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Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience	Published	Provider reference
Post-sixteen	May 2007	106166

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders
Type of college:	Independent, specialist, residential and day
Principal:	Mrs Hilary Ward
Address of college:	Stanley Road Cheadle Hulme Cheadle Cheshire SK8 6RQ
Telephone number:	0161 610 0100
Fax number:	0161 610 0101
Chair of governors:	Tony Snape
Unique reference number:	106166
Name of lead inspector:	Kathleen Smith, HMI
Dates of inspection:	20–22 March 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders (RSDCD) is an independent specialist residential and day college. It is located near to Manchester and learners are referred from across the United Kingdom. The college meets the needs of learners who have severe and complex learning difficulties combined with significant communication disorders which include very limited or no oral language. Its aim is to develop communication systems to enable learners to make choices and decisions for themselves about their future lives. The college has 32 learners following a three year Vocational Pathways course. All are funded by the Learning Skills Council (LSC), except for two learners funded by ELWA and one by Education Scotland. Two learners are from ethnic minority backgrounds.
2. All residential learners live in houses on the school and college site and follow an individualised programme which includes literacy, numeracy and communication skills, life and vocational skills, and creative studies. The teaching and residential accommodation is on one site and the college makes use of the residential units for teaching. Improvements to the college accommodation are underway and most learners are based in temporary classrooms until the work is due to be completed in September 2007.

Scope of the inspection

3. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
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Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
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Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
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Leadership and management	Good: grade 2
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Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

4. Achievements are good. Young people make good progress in their learning, and make particularly great strides in their social development and communication skills. Most become increasingly confident in the use of signs, symbols and pictures to help communicate their thoughts and needs to others. The implementation of the RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement) framework is developing well. Outcomes from comprehensive multi-disciplinary assessments are used successfully to inform individual learning plans (ILP). The quality of target setting is not consistent across the provision. Learners attend well and are punctual.
5. Teaching and learning are good. Improvements are clearly identified through a rigorous analysis of regular lesson observations. Lesson planning is effective and most learners benefit from highly individualised programmes. Staff make good use of a range of communication systems and teaching strategies. Teaching assistants are managed effectively and have a good understanding of their role. Liaison between the residential, support and teaching staff is good. The monitoring and recording of learner progress is not of a consistently high quality across all areas.
6. The college's approaches to educational and social inclusion and meeting the needs and interests of learners are good. The individualised education and care programmes are very well suited to learners' needs. The wide range of practically-based activities and the flexible approach taken to both education and residential arrangements take full account of the very diverse needs of learners. The young people are well supported to increase their involvement in decisions about their daily lives, educational and recreational activities. Most learners participate in a range of work experience placements, school and college links and community based activities. Comprehensive procedures are in place to promote the safety, wellbeing and protection of individual learners.
7. Support and guidance for all learners are good. The specialist multi-disciplinary teams make an outstanding contribution to learners' ability to communicate and behave more appropriately and to access the curriculum. The induction programme is good, individualised and learners are effectively prepared for transition. Behaviour management strategies are highly effective. An extensive range of specialist resources and facilities is successfully used to support learning.
8. The quality of leadership and management is good. There is clear leadership by the principal and senior staff towards meeting each learner's needs effectively. There is a strong ethos of respect and care throughout the college, and a commitment to continued improvement. Quality assurance arrangements have improved; although still need to be more rigorous. Self-assessment is accurate overall, although not always based on sufficiently

detailed evidence. Areas for improvement are clearly identified and used to direct improvement plans. Governors discharge their duties well. Financial management is good. The college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

9. The college has a high capacity to improve further. The quality improvement arrangements are comprehensive, although not sufficiently robust in some aspects. The new management structures are improving the provision. The college is very aware of its strengths and areas for development; self-assessment is well established but is not sufficiently rigorous. Strategic management is good and the college has well advanced plans to improve accommodation. The governors and staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to the college. They have the potential and the resources to continue to improve the learners' experience.

