

WESC Foundation College

Independent Specialist College



23–25 September 2015

Inspection dates

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers promote high standards in all areas.
- Trustees and leaders have established a sustainable future for the college.
- Students are enthusiastic, motivated and keen to succeed because all staff work together well to reinforce and personalise learning.
- Students develop good levels of confidence and expertise in walking and navigating by using the college estate, the local community and specialist resources.
- Students with complex needs make good progress because of the innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
- Students develop good personal, social and employability skills in a wide range of formal and informal situations on the college campus and in the wider community.
- Progression for students to supported or independent living is good and improving.
- Progression routes for students who are work-ready are very good; they include apprenticeships, supported internships, voluntary and paid work.
- WESC provides very good practical support for students after they leave college.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because

- Teaching in some sessions does not meet the high standards set by managers despite the support and professional development provided for teachers.
- Functional skills sessions in mathematics and ICT do not give the majority of students the skills necessary for adult life.
- Therapists are not routinely involved in supporting work experience placements.
- Education staff and therapists do not always work together closely enough to plan and review the effectiveness of work placements.
- In some sessions, the limited use made of the accessible technology used in other areas of the college hinders student progress.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The WESC Foundation provides a range of specialist services including education, care and complementary therapies for children, young people and adults who are visually impaired and, in a majority of cases, have additional complex needs. Twenty-eight local authorities commission places at the college. The college offers full-time, part-time, day, residential, 38-week and 52-week, respite and split placements with other further education and skills providers. The adult service supports adults towards independent living and work including living in the community through landlord-supported housing provision. The research and development department works with other organisations nationally and internationally to understand the barriers to learning for young people with sight problems.
- WESC has four landlord-supported houses, either adjacent to the WESC grounds or within one mile of the campus. The homes are fully adapted and supported by WESC's community enabling service. WESC also runs five charity shops in the Devon area.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the observation of teaching, learning and assessment so that following an observation each teacher is very clear about the impact their work has on individual students, what they are doing particularly well and how they can improve.
- Ensure that the teaching in all mathematics and ICT sessions is directly related to the needs of individual students and develops the skills they need as they progress into adult life.
- Make better use of the accessible technology available to teachers and students in some sessions to make learning even more effective.
- Increase the effectiveness of work-related activities by ensuring that education staff and therapists work closely together to provide practical support and guidance to students and employers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The recent restructuring of the college provision has led to a much greater focus on meeting the needs of all students. The overall quality of provision is good as a result of generally good, and improved, teaching and learning; the refurbishment of parts of the college; and the strong joint working in the college by therapists, education and residential staff.
- The new management team provides good leadership across the college, motivating and invigorating staff and reinforcing the high standards of teaching and learning now expected. Leaders and managers have the skills, experience and enthusiasm to drive forward further improvements. Managers use performance management systems effectively to identify, challenge and support any underperforming staff.
- Leaders and managers focus well on improving teaching and learning through the introduction of specific techniques for students with neurological visual impairments. This has transformed the way learning is managed for some students. Staff are motivated to improve their practice and are keen to develop new skills.
- The monitoring of students' progress and achievements is now good. All relevant staff have good access to the management information system, use it well to record students' progress against targets, and refine their learning goals as necessary. Consequently, students benefit from a more personalised curriculum that has a stronger focus on their aspirations and interests. However, strategies to make learning relevant to the students' wider needs are ineffective in discrete ICT and mathematics sessions.
- The new process for observing teaching, learning and assessment reinforces and promotes high standards but requires further improvement if it is to support the achievement of consistently high-quality teaching and learning for all students.
- Observers are improving their skill at judging the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment but their written feedback to teachers lacks detail. It does not always identify the impact of teaching on students' learning, the progress they make and the skills they acquire. Some of the strengths identified in teaching and learning are what is expected in specialist provision, and some areas for improvement do not provide sufficient detail to enable teachers to understand how to improve.
- Students are increasingly well prepared for life in modern Britain. The college provides good experiences for students to mature, develop their self-confidence and understand how they can contribute to their local communities. The strategy to ensure that students are protected from radicalisation and extremism is appropriate but at an early stage of implementation.
- Students support each other well and, if necessary, raise concerns about their peers to relevant staff. Inspectors observed exemplary behaviour across the college campus with no incidents of bullying or other inappropriate behaviour. Strategies and activities to minimise bullying such as the bullying awareness week and the introduction of anti-bullying ambassadors are effective.
- WESC now provides a good range of supported living accommodation for seven ex-students, providing them with high-quality, adapted accommodation. This enables them to have good access to the local community, regular social contact with peers and further support where necessary from the extended visual impairment specialist services team. This successfully addresses a problem WESC identified that too many of the planned destinations for students were unsuccessful due to a lack of specialist support in the students' home authority.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Senior leaders and the trustees have taken strong and decisive action to improve the college's weak financial position and secure its financial resilience. The costs of running the college have reduced and income generation has improved.
 - Trustees now have a clear understanding of their strategic role in the management of the college, supporting and enabling the leadership team to use their delegated authority to make appropriate decisions quickly.
 - The clear terms of reference and new board structure ensure that individual board members use their knowledge and expertise well to provide good support and challenge to the leadership team.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding**
 - The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Regular training gives staff a good awareness of the potential risks faced by students in college, the wider community and at home. The strong emphasis

on giving students the skills to keep themselves safe increases their confidence when using community facilities or travelling independently.

