

Portland College

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
- specialist provision in: foundation for learning and life and preparation for work.

Description of the provider

1. Portland College is an independent, specialist residential college. It is located near Mansfield on a 40 acre site in Sherwood Forest. The college was founded in 1950, is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The principal reports to the governing body of the trust. Learners are recruited from across the United Kingdom. The college provides for students aged over 16 with physical disabilities and associated neurological conditions, many with complex needs; a high percentage have cerebral palsy. It does not specifically provide for students with significant behavioural or emotional difficulties. The college's mission is 'to maximise the ability and minimise the effects of disability of students, through the provision of opportunities for learning in an inclusive specialist residential environment, giving individuals empowerment through employment, independence and integration'.
2. The college recruits nationally. At present the college accommodates learners in its on-site residences. These include flats for learners to develop their independence skills. The college has a comprehensive communication strategy led by the alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) manager supported by a full-time technician. Specialist staff include a speech and language therapy team, a physiotherapy team, occupational therapists, seven nurses and independence staff. Teaching and learning support staff have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications and level 2 in literacy and numeracy. A new learning centre has been opened since the previous inspection.
3. The college receives funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and through the Residential Training Unit (RTU) of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). There are currently 191 learners, of whom 29 are non-resident, 126 are funded by the LSC and 65 are funded by the RTU. Of these learners, 158 are aged over 19 years, 133 are male, and nine are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The 65 learners funded by the RTU are in the employment department. All of these are aged over 19 and 55 are male.
4. The LSC funded learners have two programmes. Learners on the personal development and communication programme have a core curriculum of Skills for Life, independence and daily living skills, self-advocacy, mobility and therapy, and personal and social development. Learners on the preparation for independent living and life skills programme also have the same core curriculum plus vocational preparation. The use of alternative and augmentative technology to assist in vocalising, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy are integral aspects of the curriculum for many of these students. The RTU funded learners work at levels 1, 2 and 3, studying business-related subjects and information and communication technology (ICT). Seven learners study horticulture. The college is a recognised academy for computer software qualifications.

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>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Sector subject areas

Foundation for learning and life	Good: Grade 2
Preparation for work	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. This is a good college. Learners' achievement is good and the standards of work are high. All learners make good gains in confidence. LSC funded learners make particularly good gains in their communication and independence skills. Opportunities are good for learners to develop work-related and employability skills. Progression into employment for RTU learners is outstanding. The achievement of national awards for learners is good. Attendance and punctuality are well monitored.
6. Teaching and learning are good overall. Initial and baseline assessment are thorough. Promotion of independence in the curriculum is good. Learning support is very good. Communication strategies are well matched to the needs of most learners. The recording and assessment of progress and achievement (RARPA) framework is developing well. Assessment practices are good. The college is aware of the need to improve the proportion of good or better teaching. Arrangements for literacy and numeracy are satisfactory but require further development for RTU learners. The employability programme for RTU learners needs further development. Learning resources are good; specialist communication resources are outstanding.
7. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. A good range of external links and enrichment activities has been developed; the college is aware of the need to develop further social opportunities for the RTU learners. The curriculum for LSC funded learners now meets learners' individual needs. The use of practical and realistic contexts for learning is particularly effective. The college has outstanding success in supporting RTU learners to gain employment. Social and educational inclusion are outstanding. Highly innovative projects and themed activities are planned to promote social and educational inclusion.
8. Advice, guidance and support are outstanding. Specialist guidance and support by the multi-disciplinary and communication teams are outstanding. Medical support is very effectively managed. Access to a wide range of external specialist links is good. Good pastoral support is provided through the tutorials. The college and the local Connexions service work highly effectively together to provide a high standard of information, guidance and support to all learners.
9. Leadership and management are good. The arrangements for quality assurance are good; the annual quality assurance cycle provides a clear and systematic framework for quality monitoring. The self-assessment process is inclusive; the report is largely accurate but descriptive. Management of the curriculum is good. There is an outstanding and highly innovative approach to promoting equal opportunities in the curriculum. The college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college has a good capacity to improve. The management of change is effective and well supported by staff. Accommodation and facilities have improved with clear plans for further development. Quality assurance arrangements are now good and well supported by staff. The self-assessment report is largely accurate but somewhat descriptive. There is a coherent cross-college approach to continuous improvement. The college is aware of most areas for development.

