

# Queen Alexandra College

Inspection report

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

#### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management
- specialist provision in information and communication technology; preparation for life and work; vocational skills and employability.

### Description of the provider

1. Queen Alexandra College (QAC) is a medium-sized, independent specialist residential college. The college provides education and training for learners with visual impairments. There are both residential and day learners. They attend from across the country, although day learners are local to the area. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of learners with a range of other disabilities, in particular those with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The college does not accept learners with severe learning difficulties and very few learners have high levels of personal care. The college's major contracts are with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the

Residential Training Unit (RTU) of the Department for Work and Pensions, and Job Centre Plus (JCP). There are 124 learners of whom 77 are residential and 47 are day. Of these there are 73 male learners and 51 female. Approximately 50% have a visual impairment and 18 are from a minority ethnic background.

2. The college offers a range of vocational courses from pre-entry to level 4, in addition to employment skills, mobility and Braille. The provision for RTU learners is geared to individual preparation for employment. Learners following the preparation for life and work course also participate in independence skills training and take vocational qualifications in a number of subject areas as well as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The college has residential accommodation staffed according to the varied needs of learners. There are hostels on site and housing accommodation provided within the community.
3. The college's mission is 'to challenge discrimination and exclusion by providing opportunities for people with visual impairment and other disabilities to learn, live and work independently'.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: Contributory grade 2</i>

### Sector subject areas

Information and communication technology	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Preparation for life and work	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Vocational skills and employability	Good: Grade 2

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. This is a satisfactory college with some good aspects. Learners achieve well and succeed in progressing onto more advanced courses. Those funded by the RTU achieve high levels of progression into employment. Learners gain high levels of confidence, but their progress in personal development and independence skills are insufficiently captured.
5. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is a good standard of resources including ICT and specialist software to promote learning. Learners are motivated and enthusiastic and many activities are designed well to stimulate their interest in learning. However, there is insufficient planning to meet the needs of individual learners and target setting is insufficiently focused or precise enough to assess how well learners are progressing.
6. The college's response to social and educational inclusion is good. The college caters for a large number of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds and meets the needs of those with a wide range of complex needs effectively. There are a wide range of courses and many opportunities for learners to progress through courses leading to qualifications. Learners enjoy and benefit from the varied enrichment activities arranged for them to take part in. However, learners' programmes lack coherence across residential and college provision. Work opportunities for those following RTU funded courses are good, but are undeveloped for other learners.
7. Support and guidance are good. A wide range of staff work successfully together to ensure learners are well supported throughout their time at college. The provision of specialist equipment to enable learners to access the curriculum is very good and learners have access to high quality therapeutic and medical intervention. Behaviour management is good and the tutorial process works well, with residential and academic staff working effectively together.
8. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has recently restructured at senior level to better match the needs of the learners. Self-assessment is broadly accurate but quality assurance arrangements continue to lack coherence and the college does not make sufficient use of data to evaluate its overall performance or to set whole college targets. The college demonstrates good practice in many aspects of provision but this is inconsistently applied and insufficiently disseminated across the college as a whole. Specialist resources are well monitored and staff development is comprehensive. Financial management is sound and the college provides good value for money.

## Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

9. The college has satisfactory capacity to improve. The partnerships that have been developed with other further education colleges, employers and a number of support agencies are good. The college shows a good capacity to manage significant change. However, although self-assessment is broadly accurate, quality assurance arrangements continue to lack coherence and the college does not make sufficient use of data to evaluate its overall performance or to set whole college targets. Learners' achievement is good overall. Teaching and learning and the curriculum are satisfactory. Support and guidance for learners are good.

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. Assessment and monitoring processes are more rigorous and comprehensive. Provision for basic skills is satisfactory. There have been significant improvements in the planning and co-ordination of life skills across the college. Learning support staff are more effectively deployed. Teaching accommodation is of a high standard. A new management information system has recently been installed but is yet to produce sufficient data for quality improvement purposes. There has been increased rigour in monitoring the contract with the LSC. The coherence and application of quality improvement arrangements remain underdeveloped.

