

Sense College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 132011

Name of lead inspector: Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

Last day of inspection: 18 March 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Information about the provider

1. Sense College, formally Sense East, is an Independent Specialist College (ISC), operating in the areas of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Northampton. It is part of the national organisation SENSE, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. All learners are identified as being deaf-blind, hearing impaired or visually impaired. Most learners have profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities affecting emotional development and behaviour. Some learners have complex health needs. The majority of the learners are in long-term care places funded by health and social services. Currently 36 learners are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Of these, 35 are aged 19 or over, 22 are male and 14 are female and three learners are of minority ethnic heritage. The vast majority of LSC learners are non-resident and taught in day services centres known as resource centres. These centres have a wide geographical spread and are located in Peterborough, Dereham, Nettleham, Spalding, Kettering and Bourne, Knapwell and Louth.
2. Since the last inspection in 2006, the college's head office has relocated to Hampton, Peterborough and two new resource centres have been opened. A new principal was appointed in autumn 2007. Between November 2008 and November 2009 the college underwent a significant restructure and the previous regional nature of the college has expanded to have a more national focus.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	37 full-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 4
Capacity to improve	Grade 4
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	4

Overall effectiveness

3. The effectiveness of provision is inadequate. Since the last inspection the college has not made enough progress against previously identified weaknesses. Arrangements to monitor, report and sustain improvements, both centrally and across the widely dispersed resource centres are underdeveloped. Subsequently the college's capacity to improve is also inadequate.
4. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Learners make good gains in communication and self advocacy which supports their independence well. Learners' individual targets however, are not challenging or precise enough. As a result, the recording of learners' achievement does not always capture the progress they have made or could make. Learners' achievements are actively and widely celebrated but are not analysed or reported by different groups to identify if there are any notable variations.
5. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching staff have particular expertise in developing learners' communication and in managing behaviour. The college's formal arrangements for improving and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning across all centres however, are flawed. The college satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of learners. Enrichment activities are wide-ranging and they contribute effectively to learners' self esteem. Other areas of the curriculum, such as the clarity of progression opportunities however, are less developed. Individual care, guidance and support are a strength of the college. Learners' transition into college life is good and their complex needs are very well supported through a broad range of therapies.

6. Overall leadership and management are inadequate. Following the restructure, the college's strategic direction has yet to be finalised and all levels of accountability are not fully clarified. At curriculum level, centre management is generally satisfactory. Actions taken by senior managers to improve the quality of resources and learning environments have been effective. Actions taken to improve: the college's response to equalities legislation; the promotion of equality and diversity; to ensure sharp and meaningful self-assessment; and to bring about robust quality arrangements however, have been much less successful. Each of these aspects requires significant improvement.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall, learners work to satisfactory individual standards. Baseline assessment is detailed and informs individual education plans. Many learners undertaking externally accredited units or qualifications successfully attain their goals. Outcomes however are not analysed by different groups to identify if there are significant variations. Learners' work is prominently displayed and celebrated across the college's centres.
- The progress learners make is satisfactory. Learners make good gains in the acquisition of communication, personal and social skills which support and increase their independence. The recording of learners' progress and achievement through individual target-setting however is insufficiently precise and as a result, learners' progress is not always maximised. Destination data is not systematically collected or analysed.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching staff are particularly skilled in using communication techniques and in the use of intensive interaction techniques with the most complex learners. Behaviour management is good. The effectiveness of learning support staff in learning sessions is variable. The college's formal arrangements for observing the quality of teaching and learning are insufficiently rigorous.
- Individualised programmes satisfactorily meet learners' needs. Learners enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities which encourage the development of communication skills, confidence and self esteem. Routes of progression however, are not clear, and few learners access external work experience.
- Partnership working is satisfactory. The college links with several organisations including employers, local schools and general further education colleges, many of whom participate productively in individual learner reviews. The involvement of partners in the development or evaluation of the college's provision is minimal. Links with partners to share and promote best practice are underdeveloped.
- Individual care, guidance and support are good. Holistic initial assessments contribute to specialist care and support plans and ensure a smooth transition into college. A wide range of appropriate therapies are provided. Teaching staff have a good knowledge of individual learners and their preferences and communicate regularly with parents and/or carers.

