

RNIB College Loughborough

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: vocational and employment skills; and preparation for life.

Description of the provider

1. RNIB College Loughborough (RNIB) is a medium sized residential independent specialist college. Residential learners attend from across the country. The college is located, in purpose-built accommodation, on the campus of Loughborough College, with the aim of enabling learners to have access to the full range of provision of a mainstream general further education college. The college has a resource centre and staff based at Loughborough College. There are 46 full-time learners funded by the LSC; 36 are residential and 10 are day learners, with 32 adults, aged 19 years and over, funded by the Residential Training Unit (RTU) of the Department for Work and Pensions services. Currently, 11 RTU learners are accessing college provision. The majority of learners have a visual impairment and most learners have multiple difficulties and disabilities, such as hearing loss, learning difficulties, physical mobility difficulties, mental health issues or autistic spectrum disorder. Twelve learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
2. The college provides, through its links with Loughborough College, academic and vocational courses for visually impaired learners supported by RNIB's staff and support services. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with complex needs has expanded over recent years. For these learners, individual learning programmes are arranged on site. The college also provides specialist support to around 60 learners attending local mainstream education providers throughout the East Midlands. The college's mission is 'to work with partners so that young people and adults with disabilities can develop the skills and personal qualities needed to progress in life'.

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	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

Sector subject areas

Vocational and employment skills	Good: Grade 2
Preparation for life	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. The overall effectiveness of the college is good and agrees with the college's own self-assessment. Achievement and standards are good. Many learners achieve relevant qualifications and succeed in progressing onto further and higher education courses and employment. Learners develop effective communication skills and make good gains in confidence. The setting of learning targets and the recording of progress is underdeveloped.
4. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners benefit from learning in practical and realistic learning environments. A good standard of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) and specialist software, promotes learning. However, lesson planning to match individual learners' needs lacks rigour and support given to learners is over directive.
5. Social and educational inclusion are good. The college caters well for a wide range of learners with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with visual impairments. There are proportionately a large number of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds and an increasing number of day, as well as residential learners, from the local community. The curriculum is well planned and the partnership the RNIB College has with Loughborough College is successful in providing a broad range of academic and vocational opportunities across all ability levels. Work experience is planned very well and, where appropriate, all learners benefit from internal and external work placements.
6. Support and guidance are satisfactory overall. Transition planning, which includes careers guidance and support for learners on RTU programmes and academic and vocational programmes, is very good. This enables such learners to progress onto positive destinations. However, support for pre-entry and entry level learners is less effective. Specialist support is not sufficiently monitored to ensure learners are able to access services identified within initial assessment. Behaviour approaches and strategies are not adequately linked to individual learning plans.
7. Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers have successfully steered the college's strategic direction and have been successful in widening the participation of learners with more complex needs. This has involved a clear focus on improving the expertise and skills of staff who have recently undergone large amounts of intensive staff development and training. Links with partnership organisations, local employers and agencies are particularly good. There are comprehensive quality assurance processes in place and self- assessment is inclusive and broadly accurate. Analysis of the impact of quality assurance processes is underdeveloped. Accommodation and resources are good. Financial management is sound and the college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

8. The college has a good capacity to improve. Strategic management is good. Managers and governors work closely and have demonstrated that they can introduce major change effectively. They have shown considerable commitment to improving the scope of the college and the learners' experience since the last inspection. The quality assurance system is detailed and comprehensive. The internal lesson observation outcomes are accurately graded and they inform appraisal and staff development at the RNIB and Loughborough Colleges well. During a period of major expansion of learners with more challenging needs, the college has sustained high levels of retention and participation. Managers do not evaluate the impact of quality assurance actions and staff development sessions well enough. Although they have worked with many staff to improve teaching and learning and the use of individual learning plans and target setting, these aspects are still underdeveloped.
9. The self-assessment process is inclusive and it links well to strategic and development plans, and managers make good use of data to inform judgements. The self-assessment report is mostly accurate but overstates strengths in some areas. It is very descriptive and sometimes lacks clear evidence of impact to support judgements.