## Key strengths

- Good achievement
- Very good development of learners' confidence
- Very effective support and guidance
- Extensive staff development opportunities.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- The monitoring of learner progress
- The planning of lessons matched to individual learners' needs
- The consistency and sharing of good practice across the college
- The inconsistent implementation and effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements.

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good for all learners across all ability groups, ages and minority ethnic backgrounds. Learners are very successful in gaining vocational qualifications. They progress well onto more advanced courses and achieve relevant additional qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Learners on the advance to work programme (A2W), funded by the RTU, gain useful employability skills and a good range of qualifications in their chosen vocational area. Progression into employment is high with 68% of learners since April 2007 gaining jobs within the short timeframe used to measure success. The standard of learners' work is good. Retention rates are high in line with other similar independent specialist colleges and attendance is good.
12. Learners gain high levels of confidence and develop good social communication skills. They improve their mobility skills, travel safely independently and are enthusiastic and motivated in their learning. Learners develop effective independence skills and some move into college houses where less support is provided. Literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactorily developed within curriculum activities, although some learning targets for achievement are worded in terms not easily understood by learners.
13. The progress that learners make in their personal development and social skills is not adequately captured and recognised. The college accurately identifies this as an area for improvement. Learners are in some cases insufficiently challenged and skills already learned within different learning environments are not reinforced adequately. Learners develop skills useful for their future economic well-being, such as managing their finances and applying for jobs. Learners' awareness of health and safety is good, particularly when they learn to travel alone and use public transport.

### Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. Inspectors agree with the college's own self-assessment that teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is a wide range of good quality resources in the classrooms which are used effectively and are relevant for the learners. The ICT equipment is of a good standard and specific equipment for visually impaired learners is adequate to meet all learners' needs.
15. Learners are learning to manage their own behaviour well within lessons. The behavioural support team actively involves the learners in developing their own strategies to address aspects of their behaviour and gives guidance to all relevant staff. There is good support for learners within lessons from committed tutors and learning support assistants who show good knowledge of the learners' requirements. However, in a few lessons, learners were observed completing tasks with too much direction from

- teachers and support staff. In well planned lessons learners were actively engaged throughout in a variety of individually targeted and relevant activities that had clear and practical application. However, in less successful lessons the planning of activities lacked pace and activities were not matched sufficiently to individual learners' targets.
16. The assessment processes are not applied consistently for all learners and although the setting of learning targets has improved, many targets are still too broad or worded in vague terms. In these cases future learning opportunities are missed or misdirected. The recently revised lesson observation system is underdeveloped. The documentation is not routinely collated to inform both the continual professional development of teaching staff and the quality assurance processes with sufficient rigour. The quantity and quality of monitoring of progress currently varies from one part of the college to another leading to missed opportunities for learning and varying perceptions of learner progress.
  17. The extent to which the college meets the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. The college offers a wide breadth of provision ranging from pre-entry level to level 4 which provides good opportunities for learners' progression within the college. Provision for the development of independent living skills and travel training is adequate and literacy and numeracy is being effectively integrated into learners' programmes. The wide range of employers offering placements to RTU funded learners reflects the clear emphasis on employability. However, there are insufficient external work placement opportunities for learners following other programmes. Social and educational inclusion at the college is good. The college has identified and responded to increased complexity in needs since the last inspection by developing relevant provision and accommodation. The college has improved communication between the residences and college but learners' programmes are still not sufficiently coherent across the day and extended provision.
  18. The college's self-assessment report accurately judges care, guidance and support for learners to be good. A strong focus on meeting the needs of individuals is reflected in the high quality personal, residential and academic support on offer to all learners. This support is highly valued by the learners. The college works well with a wide range of external agencies to arrange specialist support as needed. There is an extensive range of assistive technology available to support learning and where necessary equipment is adapted by the resources team. Dyslexia support for learners continues to be a strength and the therapeutic and medical services are of high quality. Multidisciplinary contributions to assessments are comprehensive and are used well to inform planning. The behaviour management team is increasingly successful in working with learners to assist and empower them to manage their own behaviour and improve their communication skills. Links with parents are good.
  19. Learners on the associate programme receive high quality support such as the development of learner study and research skills, the transcription and

adaptation of course materials and accompanying learners to college, university, work placements and interviews as necessary. Arrangements for careers guidance and transition planning are very effective, as the college adapts its provision so that transition for each learner is carefully considered. The college works closely with the specialist designated Connexions personal advisor in assisting learners to decide about future destinations. Good advice on future destinations, employment careers and further education is provided through tutorials, careers resources, and the Connexions service. Induction enables learners to quickly settle well into their courses. Learners have frequent tutorials where academic progress and personal development such as work experience are discussed. Good health and safety practices feature prominently at college.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