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

10. The college has made good progress to address most of the key areas for improvement stated in the last inspection. There has been an improvement in the distinction between college and post-16 policy and practice. The new accommodation will further this development. The recording of learners' progress has improved. Evaluations after lessons are now much more focused on recording learners' progress, although there is still room for further development. Teaching continues to improve and an increased focus on individualised programmes for most learners provides a better match to their specific needs.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- high levels of achievements in communication and social skills
- good management of behaviour
- good use of realistic learning environments
- outstanding specialist multi-disciplinary support services
- effective liaison between the residential, support and teaching staff
- outstanding range of staff training and development
- well embedded ethos of dignity and respect.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the consistency in setting and monitoring individual learner targets
- the consistent implementation of quality improvement procedures
- the coherence of management information systems.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

11. The achievements of learners are good. Young people make good progress in their learning, and make particularly great strides in their social and communication skills and social behaviour. They routinely develop and practise their skills throughout the day and in a variety of contexts. Learners with multi-sensory impairment and severe learning and communication difficulties make particularly good progress. Most become increasingly confident in the use of signs, symbols and pictures to help them communicate their thoughts and needs to others around them. They also learn how their day is structured and this reduces their anxiety about what is expected of them. For example, a learner who did not have significant functional communication on arrival at RSDCD can, with assistance, now make a drink for herself when she wants it. This substantial achievement involves the ability to make requests and choices by selecting the correct images from her PECS (picture exchange communication system) book. In so doing, this learner no longer needs to resort to using challenging behaviour to express frustration when unable to communicate.
12. The implementation of the RARPA staged framework is developing well and adequately used so that the college can have increasing confidence in the quality of their work and, therefore, their learners' achievements. Initial assessment is comprehensive, rigorous and includes significant contributions from a wide range of multi-disciplinary professionals. Outcomes are successfully used to inform ILPs. Recently improved baseline assessments provide a more accurate basis to measure the progress made. These are now in place for all first year learners. Achievements are successfully celebrated through an appropriate range of nationally recognised awards, termly records of achievements, annual reviews and displays.
13. Target setting is not consistently good across the provision and, in some cases this also adversely affects the quality of recording of learning in lessons. Staff are fully aware of this area for development and plans are in place to make the necessary improvements. The college acknowledge that the use of data to demonstrate trends or patterns of individual learner performance, in order to inform improvement planning, is underdeveloped. There is no analysis of achievement data in relation to gender, disability or ethnicity. Learners attend well and are punctual. Destination data over the last two years shows that five of the nine leavers returned home and accessed day services. The other leavers moved on to supported living options, with one learner also involved in supported employment.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

14. Teaching and learning are good. In most cases sessions are planned very well and based on a good knowledge of learners' specific needs. They are taught

in a realistic and practical context which enables the learners to develop and transfer the skills learned into daily realities. Very effective use is made of the local community. Teaching assistants are well deployed and have a good understanding of their role. There is good communication between education and residential staff and this contributes well to learners' progress. However, target setting within the extended curriculum has correctly been identified within the self-assessment report as an area for improvement

15. The college's judgement that learners enjoy their learning and benefit from a range of teaching methods is accurate. The majority of staff work confidently and use their knowledge well to enable learners to communicate and learn effectively. The management of learners' behaviour is highly skilled and very effective. Staff successfully use a range of communication systems and teaching strategies, including example PECS, intensive interaction, sign, objects of reference and visual timelines.
16. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment that the college meets the needs and interests of learners well and social and educational inclusion is good. There is a clear focus on enabling learners to achieve their potential. They are ably supported to increase their involvement in decisions about their daily lives, education and recreational activities. A well established curriculum framework provides clear routes for progression through the post-16 and post-19 provision. The majority of learners have highly individualised flexible programmes, well matched to their specific needs. The development of communication underpins all teaching and learning. Teaching environments have been created in each of the curriculum areas to provide stimulating learning experiences or, alternatively, stress-free zones for learners, as appropriate to their needs.
17. Processes for external verification of awards are comprehensive. Effective relationships with local general FE providers have enabled link places for several learners on a variety of courses. Relationships with specialist and mainstream colleges are used well to enhance programmes for learners. Learners have access to an extensive range of activities both on-site and in the community. Learners make a positive contribution to the local community through charitable fund raising events and raising awareness about learners with disabilities. The impact of the learner council is developing and they have recently supported the catering staff in developing menus through tasting sessions of lunch time foods and feeding back their views. Opportunities for learners to participate in both internal and external work placements are very good. An understanding of healthy lifestyles is well promoted through individually tailored programmes.
18. Planned reviews take place six monthly, are effectively used to monitor progress and inform any changes to their programmes. Communication with parents and carers is good. They are encouraged to contribute to reviews and to setting and evaluating learning objectives in education, care and behaviour support plans.

