

WESC Foundation College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

14–16 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Managers have not maintained the good quality of teaching, learning and assessment evident at the time of the last inspection. The quality of teaching has declined and requires improvement.
- The curriculum does not support students' good progress in English and mathematics. It does not provide a clear pathway to independence, employment or further education.
- Students do not have sufficient access to specialist impartial careers advice and guidance and therefore do not always plan soon enough what they are going to do when their course is finished.
- Managers do not monitor the progress of students sufficiently to identify those who are falling behind. Therefore, too many students do not make the progress they are capable of.
- The multidisciplinary team does not work together effectively to set clear and meaningful learning targets for students which they, and all staff, understand.
- Staff do not effectively identify students with low-level problem behaviour. Students are not getting enough support to enable them to overcome these difficulties.

The provider has the following strengths

- New leaders have communicated a clear vision to staff about the college's aspirations for its students.
- Leaders' and managers' reviews of the provision are accurate, and the college is now improving.
- Staff are enthusiastic and passionate. They are keen to improve how they work with students.
- Teachers, managers and therapists use their expertise in visual impairment well to assess students' needs and support them with their learning.
- Students' attendance at college is very good and they benefit from good enrichment activities.
- Students quickly gain in confidence, increase their mobility and become more independent.

Full report

Information about the provider

- WESC Foundation College provides a range of education, care and support services to young people and adults with visual impairment and other complex needs. Since the last inspection there have been changes in staff, including a new chief executive and a new director of education.
- All students have additional needs, requiring physical and medical support, which is provided by a multidisciplinary team. This includes specialist nurses, occupational, speech and language therapists, and physiotherapists. Many of the students use wheelchairs.
- WESC Foundation College is one part of the WESC Foundation, which includes a school, residential accommodation, adult support services, a research and development department, supported living and short-break services. The college operates from the main 14-acre campus on the outskirts of Exeter. At the time of the inspection, 34 students were enrolled on study programmes. Thirty of these students are residential for all or part of the time. Sixteen local authorities commission places at the college. The majority of students work at or below level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by implementing a thorough system to check and improve quality and ensure that teachers are clear about what they need to improve.
- Develop a curriculum, including English and mathematics, so that:
 - students understand what pathways are available to support them on their journey to independence, employment or further education
 - students make the progress they are capable of in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that students have access to specialist impartial careers information, advice and guidance at appropriate times, and at the appropriate level, and that this leads to realistic plans for their next steps.
- Ensure that managers and staff improve students' progress by careful monitoring, and swiftly put in place plans for those who fall behind.
- Make sure that the multidisciplinary team works effectively together to set learning targets for students, to ensure that therapy and learning are better integrated and that each student can progress rapidly.
- Ensure that managers, teachers and enablers effectively identify students with low-level challenging behaviour and put plans in place to support them in overcoming this.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Following the previous inspection, the quality of leadership and management declined. Managers were slow to implement recommendations made at the time of that inspection. Improvements were hampered by changes in trustees and senior managers. The board of trustees recognised this and appointed a new chief executive in January 2018. Governance has been strengthened, students, staff and managers now have high aspirations and the quality of education is improving.
- Managers have not effectively evaluated and improved the work of teachers and support staff, known as enablers. Teachers and enablers do not receive clear feedback to help them improve their practice. The new director of education is implementing a new system for the management of staff performance, but it is too soon to see the impact of this.
- Managers and teachers do not have a clear view of students' progress. The management information system to capture students' achievements against planned learning is not sufficiently well developed. Managers and teachers cannot easily see what has been achieved and what new challenging targets students need.
- Managers have not developed a curriculum that meets the needs of all students. The curriculum contains a wide range of courses and activities that benefit students. However, activities are not planned so that they clearly improve students' independence or lead to employment or further education. Managers have identified this weakness and a new curriculum is currently being developed.
- Managers have given too little priority to the provision of English and mathematics within the curriculum. Teachers do not have sufficient skills to integrate these subjects effectively within the other areas taught. Students are not improving their levels of skills in English and mathematics sufficiently compared with their starting points.
- Students enjoy the good range of enriching activities, such as the Ten Tors challenge, camping, forest school and visits to America and Crealy Adventure Park, that they can undertake alongside their programme of study. Visitors to the college include bird-handlers showing birds of prey and a local artist. Students commented that the trip to America developed their confidence.
- Leaders and managers now provide strong strategic leadership. They have created a clear vision supported by clear objectives for improvement that are communicated well to staff.
- Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about improving their work with the young people. Staff morale is good. They are clear about the direction the college is going in and what contribution they can make.
- Managers' recent review of the provision is an accurate reflection of the performance of the college. The involvement of staff and leaders has resulted in an effective improvement plan that includes actions to integrate the work of the therapists into all aspects of the students' lives at the college. Therefore, all know their part in driving improvements.
- Most staff benefit from good-quality supervision that motivates them. Managers now set high expectations for most staff in supervision and appraisals. However, the safeguarding

lead does not receive supervision frequently enough to check their understanding about the relevance of the most recent safeguarding guidance for the provision.