*Equality of opportunity*

*Good: grade 2*

20. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been significant changes since the last inspection to better meet the needs of the learners. Many areas of weakness have been successfully remedied but arrangements for quality improvement remain underdeveloped. The principal provides open, consultative leadership and has a clear strategic vision for the future. There is a determined and energetic commitment from him and senior managers to improve and develop the provision. Staff value the open style of management and feel increasingly involved in decision making. Day-to-day operational management and communication are effective.
21. There is an appropriate range of policies and procedures which are reviewed annually but overall quality improvement processes lack coherence and are not sufficiently standardised or rigorous. The college is very aware of this area for improvement. A new management information system has recently been installed but is yet to produce sufficient data for quality improvement purposes. Although there is a quality improvement action plan, the formal review of actions taken is weak and does not provide a sufficiently clear picture of overall progress. The self-assessment process is comprehensive, largely accurate and highlights most areas for improvement. The lesson observation scheme lacks rigour and outcomes are not sufficiently collated to inform particular areas of improvement. There is a lack of consistency and sharing of good practice across the college in relation to key teaching and learning processes which include the setting and monitoring of learning targets and lesson planning matched to the individual needs of learners.
22. Equality of opportunity is good. The college is fully accessible to people with mobility problems and makes reasonable adjustments to ensure accessibility. There are suitable arrangements to meet the needs of its learners from minority ethnic groups such as women only swimming groups, specific dietary needs and a prayer room. Equality and diversity are adequately promoted across the college and staff and governors have undertaken training. The college is not yet fully compliant with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act

- 2002(SENDA) legislation. Plans are in place but in the early stages of development to evaluate the impact of the promotion of equality and diversity within curriculum activities. Safeguarding procedures are comprehensive and staff have the appropriate checks in relation to best practice.
23. There is an extensive staff development programme in place and staff are well qualified. Their skills and expertise meet the needs of the learners well. As identified in the self-assessment report, the induction of new staff is thorough and comprehensive. Systems to supervise and appraise staff are effective.
24. The standard of accommodation has been greatly enhanced and a programme of investment and renewal of ICT and assistive technology resources ensures high standards are maintained. The new Bradbury building provides modern, spacious and flexible teaching accommodation. The college works effectively with other agencies, employers and with general further education colleges; agreements are well established, regular meetings are held and any problems are quickly and effectively managed.
25. Governors are highly committed and very knowledgeable about visual impairment but there is insufficient expertise about further education among the board members. The monitoring of LSC and other contracts is effective and compliant with the funding requirements. The college has made significant capital investment to greatly improve the teaching accommodation through fund raising and sound financial management. A rigorous audit ensures there is a good match between the requirements of the individual learners' schedules and the specialist resources available. The college provides good value for money.

## Sector subject area

Information and communication technology

Satisfactory: Grade 3

## Context

26. The department provides three programmes. Courses are offered at certificate, diploma and levels 1 and 2. The department also provides key skills IT level 1 teaching across the rest of the college. There are 15 full-time learners enrolled. Six learners are aged 16 to 18 and nine learners are aged over 19.

## Strengths

- Good achievement
- Well motivated and enthusiastic learners
- Good progression
- Good accommodation and resources.

## Areas for improvement

- Lack of variety in teaching and learning
- Insufficient links to external businesses and organisations
- Ineffective use of quality assurance to improve classroom practice.

