There is a Connexions advisor attached to the college who attends all annual reviews. Specialist staff are used effectively in the transition process.
9. The college offers outstanding social and educational inclusion. The wide range of courses and enrichment activities takes full account of the diverse needs of learners. The curriculum provides clear progression routes. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity underpins all college activities and the college is compliant with relevant equalities legislation. The college has made every effort to increase access to further education for all members of the community with little or no sight.
10. Leadership and management are good. The principal and the senior managers provide a clear direction which promotes high standards and identifies areas for improvement. The quality improvement process has been consistently applied across the college and has led to improvements in provision. The college has not been sufficiently systematic in analysing its data. A good teaching and

learning scheme is in place. However, the college has not yet embedded sharing of good practice.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

11. The college shows good capacity to improve. The quality improvement framework is comprehensive and is applied across the whole organisation. The good leadership and management and the expertise of the governors ensure a firm focus on improving quality, raising achievements and developing the full potential of every learner. The self-assessment report goes some way to identifying the college's strengths and areas for improvement but it is descriptive rather than judgemental and understates the strengths of the organisation.

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

12. The college has made good progress in addressing the key issues from the last inspection. Systems and meetings have been put into place to ensure good and effective sharing of information about learners' programmes and progress. A considerable amount of resource has been invested in ICT, access technology and specialist staff. This has had an impact in raising the accessibility for all learners. The college has a clear direction of where it is going in the future. The strategic planning is good. The college actively promotes equality and diversity. A cohesive curriculum framework has been developed that meets the needs of all learners in the post-16 provision. The college has a thorough memorandum of agreement with partner colleges. This ensures good quality improvement arrangements.

Key strengths

- good achievement
- good teaching and learning
- outstanding integrated provision from care, therapy, mobility, health and teaching
- very effective leadership and management of the college
- outstanding social and educational inclusion.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the development and training of learning support assistants
- using a systematic approach to analysing data
- sharing good practice in teaching and learning.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

13. Achievement and standards are good. These are accurately identified as a strength in the college's self-assessment report. Learners have a detailed pre-placement and baseline assessment which involves comprehensive reports from multi-agencies. This leads to the college setting meaningful yet challenging targets from the information gained. For the period 2006/07, over 90% of individual learning plan targets were met. All staff across the college record the achievement of targets by using 'capturing achievements sheets'. This informs the individual learning plans. These plans are formally reviewed each term and are updated as necessary. Learners are actively involved in the target setting process. The recognising and recording progress and achievement framework are well applied and effectively used so that the college can measure the outcomes for a range of skills and achievement that are non-accredited.
14. The accredited achievements for learners are good. For the period 2006/07, 97% of learners entered for accredited awards achieved them.
15. Most young people enjoy college. They develop qualities which enable them to make good contributions to their community and their social and economic well-being. The curriculum pathways promote independence and life skills as well as giving learners opportunities for work experience.
16. The destinations of learners are very good. For the period 2006/07, high numbers of learners went into further education or employment. Living arrangements are appropriate. The percentage of learners who progressed to supported or independent living is high.
17. Attendance and retention rates are high, as expected in this type of provision.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

18. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The in-depth baseline assessment accurately identifies learners' needs. Lessons are well planned and they address individual requirements. Clear, personalised learning targets, which build on previous experiences, are successfully used. The summative learning profile used by all teachers is thorough and gives an informative overview of each learner. Learners are encouraged to be actively involved in the lessons and they know what is expected of them. Learning is evaluated in every lesson. Learners value teachers' hard work and enthusiasm for their success. Behaviour is skilfully managed.
19. There are well resourced, specially adapted teaching areas. These adaptations remove barriers to learning and give the learners maximum opportunities to achieve. The use of assisted technology enhances learning.