- Leadership and management are inadequate overall. Progress since the last inspection has been too slow. Quality improvement processes across the college are insufficiently cohesive or thorough. Management information systems remain underdeveloped and data are not used consistently well to inform improvement planning. In many cases, the targets set are not precise enough to enable effective monitoring.
- The day to day operational management at the college's resources centres is satisfactory. Staff know their learners well and plan appropriately to meet their personal and sensory needs. Arrangements for sharing best practice between centres is not maximised and approaches to quality improvement and monitoring at individual resource centres are too inconsistent.
- The oversight of the college's provision provided by the newly formed supervisory body is weak. The supervisory body is supportive of the college's work but its role in monitoring key aspects of the college's performance lacks clarity and there is insufficient challenge to bring about improvements. Some staff are not completely clear about where responsibilities lie under the new structure.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Robust arrangements ensure that all staff have been through appropriate vetting checks. Risk assessments of learners' activities are satisfactory. Safeguarding training in the protection of vulnerable adults is mandatory for all staff but as yet no staff are undergoing formal training in child protection.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate. The college has been slow to respond to equalities legislation. Learner achievement data and wider equality data, including for staff are not analysed or monitored sufficiently to identify any significant variation over time and to ensure all potential discrimination is avoided. The promotion of equality through the curriculum is improving but is not yet consistent.
- Engagement with users is satisfactory. The college responds well to the views and suggestions made by learners and have increased the opportunities available for them to contribute their ideas. Feedback from other stakeholders such as employers, other education providers and parents or carers are not used systematically enough to contribute to self-assessment
- The self-assessment report does not provide an adequately sharp or accurate picture of college performance. Evidence used to evaluate much of the provision is too anecdotal and not supported sufficiently by data, analysis or trends. Internal and external scrutiny to validate self-assessment is limited.

What does SENSE college need to do to improve further?

- Improve the tracking and recording of learners' achievement by: ensuring all learners are set sharp, challenging and individualised targets that enable them to make the progress they are capable of; ensuring all staff understand how to write measurable objectives and monitor learning objectives at all stages; and increasing the central monitoring, auditing and recording of achievement.

- Further improve learners' economic and social well-being through: the systematic recording and analysis of learner destinations; ensuring better routes of progression are developed in the college's current curriculum review; and where appropriate, wider opportunities for external work experience are provided.
- Increase the proportion of good and better lessons by: more rigorously applying the college's observation scheme to include greater moderation and training for all observers; analysing regularly and in detail the outcomes of observation findings to better use as a basis for quality improvement planning; and by making sure learning support staff are trained sufficiently so they are knowledgeable and skilled to support learners in the classroom more effectively.
- To improve the thoroughness and cohesion of all quality improvements arrangements by: making sure targets and timescales at all levels are precise, ambitious and are monitored frequently to assess progress; to use management information and data more effectively to review and monitor the quality of provision; and to more systematically share best practice across resource centres.
- Strengthen the self-assessment process so the college has an accurate view of its performance by: the use of sound data and evidence to support judgments; reporting more precisely on all aspects of the college's work; systematically using the feedback of learners and other stakeholders to contribute to quality improvement; and ensuring a more thorough validation and scrutiny of the self-assessment report.
- Ensure the college fully meet its legislative duties and better promote equality and diversity across all areas so any potential discrimination can be avoided by: collating, analysing and monitoring all equalities data, including achievement data, thoroughly and frequently; clearly monitoring and reporting the affect of actions taken to improve; and better sharing best practice in the promotion of equality at curriculum level.
- Increase the accountability of the newly structured supervisory group to support more rapid improvements to the college's performance by: ensuring all staff are clear about roles and responsibilities under the new structure; ensuring the supervisory group monitors, provides sufficient challenge to college managers in meetings and takes a more prominent role in validating the college's self-assessment.
- Provide safeguarding training in child protection to the same standard as that provided for the protection of vulnerable adults to ensure that staff have the knowledge and awareness and are absolutely clear about any differences in procedure.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the opportunity to meet and make friends
- the support they receive from staff

- the enrichment activities (especially swimming) are particularly appreciated
- the support for communication development.