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

10. Managers have made good progress to effect improvements since the last inspection in March 2004, which judged the college to be unsatisfactory in two curriculum areas and in leadership and management. In particular, managers have improved the quality of the extended curriculum and learners' participation in such activities. The structure of the college day has improved well to include independent living skills. Managers have also made good progress, working closely with Loughborough College, to improve the quality assurance of its teaching and learning. Although satisfactory progress has been made to improve the use of individual learning plans to plan, monitor and record progress, this is still an area for development. Satisfactory progress has also been made to improve the coherence and management of the curriculum, between the residential and day aspects. Learners' timetables include independent living skills appropriately but the specialist support provided does not always reflect the assessed needs contained within individual learners' schedules.

Key strengths

- good achievement
- good progression for learners onto further and higher education courses and employment
- good range of provision to promote educational and social inclusion
- very effective partnerships with other educational providers, local employers and agencies
- good transition planning
- good quality accommodation and resources
- extensive staff development opportunities
- successful strategic management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the rigour and use of target setting and recording progress
- the quality of lesson planning
- the implementation and effectiveness of individual learning plans
- the monitoring of specialist support
- the evaluation of quality assurance and other actions taken to improve provision.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good. The judgement agrees with the college's self-assessment report. Pass rates on courses leading to qualifications are good. Many learners progress successfully into employment or further education. Of those learners funded by the RTU in 2005/06, 35% entered into further education or employment; in 2006/07 this figure increased to 42%. Pre-entry and entry level learners gain relevant qualifications in life and basic skills closely linked to the learning aims contained within their individual learning plans. Learners with visual impairments achieve very good results in levels 2 and 3 qualifications at Loughborough College; most are successful at moving onto higher education. The standard of learners' work is good. They develop effective communication skills such as listening, responding to questions and taking part in group discussions. The college recognise that the low pass rates in key skills at Loughborough College is an area for improvement. Retention and attendance of learners is high, particularly for those learners funded by the RTU.
12. Adult learners on RTU programmes make good gains in confidence, which enables them to actively seek employment and develop useful job seeking skills. Learners develop good skills in using ICT software and equipment. Adult students talk very positively about how gaining these skills improves their confidence and self-esteem. All learners develop good work-related skills through the many opportunities afforded to them to gain external and internal work experience. Learners' mobility skills improve and most learn to negotiate the college site independently. Where appropriate, learners are encouraged to walk into town and travel by public transport without support. They develop skills useful for their future lives and economic well-being. These include learning to cook simple meals for themselves, to wash their own clothes and how to use money to shop for personal items.
13. The implementation of the RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) staged framework has brought about satisfactory improvements in the setting of learning targets and monitoring of progress. Initial assessment and comprehensive baseline information is effectively used to inform learning aims contained within individual learning plans. Learners make satisfactory progress in relation to literacy, numeracy, independence and personal development skills targets. However, these targets are in many cases too broad and progress is insufficiently recorded.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall as identified in the self-assessment report. Learners make good progress in lessons where tasks are varied or undertaken in practical and realistic learning environments. There is a wide range of good quality resources available to learners. Teaching notes and handouts are suitably reproduced to enable learners with visual impairments to

learn effectively. Learners are highly motivated and enjoy lessons which involve them fully in their own learning.

15. Baseline assessments are comprehensive but the outcomes are not used well enough to inform lesson planning. Individual learning targets are not consistently integrated within lessons. In too many of the lessons observed there was insufficient variation in the teaching methods used and tasks were not suitably matched to learners' levels of ability. In these lessons, teachers over-direct learning and too much support has to be given to enable learners to complete tasks.
16. Comprehensive internal lesson observations are undertaken by the college and outcomes are used effectively to improve teachers' performance. However, insufficient attention is given to the appropriateness and quality of support provided to learners, particularly within lessons undertaken at the RNIB.
17. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners, and to social and educational inclusion, is good. A well planned curriculum provides a good range of opportunities, from pre-entry to level 3, well matched to individual need. The college has recently increased the number of day learners who benefit from the same breadth of programme as those attending on residential courses. Learners from minority ethnic backgrounds exceed the proportion found in the local area and achieve at least as well as other learners.
18. A very productive partnership with Loughborough College enhances opportunities for learners to receive highly individualised programmes which include levels 2 and 3 courses. RNIB learners also benefit from access to the Students Services at Loughborough College. All learners, including RTU and day learners, have opportunities to participate in a good range of extended curriculum activities. Very good internal and external work experience programmes are available for all learners. Work placements are successfully matched to individual learners' goals and aspirations, and result in very good outcomes and progression on leaving the college.
19. There are increased opportunities for students to develop their independence skills both within the college day and during the evenings within halls of residence. Where appropriate, they attend breakfast and brunch clubs, cook their lunch and evening meals, and attend to their laundry. Although the links between the college and residential provision have improved, individual learning plans are not yet fully embedded into the residential provision and there is no formal personal health and social education programme. The college is aware of these aspects of provision as areas for further improvement.
20. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory overall. Support for Braille and mobility is very good. Transition arrangements are good and induction for learners is thorough. Links with Connexions are highly successful and there is very good support for learners' progression into employment or further and higher education. There is good provision for specialist IT software and equipment.