- Leaders and managers develop good partnerships with employers and organisations that bring benefits to students. Students have access to a good range of work placements with employers.
- Managers have introduced a system for staff to check on the quality of different aspects of the provision. This process is at an early stage of implementation but is already leading to improvements, sharing of good practice and greater understanding by the staff of the standards expected in supervision and in handling money.

The governance of the provider

- The chair of trustees is experienced and knowledgeable. He has increased the number of trustees and established a new committee structure. The board is now professionally run with clear terms of reference. Trustees are clear about their responsibilities. They regularly visit the college and report on their findings.
- Trustees take an active role in meetings and decision-making has improved. Trustees are very experienced and use their knowledge well to ask appropriate questions and support managers. For example, trustees use their expertise as lawyers to help with legal issues.
- Despite the skills evident on the board, the overall quality of leadership and management, the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment has declined since the time of the last inspection.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Current staff have frequent training on safeguarding and use their knowledge well to check carefully that students know how to keep safe. Staff and students know whom to contact should any concerns arise. A safeguarding team meets regularly, disseminates information, reviews incidents and reports to the board. Managers ensure that during this inspection safe recruitment practices are implemented.
- Risk assessments on students and on work placements are thorough and keep students safe. However, managers do not carry out risk assessments or create action plans routinely to check compliance with new national safeguarding guidance.
- Staff are aware of safeguarding procedures and keep alert to any changes in students' behaviour. Staff discuss e-safety with students and they have a basic understanding of how to keep safe online. Leaders are aware that more could be done to strengthen this aspect of safeguarding. Staff work appropriately with students on 'Prevent' and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching does not meet the needs of all students. Too many staff have low expectations of what students can achieve. They do not provide students with sufficient challenge. The curriculum, activities and resources are not used effectively to create clear pathways that

reflect the needs of young adults preparing for life after college or the world of work.

- Teachers do not plan activities to ensure that students can progress well in English and mathematics or ensure that students can use these skills when undertaking other learning related tasks. Students are therefore not gaining important work- and life-related skills in English and mathematics as fast as they are able.
- Teaching staff and therapists do not work together effectively across all areas of provision. Planned learning is not integrated with therapy; as a result, therapy advice is not always implemented in the classroom setting. For example, teachers and enablers do not use the student profiles effectively when planning how to develop students' communication skills.
- Teachers and therapists do not jointly set clear learning targets for students which enable them to understand their next steps and what they need to do to improve. This lack of clear targets means that teachers and therapists cannot effectively measure learners' progress and ensure integrated activities. While staff give positive verbal feedback and encouragement, written feedback does not detail what the student could do better.
- Students have limited access to assisted technology such as reading machines. In a few cases, students are waiting to use equipment and make slow progress as a result.
- In a few cases, teachers and enablers do not manage or monitor behaviour that disturbs learning. Staff do not always understand what triggers students' behaviour. Students can become frustrated and unable to learn. For example, a student's assessment may indicate that they find loud noises distracting; however, they might be taken into a noisy classroom and become too agitated to continue learning and have to be withdrawn.
- Teachers and therapists have good knowledge and expertise in visual impairment that they use well. They build on students' prior learning and carry out very detailed initial assessments that are used well to plan learning that links to the target outcomes in the education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- Teachers develop individual timetables to meet students' needs and interests. Teachers manage students' individual timetables in order to maintain a calm learning environment. This ensures minimum disruption to the learning environment.
- Teachers, therapists and enablers have good access to research and specialist training such as braille. Teachers confidently plan learning for students who have both hearing and sight impairment following specific training. Teachers of braille use their expertise well so that students improve their braille skills.
- Most teachers use questioning effectively to check on students' understanding and ensure that they make links to prior learning. They are skilled at allowing students time to process and think, so they can provide their most detailed response. For example, in science students progress well when given processing time to complete the stages of experiments independently. However, many enablers are too quick to prompt with answers and do not give students time to process or reflect on their own work.
- Students' learning is enhanced when teachers plan carefully to develop students' skills in independent living and travelling. For example, in cookery, activities planned include appropriate independence aids that allow students to butter bread and create simple dishes using a microwave with the minimum amount of support.
- Staff carefully consider students' transition into and out of the college and support them

