

# Royal National College for the Blind

Royal National College for the Blind, Venns Lane, Hereford HR1 1DT

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

This is an independent specialist residential college with charitable status. The college provides education and training primarily for students who are visually impaired. Several students also have a hearing impairment and/or another disability. Some students have additional needs, including medical and mental health needs. There are 96 residential students and two day students. At the time of the inspection, 24 residential students were under 18 years old.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this college.

### Inspection dates: 4 to 6 March 2025

**Overall experiences and progress of young people,** taking in account **good**

How well young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The college provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 25 January 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of young people: good**

Students flourish and thrive in the residential accommodation. They value their growing independence and the opportunities it gives them. The college provides a community for students who have previously been more likely to experience isolation. Students enjoy various activities, including organised visits to local attractions and comedy nights. On site, they can play games together and enjoy karaoke and quizzes. As their independence grows, students often enjoy dining out and exploring the local area with their friends.

Students like their accommodation and feel it is well tailored to their needs. They say that staff support them well and are always available if they need anything. Students have different opinions about the food that is served. Some enjoy the choice and variety, while others find it limited. Leaders seek feedback about the food and work to make changes to better suit preferences. Many students choose to prepare their own meals. They enjoy reaching this independence milestone and developing the skills they will need for adulthood.

Students make progress in multiple areas of their lives. Most notably, this progress is associated with their independence. Students develop skills in areas such as cooking, cleaning and travelling. In addition, they have opportunities to explore friendships, relationships and living with others. This prepares them well for the future. Students leave the college with various new skills and with increased independence and confidence. Academically, they are prepared for further education, apprenticeships, employment or work in the voluntary sector. Leaders understand the challenges faced by students with visual impairments and help prepare them for employability.

Leaders seek students' views and feedback regularly through different forums, including well-being and satisfaction surveys. Senior leaders take advantage of more informal feedback opportunities around the college.

Parents feel that staff empower their children to achieve and support them well. They see their children develop their independence and confidence during their time at the college.

### **How well young people are helped and protected: good**

Students enjoy positive relationships with staff. They say they feel safe and that they can go to staff if they have any concerns. Staff understand that students with visual impairments are more vulnerable. Staff spend time supporting students so they feel safe and confident on campus and in the wider community. This expands the opportunities available to them. Staff encourage students to take age-appropriate risks while providing support. Students receive support and advice around topics such as healthy relationships and sex education.

Students understand how to conduct themselves appropriately at college and in the residential provision. Staff aim to empower students to make their own decisions and accept responsibility for their actions. When behavioural issues arise, parents are fully involved in subsequent meetings. The outcomes focus on providing additional support, advice and guidance. When addressing behavioural issues, staff consider any additional needs or factors that may mitigate them, such as mental health concerns.

Staff identify and report safeguarding concerns. Staff who are responsible for safeguarding respond to identified concerns. Most support is in the form of one-to-one conversations and follow-up assistance from staff in the residential accommodation. Staff notify parents of any concerns that arise. When necessary, staff make referrals to other agencies to ensure that students receive the right support.

Staff receive clear guidance about their conduct in the role. Leaders investigate when there are concerns about staff practice and take swift action to reach a resolution. However, leaders do not always identify when referrals should be made to the local authority designated officer. In addition, they do not always identify and record concerns that do not reach the threshold for external referrals in line with guidance.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leaders have a clear vision for the residential provision. They maintain high expectations about student achievements, with a focus on independence and life skills to build resilience and confidence. They acknowledge that students' actions will have a lifelong influence on what is achievable and possible. Leaders understand the strengths of the residential provision and identify clear areas for development.

Staff are dedicated and enthusiastic about their role to support students. They receive regular training to support their practice, which includes sessions that are tailored to students' individual needs or emerging themes. Staff benefit from the presence of managers in residential halls, allowing for informal discussions that provide support and advice. However, staff do not receive regular, formal supervision that would allow them to reflect on students' needs and the support they offer in a structured way. Staff receive annual appraisals and six-monthly reviews to provide them with feedback on their practice.

Staff work well as a team across different departments to provide support for students. There is a focus on building strong and trusting relationships. Staff share information to ensure consistent support for students across the whole provision. Residential managers ensure that staff receive and capture information and updates about students and their care. However, this information is not always recorded clearly and consistently and is often shared verbally or informally.

## **What does the college need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendation**

- Ensure that the college makes referrals to the local authority designated officer when necessary and maintains a clear record of concerns that do not meet this threshold, with due regard to any relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS for 'Accommodation of students under 18 by FE colleges' 11.1)

### **Point for improvement**

- The college leaders should ensure that staff are provided with regular opportunities for reflective supervision that addresses students' needs.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people, using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Further education college with residential accommodation details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC050563

**Principal/CEO:** Lucy Proctor

### **Inspectors**

Clare Nixson, Social Care Inspector

Emma Fryer, Social Care Inspector

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