21. All learners have a personal tutor and key worker and there are regular weekly timetabled group tutorials and key worker sessions. Although good practice was observed by inspectors in the review of learner progress, pre-entry and entry level learners are less involved in evaluating their own progress in meaningful and relevant ways.
22. Mobility, specialist and therapeutic support is accurately stated within initial assessments but is not robustly monitored to ensure learners are receiving the support that has been identified. Approaches and strategies to improve learners' behaviour are not always used effectively to ensure learning targets are achieved. Learning support staff are at times over-directive and do not allow learners to learn by their own mistakes. In some cases there is insufficient support within residences to actively promote learners' independence; for example, some students do not use the kitchens in the flats to make drinks as there is insufficient support to encourage their independence.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

23. Leadership and management are good and this agrees with the college's self-assessment. Senior leaders and governors have planned and managed a major change of strategy successfully. This has led to increased learner numbers and those with wider and more complex learning needs. Managers have provided a large professional development programme for existing and new staff in order to equip them with the skills necessary to meet these needs. They have managed to sustain good retention of learners and have improved their participation in extended learning activities.
24. Communication between managers, staff and learners is effective. Managers have involved and supported all staff in the new strategy. They have encouraged learners to express their opinions at team level, in focus groups and as learner governors. External communication is good. The college has very good partnerships with a wide range of employers, Connexions and other agencies. The close relationship with Loughborough College is very effective. Learners can access mainstream further education readily and both colleges collaborate fully on quality assurance, lesson observations and staff development.
25. Governance is satisfactory. Governors and staff are very committed to improving learners' experience of college life. Governors support senior managers effectively and challenge them appropriately. They bring wide and business-like experience and expertise to influence decisions. However, governors do not receive any systematic training or receive annual reports on the monitoring of progress against the race relations action plan. The college meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA). Managers monitor the performance of learners by gender, disability and ethnic background thoroughly, and outcomes are positive. Appropriate safeguarding policies are in place. Staff promote equality and diversity aspects through the curriculum well.

26. Quality assurance systems and procedures are comprehensive. Nevertheless, although managers have worked hard to improve teaching and learning and the effective use of individual learning plans and target setting, these are still underdeveloped. Evaluations of quality assurance processes and other initiatives, such as staff development, are insufficiently analytical or focused to ensure areas for further development are clearly identified. Internal lesson observation outcomes inform appraisal and staff development appropriately. The self-assessment process involves all staff and learners, links to strategic and development plans appropriately, and incorporates an improved use of data. The self-assessment report is mostly accurate. It is, however, overly descriptive and it lacks clear evidence to support judgements.
27. Financial management is good. Resource procurement is appropriate to need and is at best value prices. Learners achieve well. The financial monitoring of learners' schedules is rigorous, but the specialist support provided does not always reflect learners' planned needs in their schedules. Value for money is good. Accommodation and resources are of good standard. Learners benefit from an environment which is pleasing and conducive to learning. Staff are well qualified.

Subject sector areas

Vocational and employment skills

Good: Grade 2

Context

28. Learners follow several programmes at the RNIB College and at Loughborough College. The Residential Training Unit (RTU) provides short programmes which focus on employment outcomes, and these include customer care, call handling, literacy, numeracy, IT communication and Braille skills. Other learners study a wide variety of academic and vocational programmes. These programmes include different General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A levels, such as law, psychology and economics, and specialist courses in music, sport studies, ICT, science and complementary therapies. There are 11 learners funded by the RTU and 17 learners supported by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Strengths

- good achievement and successful outcomes
- wide range of provision
- good support for learners
- highly effective leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- the range and variety of activities in lessons
- the use of individual learning plans.