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

11. The college has made good progress to address the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Quality assurance processes have improved significantly and are now systematic and rigorous. Teaching and learning have improved and there is a clear focus on improving the proportion of good or better teaching. The curriculum for LSC funded learners has improved and generally class sizes are appropriate for the timetabled groups. Specialist support for learners with dyslexia or visual impairment is now satisfactory.

Key strengths

- outstanding progression into employment for RTU learners
- good development of LSC funded learners' communication and independence skills
- good opportunities for learning through practical and realistic contexts
- outstanding multi-disciplinary support
- good leadership
- good curriculum management
- outstanding promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the small proportion of good or better teaching
- the underdeveloped employability and Skills for Life provision for RTU learners.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

12. Learners' achievement is good and the standard of work across the curriculum is high. This was accurately identified in the self-assessment report. All learners make significant gains in confidence. LSC funded learners make particularly good gains in the development of communication and independence skills. Opportunities for LSC funded learners to develop work-related skills are good through a range of real internal work placements and projects. Learners funded by the RTU gain good employability skills through work placements and work projects which promote economic well-being. Achievement is successfully recognised and celebrated within the college. Learners enjoy their time in college and take pride in their work and developing skills.
13. Progression into employment for RTU learners is outstanding. In the current year, 80% have progressed into employment. In August 2007, 97% of RTU learners successfully gained jobs in comparison with the national rate of 66%. Achievement of vocational qualifications is also good. The achievement of national awards for LSC funded learners is good and appropriately used; for example, 30 learners successfully completed a national communication award. Achievement in sports is particularly good. Retention rates are in line with other specialist colleges. Attendance and punctuality are well monitored. Destination outcomes for LSC funded learners are good. In 2006/07, 80% of LSC funded learners progressed into further education, work-based learning or employment.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

14. Teaching and learning are good overall. The lesson observation process is promoting improvement but inspectors found some teaching grades to be over-estimated. The college accurately identified in their self-assessment report the need to increase the proportion of good or better teaching. Learning support is very good within lessons. The communication needs of LSC funded learners in lessons are very well supported by the highly effective use of symbols, objects of reference and alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) devices. Similarly, the promotion of independence is particularly effective for these learners. In the RTU provision, there is a strong emphasis on actively promoting independent learning and employability.
15. Initial and baseline assessment to identify support and learning needs are comprehensive and successfully inform the development of individual learning plans (ILPs). The RARPA framework is developing well. Lesson planning is satisfactory overall. While communication targets are well integrated in lessons, some lesson objectives for LSC funded learners are not sufficiently clear and measurable. Individual targets for RTU learners are adequate. Arrangements for the integrated development of basic literacy and numeracy are satisfactory overall. This was over-estimated as good in the self-assessment report.

Assessment practices are good. The management information system is used very effectively to record and monitor learners' progress.

16. Learning resources are good overall. However, a very small proportion of learning materials for LSC funded learners are not age-appropriate. Specialist communication resources are outstanding and highly individualised. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are used particularly well to promote learning. A good range of ICT equipment and software is available in many parts of the college, including the learning centre. In one of the residences, staff are piloting the use of wireless laptops to record ongoing learner progress and involve learners in this process.
17. As accurately identified in the self-assessment report, the college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. The good range of enrichment activities benefits learners and extends their community involvement. The college is aware of the need to develop further social opportunities for RTU learners. Participation in sport is actively promoted and learners are encouraged to adopt a healthy diet. Reorganisation of the curriculum for LSC funded learners has enabled the college to meet individual needs more appropriately. Greater challenge is now provided for these learners, particularly through the sports curriculum. Learners with more complex needs have individualised programmes, which include a well planned sensory approach and a range of appropriate curriculum options. The college successfully implements an outstanding multi-disciplinary approach to meeting learners' individual communication needs, which promotes their greater involvement in the curriculum. The use of practical and realistic contexts for learning is particularly effective for both LSC and RTU funded learners, including internal and external work placements, as appropriate. Detailed risk assessments actively support the promotion of good health and safety practices. The college has outstanding success in supporting RTU learners to gain employment.
18. Social and educational inclusion at the college is outstanding. There is a highly effective commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion through a dedicated committee. Staff are trained well in its promotion, including annual themed awareness raising with associated projects across the curriculum. Other celebrations include religious and cultural events. Highly innovative projects and activities are planned to promote social and educational inclusion with a strong focus on promoting a positive image of disability in the community. Learners are involved in the induction programme for new care staff as well as the recruitment of senior staff. Learners are also encouraged to represent the college in the community; for example, one RTU learner is a representative on the race crimes panel. Learners funded by the RTU, support LSC funded learners in vocational and enrichment programmes. Learners have a significant number of opportunities to make a positive contribution and influence decisions through the student council, residential meetings, and a range of college forums and committees. Such involvement has led to improvement.
19. Advice, guidance and support for learners are outstanding. As accurately identified in the self-assessment report, the college provides outstanding

