

Short inspection of Dorton College of Further Education

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 February 2024

Outcome

Dorton College of Further Education continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Dorton College is an independent specialist college based in the London Borough of Bromley, providing specialist further education for day students who are blind or partially sighted (vision impaired or VI) aged 16-25 years old. Most students access their main programmes of study at partnership colleges with support from Dorton College staff. Other students complete bespoke programmes of study based on individual need and progress at the Dorton College's VI hub. Dorton College is part of the Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC). At the time of inspection, there were 19 students, studying a range of programmes, such as level 2 media, catering programmes and A levels. Two students were aged 16-18 and 17 were aged 19 and above. All students are in receipt of high needs funding. The provider works with three partner colleges, London South East Colleges, Bracknell and Wokingham College and Farnham College.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students value highly the positive relationships they have with tutors and learning support assistants (LSAs) who know their students very well. Expert staff use the 'just enough support' ethos effectively. As a result, students gain high levels of confidence and develop independent skills over time well.

Students benefit greatly from the well-planned sessions at the hub to help them become more independent in their studies and home lives. For example, in the health and well-being sessions they discuss helpful topics like road safety for VI individuals. In the occupational therapy and life skills sessions, students learn about money and cooking skills and in mobility sessions they learn the routes around their local area. As a result, students practise the skills they need for their futures and become more resilient.

Almost all students make significant progress in developing new skills and knowledge in subjects they have not been able to study before. For example, in catering they make pasta and sauce for paying customers using voice operated

kitchen equipment, such as scales, microwaves and hobs. In media, students produce leaflets to promote snooker with images and text sourced from the internet. Consequently, students' progress well to further learning, employment, volunteering or independent living.

Students benefit greatly from a range of employability training and experiences to help them decide on their next step. For example, students complete work placements in a theatre, in cafes, radio stations and offices. As a result, students develop social skills and employability skills, such as time keeping, working in a team and liaising with customers well.

Students feel safe in learning, they have a good awareness of staying safe online through discussions in the daily tutorial sessions and know who to speak to if they have any concerns. Staff talk to students sensitively about incidents and behaviours they may experience in public places and how to stay safe. For example, they discuss when out in the community how to identify 'safe strangers', such as shop security staff and police. Consequently, students are prepared well for independent living and working and feel safe.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders successfully made the necessary transition to the VI hub at Orpington and secured growth in student numbers to ensure financial stability. They have developed a highly effective hybrid offer that meets the needs of their VI students well. For example, students attend partner colleges for their programme of study and attend the VI hub to develop the skills they need to participate in the community and the world of work, where appropriate. Consequently, most students learn new skills, become more independent and are able to broaden their understanding of the world, develop their social skills and participate in the community and progress to their next steps confidently.

Students benefit from the well-resourced VI hub where they learn to use utilities safely. For example, they use an adapted washing machine, and speaking cooking equipment. Consequently, students learn well the skills required to become more independent in their own homes.

Students benefit from well-planned activities to widen their experiences. For example, visits to the Tower of London and Natural History Museum, where they benefit from a behind the scenes tour and are able to touch the exhibits to bring them to life. As a result, students are able to broaden their understanding of the world, develop their social skills and participate in the community.

Most teachers in the partner colleges plan learning well to enable students to develop new skills and knowledge. For example, they learn about the importance of good customer service for businesses, how to plan and write essays and how to safely follow a planned route using mobility aids to identify landmarks.

Most teachers in the partner colleges explain new concepts well and check students understanding before starting new activities. Support staff know their students well and consequently provide helpful one-to-one support that ensures VI students contribute to sessions as well as their peers. For example, support staff use sign language and use enlarged font to enable students to complete the activities in the session. However, in a small number of sessions, teachers in the partner colleges do not use adapted assessments sufficiently well enough to ensure students have fully grasped new concepts before moving on to new activities.

Leaders use their extensive contacts, such as Blind Ambition, RSBC and Blind in Business to ensure students benefit from external careers advice and guidance that relates specifically to VI. For example, VI specialist advisors share their own achievements, which motivates students to follow their ambitions. As a result, students are well informed on the options available to them for their next steps.

Leaders offer and provide relevant training and support to teaching staff at partner colleges, which ensures most VI students benefit from tailored teaching, support and resources they need to help them learn. However, leaders do not consistently monitor or have the capacity to improve the quality of teaching in partner colleges to ensure all student needs are consistently met.

Leaders monitor and track student progress in the VI hub well. However, while they receive helpful hand over information, leaders recognise they do not have an overview of the progress students make towards their qualification at the partner colleges. Leaders have recently secured approval from the society for an information system that will enable them to track student progress to ensure they achieve well. However, it is too early to see the impact of this action.

Leaders support staff well with their professional development and, as a result, they progress into more qualified roles and stay at the College. For example, staff complete qualifications to enable them to progress in their roles, such as from an LSA to a Qualified Teacher of Vision Impairment.

Staff are very proud to work at Dorton College and know they are positively contributing to their students becoming more independent. They feel well led and motivated to support their VI students to meet the RSBC mantra 'to live life without limits'.

Well-qualified and experienced governors provide effective challenge and support to ensure that leaders improve and develop the provision to benefit their students. For example, governors, some who have the lived experience, are acutely aware of and supported the need to develop bespoke careers advice and guidance for each student according to their needs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Monitor the quality of teaching and learning at the partner colleges to ensure all students benefit from high-quality teaching and support that they need to help them learn.
- Monitor student progress at partner colleges so that students make excellent progress and achieve well.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133001
Address	'The Hub' - 4th Floor, Orpington Campus Bromley The Walnuts Orpington BR6 0TE
Contact number	07557353800
Website	www.rsbc.org.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Josie Grainger
Provider type	Independent Specialist College
Date of previous inspection	12 to 14 September 2018
Main subcontractors	London South East Colleges Bracknell and Wokingham College Activate Learning (Farnham College)

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Dorton College of Further Education was judged to be good in September 2018.

The inspection team was assisted by the principal as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Jo-Ann Henderson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lyn Bourne

Ofsted Inspector

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