20. Learning support assistants are deployed effectively and the majority have a good understanding of their role. However, a minority of learning support assistants are either over or under directive. The college acknowledges this in the self-assessment report and is currently involved in a partnership with other specialist colleges. The partnership has secured LSC funding to develop the training modules for learning support assistants.
21. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. A comprehensive and detailed curriculum framework provides clear routes for progression. The majority of learners are able to follow the course that they want.
22. The college has increased the amount of external work placements that is available for the learners. The work placement process is carefully thought out and structured to recognise individual needs. All learners, apart from one, on the 'Vocational' and 'Partner Colleges' programmes have external work placements. Individualised support is given by a job coach. For the other learners, internal work placements are provided. For the more complex learners the college places a huge emphasis on experiencing the world of work. This was evident at Le Café where the learners served refreshments and cakes to staff and learners. The college also promotes and encourages enterprising activities for all learners.
23. The college is increasingly responsive to external requirements relating to employment. The emphasis is now on training, employability and housing. However, the college recognises that a formalised feedback process is necessary from the external work placement providers in order to be even more responsive to the changing needs within the workplace.
24. A good range of enrichment activities and sports contributes to learners' enjoyment. These include access to gym sessions, cinema, bowling, theatre and pub visits. Learners are making a positive contribution locally through charitable fundraising events and raising the profile of learners with disabilities.
25. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding. Excellent systems are in place to ensure individual support needs are accurately identified at the start and then throughout a learner's programme. Detailed baseline assessments inform the learners' individual learning plans (ILPs). Monitoring of the ILPs and the support learners receive takes place through learner-centred meetings each term, and include all the staff involved with the learner. The very good induction arrangements enable learners to settle quickly into college life. All learners have a key worker. They also have their own tutor whom they meet on a regular basis. Individual tutorials cover all aspects of a learner's programme and progress is recorded. Residential learners have a daily log book which is an effective means of communication between the college and residences.
26. There is an excellent range of specialist support on campus. The integration of services and staff is very good, with multi-professional meetings taking place each term. However, staff identify that learners would benefit greatly if these meetings were held more frequently. Transition arrangements are very good.

There is a Connexions advisor attached to the college who attends all annual reviews for learners, and specialist staff are used effectively in the transition process; for example, the occupational therapist has visited new accommodation for learners when they are about to leave the college.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Good: Grade 2

27. Leadership and management are good. The college has undergone much change over the last two years with a major restructuring of the whole organisation into pre- and post-16 provision. The college ethos and approach to training and employment are now entirely learner centred. The principal and senior managers have successfully worked with all staff to develop the strategic direction and restructure the college. Staff have a good understanding of the focus for the college and their roles within the organisation.
28. Communication is good and staff appreciate the more open style of management. There is an effective cycle of meetings which cover salient issues, particularly learner progress, health and welfare. The college meeting notes are detailed but actions are not always followed through to resolution.
29. Governors bring a wide range of expertise and experience to the college. They have good oversight of the college through a range of appropriate committees such as the finance and general purposes committee and the curriculum committee. Each committee receives relevant and timely reports which enable the governors to monitor the work of the college thoroughly. Governors are very supportive of the principal and senior managers and their vision for the future of the college. They have supported the change in the strategic direction of the college and are fully committed to the new vision.
30. There is a good focus on quality improvement. The policy and procedures are detailed and the associated improvement plan is comprehensive. A good teaching and learning scheme, which has a sharp focus on learning as well as teaching, has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. All teaching staff are observed up to three times a year. Those with inadequate grades receive good support and mentoring to help them improve. There has been some sharing of good practice but it is not embedded. Tutorials are not yet part of the observation of teaching and learning scheme and learning assistants are not routinely observed.
31. Staff development and training are very good. Staff have an entitlement each year to a prescribed number of training days. They are also encouraged to gain additional and higher qualifications. Recent training includes child protection and protection of vulnerable adults training. Learning support staff are all being supported to achieve NVQ level 3.

32. Feedback from learners and parents is systematically collected and appropriate action is taken where concerns are raised. There is a learner council which meets monthly and again, when issues and concerns are raised, they are dealt with speedily.
33. Senior and middle managers meet each week to identify and address areas that have been identified as a concern in the college. Some of the areas recently covered include improved lesson planning and improved recording of accidents and incidents. However, the group does not routinely keep records of what it covers throughout the year and does not currently evaluate the impact of its work.
34. The college has developed a good range of partnerships over the last two years. It now works with nearly 30 providers, including general further education colleges, work-based learning providers, other specialist colleges and charities. The college's self-assessment report accurately identifies this as a strength. Joint projects currently include continuing professional development for teaching assistants and peer referencing in teaching and learning. Transition protocols across the colleges have also been developed.
35. Health and safety are satisfactory and risk assessments are in place for all activities undertaken by the learners.
36. The college has invested in a new management information system which enables detailed information about the learners to be obtained. However, the college has not been sufficiently systematic in analysing its data. The college acknowledges this in the self-assessment report and is already taking steps to address this.
37. Resources are efficiently deployed and financial management is good. The college provides good value for money.
38. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college's equal opportunity policy is detailed and covers all relevant legislation. Policies cover bullying and harassment. The college has worked closely with work placement providers to ensure that all learners are protected from harassment and discrimination whilst on work experience. The college demonstrates a clear commitment to meeting the diverse needs of learners; it is an inclusive community and all learners are treated with the highest respect. The provision is carefully designed to take into account specific needs. The college meets its responsibilities with regard to safeguards and has satisfactory policies and procedures for the protection of young children and vulnerable adults. The legislative requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 are comprehensively met.
39. Complaints are dealt with effectively and in a timely manner. Where required, in-depth investigations take place. There is an equality and diversity working group whose remit is to monitor the equality and diversity policy and its implementation.

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