specialist information, guidance and support for learners and liaises closely with staff, parents and carers. The excellent integrated working between the multi-disciplinary and communication teams promotes the development of confidence and motivates learners to make good progress; for example, one learner has successfully learned to transfer herself from her wheelchair and is now working hard to gain more independence in her personal care. Learners and parents value this support highly. Medical support is very effectively managed by the college's team of nurses who liaise closely with local doctors. Access to a good range of external specialist links includes specialist counsellors and advocates, and sexual health services. Good pastoral support is provided through the tutorials. Transition arrangements are well established across the college. The college and the local Connexions service work highly effectively together to provide a high standard of information, guidance and support to all learners in seeking employment or other occupation. Support for learners with dyslexia and with visual impairment is now satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

20. Leadership and management are good, as accurately identified in the self-assessment report. The principal provides good leadership. The governors are very supportive of the college and are actively involved in delivery of the strategic plan. Changes to the management structure have been well managed. The majority of the key areas for improvement at the last inspection have been resolved.
21. The focus upon continuous improvement is particularly effective. The approach to quality monitoring is systematic and rigorous and is well supported by staff. The progress being made towards achieving challenging targets contained within the development plan is monitored well. Outcomes from questionnaires are used effectively. The self-assessment process is good overall and the report is broadly accurate. The lesson observation process is thorough and judgements broadly reflect those made by inspectors. However, some grades are over-estimated. Feedback is detailed and developmental and, where required, mentoring support is provided to promote continuous improvement. Staff report this to be supportive and motivating.
22. Management of the curriculum is good. All staff have appropriate qualifications and are well deployed. The college has a good range of policies and procedures which are regularly updated. The annual appraisal system is used highly effectively to identify training needs which support college developments. Staff and learners' opinions are valued. Communication throughout the college is excellent.
23. The promotion of equal opportunities is outstanding. There is a highly innovative approach to the promotion of equality and diversity throughout the curriculum. The college invites people into the college to talk to learners and

staff in order to improve their understanding of equality and diversity issues. There is an annual event where people from various religions, groups and cultures visit the college to help learners and staff understand and value diversity. This involves much planning with activities integrated in the curriculum. The equality diversity and inclusion committee is particularly effective in planning and delivering a rolling programme of equality and diversity training. This training is valued highly by staff who recognise the need for regular updating. Equality and diversity are monitored effectively. The college satisfactorily meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA). Arrangements for safeguarding are comprehensive and learners feel safe. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the local population.

24. Financial planning and management are good. Governors and trustees are highly committed, well informed and monitor the college's performance particularly well. Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation as well as to the specialist and teaching resources. The college recognises that the marketing strategy and materials do not meet the needs of the college's strategic direction and work is underway to resolve this issue. The college provides good value for money.

Sector subject area

Foundation for learning and life

Good: Grade 2

Context

25. There are 126 full-time learners, of whom 123 are residential. The core curriculum is split into three levels. Learners have a wide range of options to enable them to undertake practical options to develop their skills and knowledge. Independence training is a key feature of the programme. Learners complete external qualifications, where appropriate, in life skills, communication, literacy, numeracy, food studies or sport. They can select from a wide range of enrichment activities.

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence, communication skills and independence
- good opportunities for learning in practical and challenging situations
- outstanding multi-disciplinary support
- good management of the curriculum area.

Areas for improvement

- the setting of more precise individual lesson objectives
- increasing the proportion of good or better teaching.

Achievement and standards

26. Achievement and standards are good. Development of learners' confidence, communication and independence skills is particularly good. Learners participate with enthusiasm in lessons and behaviour is good. Wheelchair users achieve good standards of wheelchair safety. Success rates in externally accredited courses are good, although literacy and numeracy remain satisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are good overall. Learners make a very positive contribution to the college and local community, including work with the police disability action group.