through the process. They involve parents, carers and other professionals and check that the young person is happy with their plan. The arrangements are successful in helping students move on to their next steps in education, including attending a college in Bristol having completed a supporting internship in horticulture.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Students do not have adequate access to impartial careers advice and guidance. Not all students have clear plans to ensure that actions are taken towards their next steps at an appropriate time. Senior leaders do not have sufficient oversight of the plans for students leaving the college.
- A minority of students experience low-level behavioural challenges, such as rocking, that inhibit their ability to interact with the world around them. Staff are not actively supporting students to minimise these behaviours.
- The large majority of students have good opportunities for work placements that help them identify their career choices and improve their chance of future employment. They value and enjoy work placements in different settings, such as charity shops, cafes, animal care, horticulture, catering, retail and internet-based employment. However, a few students with complex needs, who could benefit, do not have access to appropriate work experience opportunities.
- Students are confident and learn to travel with minimal support. Students benefit from good mobility training and become confident at travelling alone, on public transport, or to visit shops. For a few students, travel takes a long time and as a result they do not get enough time at their placements. This problem is not considered sufficiently when planning work experience.
- Supported internships, which are a good stepping-stone to paid or voluntary employment, are effective in helping students gain work-related skills, such as customer service skills. Students learning braille are able to undertake internships at the college with a view to becoming teaching assistants.
- Students are exceptionally polite and willing to speak to unfamiliar people. Students discuss what constitutes respectful and disrespectful behaviour, and role play is used effectively. They are all clear what behaviour is acceptable.
- Students' attendance at college is very good. They attend punctually and are ready to learn.
- Students gain more control over their environment. They learn about cause and effect by using the equipment in an excellent sensory studio that has been well designed by a multidisciplinary team of staff.
- Students have a very basic understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and are clear that they would speak to a member of staff if they needed help. Students feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe on work placements and when using craft tools and equipment in pottery.
- Students know how to eat and live healthily; they choose a fitness activity each afternoon such as swimming, bike riding, horse riding or gym sessions. Students with complex difficulties have at least one swimming session per week. Students learn mindfulness

techniques that they find calming.

- Students take part in a weekly assembly, often planned by them, that celebrates their successful achievements. Peers, whenever possible, choose who receives awards. These assemblies cover topics such as anti-bullying, the 'Prevent' duty and respect.
- Students grow in self-awareness and identify their own specific needs that include working in quiet spaces, going to therapy sessions or braille classes. They manage their own time, make personal choices and develop an awareness of the needs of others.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Too many students are not making the progress of which they are capable. Last year a large majority of students did not complete all of their planned learning in their chosen subject areas.
- The majority of students' written work is at an appropriate level. Students produce work both in writing and braille to an expected standard.
- Students whose conditions or visual impairment are expected to deteriorate learn valuable additional skills and knowledge to support them in the future. Examples include use of a hoist, learning braille and discussing future specialist equipment.
- A few students have completed high-level qualifications such as level 3 in supporting students in the classroom and level 2 horticulture. One student is now a classroom assistant supporting other students with developing their skills in braille.
- Leaders' actions are beginning to improve outcomes for students. Last year, more students completed external qualifications, including in English and mathematics, than in previous years.
- The vast majority of students enjoy their studies. Students make good progress with their social and communication skills relative to their prior attainment. Students are able to do more than they could before, such as independently visit local shops or travel to college.
- Students who have severe and complex needs improve their communication and ability to make choices so they become more independent in their everyday life. The proportion of students who progress to positive destinations, such as employment, has increased over the previous three years. However, a few students do not have any planned training, volunteering or work planned when they return home or go into residential care.
- Students develop skills in horse riding through the use of a mechanical horse with the support of the therapy team, before learning to ride a real horse. They improve their core strength and their balance.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132042
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16–25
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	39
CEO	Jane Bell
Telephone number	01392 454200
Website	https://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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	8	25	–	–	–	1	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
		–		–		–		–
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	34							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of education, as nominee. 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 learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Ofsted Inspector
Jo McSherrie	Ofsted Inspector

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