What learners would like to see improved:

- an increase in male staff to provide more personal care for male learners
- the amount of specialist resources to increase their independence.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

7. Progress against the two areas for improvement identified at the last inspection is inadequate. The monitoring and recording of individual achievement is still variable in quality and the college's response to equalities legislation remains a significant area for attention. In addition, the college has not sustained all of its previous strengths. The college's recent restructure has yet to be fully embedded and lines of accountability are not explicit enough. The self-assessment report was overly positive about most aspects of provision and in many cases judgements were not substantiated with robust evidence or data. Overall, cross-college quality improvement arrangements are not thorough or cohesive and target setting is imprecise. Staff are committed to the college and learners' well-being. Resources and accommodation are of a high standard and financial management is sound.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

8. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Most learners who undertake externally accredited awards and units qualifications successfully attain their goals. Learners work steadily towards achievement against broad individual learning goals however accurate recording of progress is significantly hindered by insufficiently specific and measurable learning targets. The college does not carry out any formal analysis of achievement to ensure that it is timely or to ascertain any trends among learners, centres or curriculum areas.
9. Learners make satisfactory progress. Learners enjoy practical and leisure activities and many make significant gains in the development of their communication skills. Learners who develop sufficient skills attend further education college courses and/or work experience, although very few access external work placements. Opportunities using mini-enterprise and everyday shopping for necessities develop appropriate financial and business understanding for some learners to support their economic well-being. The college does not collect destinations of learners when they leave college.
10. Learners feel safe in college. They like the college buildings which are easy to negotiate with handrails and appreciate the support they receive from staff. Risk assessments are good and safe practice is clearly emphasised in lessons. The promotion of health and well-being is good. Learners take advantage of many opportunities for physical activities such as swimming, bowling, gym work and horse riding and they describe them as simply the best way of socialising with other people. There is an awareness of healthy eating although this is not actively promoted in lessons. Learners have a positive, albeit limited presence in the local community through their use of community facilities, social events and some work placements. A learner involvement strategy is in place and learner views are collected in a variety of ways. A learner forum is now being piloted to provide learner representation across the organisation.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Pre-entry and initial assessments are thorough and satisfactorily contribute to learners' individual education plans. The detailed planning from pre-entry to baseline provides an adequate framework for individual learning. Subject targets vary in quality and usefulness and are sometimes not sufficiently challenging for all learners. Generally, lesson planning is satisfactory but there are no standard lesson plans used across all the education centres and the detail and quality of these varies too much. Learners enjoy their lessons. In better lessons, teachers are particularly skilled in using appropriate communication techniques and in the use of intensive interaction techniques with the most complex learners. Behaviour management is particularly strong. The effectiveness of learning support for teachers in lessons though is variable.
12. Teaching staff are appropriately experienced and qualified. Education centres are pleasant, colourful and welcoming places to visit and teaching rooms are well equipped to meet the needs of individual learners. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are weak. Observations of teaching and learning are well established. Training for observers and teaching staff has not been developed or implemented. Moderation and standardisation of observation findings are insufficient. Analysis of performance data is very limited.
13. The curriculum satisfactorily meets the need and interests of learners. Personalised programmes of study for each learner are planned appropriately. A formal curriculum review is currently taking place to further tailor programmes to learners' needs. A broad range of accredited units exist to develop learners' communication, living skills, self advocacy and social skills. A rich range of enrichment activities extends these skills and enhances learners' self-esteem. The units however do not currently provide clear progression routes.
14. Partnership working is satisfactory. Well established informal partnerships exist with an appropriate range of local organisations including Connexions, local general further education colleges, special schools and local community organisations. Partners participate as appropriate in individual reviews and value the expertise in sensory impairment provided by the staff of Sense. Opportunities to share knowledge, resources and expertise with other specialist providers have not yet been fully explored.
15. Care and support for learners are good. Transition into college is well managed. Initial assessment provides a holistic and detailed view of the care and support needs of each learner. Support workers are well informed about learners' preferences and provide discrete and appropriate physical care. Mentors offer an effective single point of contact for individual learners and daily communication arrangements work effectively. A wide range of therapies are available and used well to benefit learners' well-being, including speech and language therapy and hydrotherapy. Parents and/or carers are fully involved in learners' review meetings.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