Quality of provision

27. The foundation provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Comprehensive initial assessment leads to clear targets. The most effective lessons are well planned to meet individual objectives and use practical activities to engage learners. Materials and activities are carefully adapted to suit the needs of individual learners. In less effective lessons, individual lesson objectives are insufficiently precise to help plan and monitor progress. The proportion of good or better teaching is insufficient but a clear plan is in place to address this. High levels of effective in-class support promote particularly good learning and independence.

28. Good opportunities for learning in practical and challenging situations enable individual needs to be met well. The core curriculum is well planned. A new sensory integration programme enables learners with complex needs to experience a wide range of appropriate activities and, where appropriate, work experience. A small but significant number undertake external work experience, such as working with children or as sports coach assistants.
29. Guidance and support are outstanding. The outstanding multi-disciplinary support helps learners to develop the skills to fully access the curriculum. Specialist and education teams work highly effectively together to support learners, staff and parents. Training for parents offered by the AAC team ensures that strategies used at college can be continued at home. Learners benefit well from both individual and in-class support. Excellent resources are developed by specialist teams to ensure individual needs are met very well. Transition planning is highly effective. Good pastoral support is provided through the tutorial programme.

Leadership and management

30. Curriculum leadership and management are good with a clear focus on continuous improvement. The curriculum now meets the learners' needs well. Group sizes are now appropriate. However, the college is aware that high levels of care needs still impact on punctuality and is undertaking a review. Communication is effective. Good use is made of the management information system for planning. All staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is detailed and correctly identifies the key strengths and areas for improvement. There is outstanding promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum. Festivals are used as curricular themes throughout the year. Staff qualifications are satisfactory.

Preparation for work

Good: Grade 2

Context

31. There are 65 learners, of whom 42 are residential, within the employment department of the college, funded by the RTU of the Department of Works and Pensions. Many learners have previously attended work preparation programmes at the Job Centre Plus office in Nottingham. The programmes include administration and customer services, vocational information technology and horticulture, and are accredited by national awarding bodies. Work placements are usually undertaken in the home area.

Strengths

- outstanding progression into employment
- good achievement of vocational qualifications
- strong focus on independent learning opportunities
- particularly good support for learners
- good curriculum management.

Areas for improvement

- the underdeveloped employability and Skills for Life provision.

Achievement and standards

32. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Current progression into employment is 80%, which is outstanding. Achievement of qualifications is also high; 100% success rate in ICT; and 96% in administration and customer services. Individual specific, measurable targets are monitored well and achieved within realistic timescales. Learners develop good skills in planning their own learning and in employability. Work is to a high standard. Learners make significant gains in their levels of confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of provision

33. The employment provision is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Initial assessment includes good analysis of existing skills and experience; outcomes are used well to develop vocational targets which are used well to plan sessions. Good online training materials enable learners to learn at their own pace. Tutors provide good levels of support in class. Assessment practices are good. The management information system is used effectively by learners to evaluate and record their own performance and progress.
34. Most vocational teaching challenges learners and provides a good range of learning opportunities. However, a minority of lessons lack variety while others are over directed by the teacher. Assessment processes provide insufficient detail of development needs. Co-ordination between Skills for Life and

vocational tutors is insufficient, and literacy and numeracy resources are not appropriately contextualised. The balance of time given to the employability and Skills for Life curriculum requires further consideration.

35. The range of programmes meets the needs and interests of RTU learners well. A wide range of qualifications is used effectively to build on prior experience and meet learner aspirations. There is a strong focus on the acquisition of workplace skills and independent learning. Though enrichment activities are open to all learners, the college has plans to improve social opportunities for RTU learners.
36. Support for learners is particularly good. Outstanding multi-disciplinary guidance and support is provided, including medical and mental health care by specialist nurses and counselling services. Teaching staff support individual needs very effectively. Learners are provided with appropriate specialist equipment, including seating, support for those with dyslexia and equipment for learners with visual impairment.

Leadership and management

37. Leadership and management are good. Quality monitoring activities result in clear action plans which are implemented well. The college recognises that the employability programme and Skills for Life provision need further development. Feedback from learners is valued and actions taken. The clear direction from the programme manager has supported the development of learning materials and more innovative use of ICT within lessons. Roles and responsibilities are well defined and focus on constant improvement, including appropriate staff training opportunities and the sharing of good practice. The promotion of equal opportunities is highly effective. The management information system is used well to plan, monitor and share information. There are highly constructive links with a wide range of external agencies.