19. The quality of care, support and guidance is good; some aspects are excellent. The multi-disciplinary team of specialists provide outstanding support for learners, especially so for their communication development. Support for learners who have mental health difficulties has improved significantly with the appointment of a specialist practitioner. Multi-disciplinary support is based on thorough assessment and high quality joint work with teaching, support and residential staff. An extensive range of specialist resources and facilities is used effectively to support learning. Learners are helped to settle quickly into college life through a good induction programme. They receive a good range of helpful information, individualised to meet their needs. Personal tutors build on this good start through an effective personal, health and social education programme. Learners benefit from the college's good careers education and guidance, and prepare learners effectively for when they leave college.
20. Education and care staff work very well together and learners value the pastoral support they receive from their key staff members. Regular tutorial meetings provide the opportunity for these staff to meet with each learner to review progress and plan further activities. However, the targets set are not always of high quality and it is not always clear how they build on previous successes. Policies and procedures to ensure learners' health and safety are thorough. Comprehensive and detailed risk assessments are undertaken for all learners, activities and venues.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

21. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment that leadership and management are good. The senior management team set a clear direction based on an ethos of dignity and respect for the learner. Provision is clearly focused on enabling learners with a diverse range of complex needs to develop effective communication skills, so that they can make appropriate choices and lead more independent lives. The senior management team successfully promote a culture which is appropriately self-critical and ensures continuous improvements are made.
22. The management structure has recently been strengthened to improve quality assurance and more effective individualised programming for each learner. The college recognises that, although improved, quality assurance arrangements still need to be more rigorous. The lesson observation process is thorough. It is clearly linked to performance management and has been successful in identifying areas for improvement for individual staff and informing overall staff training needs. A recently developed action plan identifies necessary actions to improve broader monitoring of teaching and learning processes, although it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness on learners' achievements and progress.
23. Management information systems are also being developed to provide more robust information. Self-assessment procedures have improved and now involve all staff. Subject leaders' skills in identifying areas for improvement are also being developed. However, while self-assessment is sufficiently evaluative

and accurate to inform improvement planning, judgements are not supported well enough by substantive evidence about outcomes for learners. Improvement plans are closely monitored to ensure targets for their completion are on-track.

24. Equality of opportunity is promoted well through learners' activities. Parents of learners from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds are consulted about how their cultural and religious needs can be best met. Policies and procedures are in place to fulfil the requirement of the Race Relations (Amendment Act) (2000) and the Disability Discrimination Act (2005), including a disability equality scheme and action plan. Safeguarding procedures are in place and all staff have received appropriate training.
25. Staff value the extensive training provided by the college organisation to improve and update their skills and qualifications. They feel well supported and encouraged to perform their roles effectively. Specialist resources, especially those to aid communications and mobility, are good. The college is aware that some of its accommodation is not suitable for the range of its learners' needs, but plans are well under way to bring about substantial improvements. Significant investment has been made in information and learning technology (ILT) provision but this was not observed extensively during the inspection.
26. There are very good links with external providers and agencies. The college has forged good links with other specialist providers to share best practice. There are extensive links with community groups and volunteers are used to enhance the quality of life experiences for the learners. The college is working with a housing association to improve destination outcomes for learners.
27. Governors discharge their duties effectively and are actively involved in evaluating the quality of provision through their direct involvement in the activities of the college. They receive regular reports about particular aspects of college performance and provide suitable challenge and support to the senior management team to ensure standards are maintained.
28. Financial management is effective in providing enough resources for staff to perform their roles to a good standard. Budgets are devolved to managers and other staff with particular education provision and support services. Individual learner schedules are effectively monitored and reflected in the ILPs. Value for money is good.