16. Leadership and management are inadequate. Following the college's large scale national restructure in 2009, lines of accountability have yet to be made completely clear to all staff at the college and a revised strategic direction is under discussion. Overall, the operational management at the college's resources centres is satisfactory and ensures that appropriate consideration is given to meeting the sensory and personal needs of individual learners through their learning programmes. Since the last inspection, a planned programme of extensive building and refurbishment has been managed successfully by the principal and senior leaders and has notably enhanced the learning environments in which learners work. However, most quality improvement processes across the college are not sufficiently cohesive or sound. As a result, the college is unable to evaluate with adequate confidence or report accurately on all aspects of its performance. The overall rate of and sustainability of progress in many key areas of the college's work has been slow.
17. Arrangements for monitoring the overall quality of provision at all levels are not adequate and lack thoroughness. Targets and in some cases timescales, are not sufficiently precise to enable managers to measure with ease the extent of any progress made. The college recognises that the absence of a central management information system and over reliance on paper-based processes has impeded its ability to produce frequent and accessible reports on learner achievement, particularly given the need to oversee the wide geographical spread of its resource centres. Where data are collated they are not always analysed in sufficient depth to be meaningful or to inform improvement planning effectively. Centre managers are enthusiastic and along with teaching staff, know their learners very well but best practice amongst centres and teachers is not maximised.
18. The principal of the college is a member of, and reports to, the newly formed supervisory community services management team, developed as part of the restructuring process undertaken by the parent company. However, although the group includes one member of Sense's board of trustees there are no other external members to offer an outside, objective view of the college's performance. Although in its early development, the group does not provide clear accountability of their role in monitoring the college's performance. At present it does not provide sufficient challenge to raise the standard of the college's performance. Involvement in the self-assessment process is limited. Financial management is good, as is the deployment of resources to directly benefit the students' learning experience. The college provides satisfactory value for money.
19. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. A safeguarding committee has been recently established which aims to provide an oversight of safeguarding arrangements. Policies and procedures for children and vulnerable adults have been updated recently and are in line with government requirements. The college routinely carries out Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for all new

staff. Risk assessments of learners' activities are thorough and clearly recorded. All staff receive comprehensive training on the protection of vulnerable adults, however managers have not provided child protection training for staff. The college plans for all staff to undertake training within the next few weeks.

20. The overall promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate. At curriculum level, managers and individual teaching staff are beginning to highlight themes of equality and diversity effectively through specifically planned activities to help raise learner awareness of different cultures, although this is not yet fully embedded or consistent across the college sites. Learners are encouraged by teaching staff to treat each other with respect. The college however, has been slow to respond to equalities legislation. An appropriate single equality scheme is in place, but not all targets in the subsequent implementation plan are precise or meaningful. The frequent monitoring and impact of actions taken to date has been limited. Learner achievement data are not analysed or monitored by different groups to help identify any patterns of persistent under or over performance over time. Wider equality data, including the tracking of complaints and the profile of all staff, are also insufficient and does not enable the college to identify or report any patterns or plan effectively to ensure all potential discrimination is avoided.
21. The college engages with learners well and has increased the formal opportunities for them to contribute their views and ideas. Feedback and suggestions from learners, either through student forums or on an individual basis, are taken seriously and wherever possible the college responds swiftly. For example, adaptations have been made to learners' timetables and improvements made to learning environments. The collation of other user views, such as employers and other educational providers is not gathered systematically and opportunities are missed to incorporate any feedback in the college's self-assessment processes.

Information about the inspection

22. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and 2 additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Bourne education centre manager as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

name of provider/college

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	36	1	35
Part-time learners	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	4	4	4
Capacity to improve	4		
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2		
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	3		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
Leadership and management	4	4	4
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	4		
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	4		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	4		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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