- The college follows recommended practice for safe staff selection and recruitment meticulously. Health and safety audits are regular and thorough and individual risk assessments take good account of the individual needs of each student.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- At the previous inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment required improvement; it is now good in most areas of the provision. Teaching is particularly effective for students with complex learning needs.
- The curriculum and the delivery of provision for students with complex learning needs is now good. This improvement was achieved through effective training for staff, the improved quality and range of resources and the very good use of adaptive technology. As a result, these students become more aware of their environment and start to communicate with teachers and the learning support assistants, known as enablers.
- The accurate initial assessment information is used effectively to set learning goals and check progress across all elements of the programme. Most staff are skilled at using this information to plan learning in college, the workplace or the residences.
- Students follow well-planned individualised programmes that teachers regularly review. In a very small minority of sessions, teachers do not use the information that is available about students to plan their learning. Consequently, all students follow the same session when it is not appropriate for some of them to do so.
- Tutors and enablers work closely and effectively with all therapists in college-based activities. By working together and focusing on the needs of each individual, they ensure that students learn and achieve in small but significant steps.
- Innovative work by the visual impairment specialist team motivates students with neurological visual impairments and this has a positive impact on the rate of progress they make. Staff follow detailed teaching protocols, which results in students interacting with their environment and communicating more effectively. Inappropriate behaviour, levels of frustration and incidents of self-harm are decreasing. This approach to teaching and learning is now benefiting all college students.
- Students' achievements in functional skills in English are good. Students are clear about the objectives they have to achieve and can discuss the progress they are making towards achieving targets. The quality of teaching in numeracy and ICT requires improvement. The delivery of these subjects is aimed too much at achieving the qualifications, and too little about equipping the students with practical numeracy and ICT skills that will help them progress towards adult life and independent living.
- In a few sessions, student progress is affected by the insufficient use of the accessible technology that they would naturally use outside the classroom. For example, students who regularly and successfully access the internet on a phone or tablet device were required to use a PC that was unfamiliar to them.
- Teachers are well qualified and many have achieved specialist qualifications in educating visually impaired students. Teachers benefit from regular professional development and have had to develop skills to teach a rapidly changing group of students. However, a small minority of teachers require further support and training to work effectively with young people with very complex learning needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Social enterprise projects and a good range of additional learning activities reinforce students' learning and broaden their experience. The vast majority of students participate in work-related learning. This includes work at WESC's retail outlets where students improve their employability skills, including social and communication skills developed through meeting adults from the wider community.
- Students participate in a wide range of activities that challenge and inspire them. They plan and take part in educational visits that link to projects or college activities, including visits to the BBC, arts projects and other cultural activities. Students make visits to major cities in the United Kingdom and abroad which develop their social, independence and problem-solving skills. Foreign travel included visits to Russia,

New York and Washington, where students visited the White House.

- Students' punctuality and attendance are good. The introduction of a student-initiated 'movement' period between lessons enables them to always be on time, especially when mobility difficulties require more time to transfer between classrooms.
- Two blind tutors provide positive role models for students. The one-to-one support they offer helps students develop communication skills in Braille and encourages the use of specialist technology. As a result, students become more independent and develop valuable skills for the future.
- The good practical support provided helps students progress towards independent living. The college supports students in identifying options they wish to pursue after leaving college. A number of students progress toward independent living options provided by WESC as well as options for voluntary work and supported internships in the local area. Students are positive about these moves and about the practical support that is offered to those in the wider community.
- Students know how to keep themselves fit and healthy. Many participate in fitness activities organised throughout the college week. The good standard of mobility training supports independent travel and enhances students' access to and involvement in the wider community.
- Students make significant progress in improving their self-esteem and self-confidence through a range of leisure and cultural activities. Some students show very good potential in developing their musical skills, through taught sessions.
- Work placements match students' needs well. The thorough briefings and good support from college staff help employers provide valuable experiences for students. However, occupational therapists do not routinely provide practical advice and guidance to the enabler and employer; consequently, some simple adaptations or improvements in the placement arrangements are not incorporated into the work experience.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Outcomes for students have improved since the previous inspection. The initial assessment process is now thorough. Assessments are detailed and reflect students' starting points, interests and aspirations accurately.
- Students make good progress in their communication, personal and social skills compared with their starting points, developing and using these skills in a good range of formal and informal situations.
- Many students have significantly and quickly improved their mobility skills because of improvements made in the college accommodation and the different approaches to mobility training used by enablers.
- Some students with very little functional vision on arrival at the college make significant progress in their ability to visually follow objects and in their awareness of their environment. Others improve their awareness of their surroundings as they move around the college.
- The number and range of positive destinations for students have improved over the last three years and are now good. Six leavers are awaiting decisions from local authorities regarding the funding of supported living, and others have progressed into other specialist residential provision or returned home and are involved in community and voluntary activities. One student has paid employment and four students are doing voluntary work. On leaving college too many students still return home when supported accommodation is their preferred choice; however, this is beyond the control of the college.
- The use of supported internships and apprenticeships has improved and expanded significantly. One student has started an apprenticeship at the college and, at the time of the inspection, three were about to start a supported internship with a national energy supplier.
- Where planned destinations have broken down or circumstances changed, WESC is particularly effective at providing short-term accommodation that enables ex-students to benefit from the adult services provided, regain their confidence and then progress to independent or supported living arrangements.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes are good

Provision for learners with high needs is good

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	40
Principal/CEO	Tracy de Bernhardt Dunkin
Website address	www.wescfoundation.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	20	21						
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Nigel Evans, lead inspector

Alun Maddocks

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the deputy Principal, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and assessments. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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