Achievement and standards

29. Achievement and standards are good. Learners funded by the RTU have consistently achieved high results and most recent learners have progressed to employment or further and higher education. Academic and vocational learners also make good progress; for example, the nine LSC learners completing their programmes in June 2007, all progressed to universities, colleges or to work in the voluntary sector.
30. Learners develop good occupational skills. The RNIB College office provides a highly effective realistic working environment. The college's employment service, together with its specialist careers service and well equipped learning resource centre, help learners to gain both confidence as well as very useful occupational skills. Learners develop good analytical and critical skills on their academic and vocational programmes at Loughborough College, and produce well presented assignments.

Quality of provision

31. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of methods to include and enthuse their learners, who respond well. In other lessons, teachers use too few methods to engage learners. Teachers either dominate through excessive teacher direction or let learners work for very long periods on their own without any change of pace or activity. These teachers do not use different ways to check understanding in lessons. They confine themselves to asking too many general questions or concentrating solely on observation of individual learners. Written work is returned promptly, with constructive comments, which enable learners to progress.
32. The range of provision is good and meets learners' and employers' needs particularly well. Learners study at different levels and progression paths are well established. Links with employers are good and the college helps learners to align their skills with those of current commercial demand.
33. Support for learners is good. Initial assessment is effective. Learners receive regular tutorial guidance. Action planning in individual learning plans lacks precision and learners often do not have precise and specific targets. Learners have good access to a very wide range of additional and specialist support services. Learners speak highly of the assistance they receive from staff, both informally and from formal arrangements.

Leadership and management

34. Leadership and management are good. Managers have a clear understanding of their priorities and communicate these to their colleagues. Teams work well together. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive. Managers monitor performance effectively using different data and this provides good access to continuous professional development. Equality and diversity are promoted well through curriculum design and delivery. Self-assessment is broadly accurate.

Preparation for life

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

35. The college offers a range of preparation for life programmes for entry and pre-entry learners, all of whom have varied and complex needs. Learners follow an individual programme of study and work towards a range of accredited outcomes. In a few cases, learners work towards outcomes at levels 1 and 2 as part of their programme. There are five pre-entry and 21 entry level learners, including five learners who attend as day students.

Strengths

- good range of activities to develop learners' skills
- good match of work placements to learners' needs
- good initiatives to improve the provision.

Areas for improvement

- the use of individual learning plans to record and measure progress
- the rigour of target setting
- planning to meet individual needs.

Achievement and standards

36. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Learners make good gains in confidence and the ability to interact in new situations. However, not all achievement in personal development and independence skills are sufficiently well recorded. Individual learning plans are not used well enough to plan for the development of specific skills. They do not capture small steps of achievement and measure progress effectively.

Quality of provision

37. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, teachers use stimulating resources and a variety of methods to motivate learners. However, in many cases learners are not sufficiently well involved in making contributions and subsequent evaluations of their work. Lesson plans do not detail sufficiently how individual learners' skills will be developed. Targets are too broad to provide sufficient guidance to learners and to enable small steps of progress to be measured effectively. Assessment is satisfactory. Learners' progress is reviewed regularly. However, comments about progress towards targets are not always sufficiently evaluative.
38. There is a wide range of relevant activities to develop learners' skills. The termly theme is used well to provide coherence to the various strands of the curriculum. An annual week long residential trip gives learners an opportunity to put skills learned in college into practice, such as money management and personal presentation.

39. There is a good range of work placements well matched to learners' needs. All final year learners take part in weekly work experience activities to extend their skills and to prepare for transition from the college. The work experience co-ordinator works well to source good quality placements in response to learners' specific requests and career aspirations.
40. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Teachers and support staff have a good understanding of learners' needs and manage behaviour effectively. Learners are confident to ask for help when necessary. Although teachers share their lesson plan with learning support assistants, they are not always used to best effect in lessons. Group tutorials are not sufficiently well structured to make effective use of learners' time.

Leadership and management

41. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are many good initiatives to improve the quality of the provision. There has been a comprehensive programme of staff development and an improved focus on transition planning. Observations of teaching and learning have resulted in improvements in classroom practice; however, the quality of lessons remains inconsistent. Communication across the area is good with regular meetings involving all staff. Staff are committed to the new direction of the college. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.