## Achievement and standards

27. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates were high in all three programmes in 2006/07. The standard of learners' work is good and learners produce well presented portfolios and written assignments. They acquire good IT and computing skills, and create work related products such as spreadsheets and advertising materials which are valuable to the workplace. Learners develop high levels of confidence and a useful range of social skills.

## Quality of provision

28. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners are well motivated and interested in their lessons. They are attentive, work well on their own, and are respectful and helpful to each other. Learning support assistants provide satisfactory additional guidance in lessons. In good lessons a wide variety of teacher and learner-led activities with whole class, small group and individual work are managed successfully to meet all needs. However, in many lessons, learners frequently spend too much time working on their own at computers, some learners are given more attention than others, and little variety of teaching methods takes place. Teachers use limited questioning methods to check individual understanding. Written feedback to learners is generally satisfactory. Learners are based in the very well presented and equipped centre which provides a good learning environment and an excellent range of assistive technology.

29. Learners progress well through programme levels and pursue different routes outside the department. Recently, learners have progressed to the college's art and design department, to mainstream further education colleges and the associate programme. Links to external businesses and organisations are underdeveloped. Employers do not contribute to curriculum design and assessment and learners make few work related visits outside college.
30. Support for learners is satisfactory. Teachers are very helpful informally. Learners have good access to additional learning support. The setting, reviewing and recording of individual learners' targets is satisfactory and new college arrangements are being introduced.

### Leadership and management

31. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been addressed. Teachers work well together and operational management of the area is good. Quality assurance procedures take place but the findings from classroom observations, learners' feedback, self-assessment and other initiatives are not discussed systematically at team level and used to improve teaching and learning. Equality and diversity are promoted through good practice in lessons. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate but neglects or understates some key concerns in teaching and learning.

## Preparation for life and work

Satisfactory: Grade 3

## Context

32. There are currently 37 learners, of whom 22 are residential and 15 are day, all aged 16 to 19. Learners work towards a certificate in skills for working life where appropriate, or individual learning targets. Two learners have individualised timetables with intensive support to ensure that their complex needs are met. A pre-entry level course has been developed better to meet the needs of current learners. Programmes focus on personal development and employability skills. Additional qualifications are available in literacy, numeracy, communication and ICT. A new club activity has been introduced to enable learners to work on their hobbies or to try new activities.

## Strengths

- Good development of learners' confidence
- Good progression to more advanced programmes
- Innovative activities that engage and motivate learners.

## Areas for improvement

- Insufficient focus on individual needs
- Insufficient formal arrangements to ensure reinforcement of learning across college activities
- Inconsistent monitoring of learners' progress.

## Achievement and standards

33. Learners' achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Learners develop high levels of confidence. Progression on to more advanced courses has been good over the past two years. Many learners move on to further education courses with external providers after leaving the college and a few learn the skills to live in more independent accommodation and housing. However, learners' achievement in relation to their personal development and independence skills are insufficiently captured.

## Quality of provision

34. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In many lessons, learners work enthusiastically and most make good contributions. In well planned lessons innovative activities engage and motivate learners and clear individual targets and appropriate strategies are used. However, in less well planned lessons there is insufficient focus given to individual learners' needs. High levels of staffing, including learning support assistants, enhance most learning and encourage independence. However, staff are occasionally too quick to tell the learners what to do. There are inadequate formal arrangements to ensure consistent reinforcement of learning across college activities.

35. Monitoring of learners' progress is inconsistent. Where effective individual targets are set, most staff monitor and record progress well. However, where clear targets have not been set, staff are unable to monitor how well learners are progressing. Outcomes of assessment are recorded on some lesson plans but not others. Tutorial records do not always contain a specific action plan for improvement.
36. Programmes and activities meet the needs of learners satisfactorily. There is now a wider range of courses to better meet the needs of learners and improving opportunities for work experience and work tasters.
37. Guidance and support are good. Learners benefit from high levels of support both in and out of class. There is effective liaison with specialist support services to ensure the individual needs are supported effectively in lessons.

### Leadership and management

38. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff work well as a team with their senior manager. Recent management action has been strongly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Staff have been successfully encouraged to take a creative approach in the organisation and development of activities for learners to engage in. Staff development is strongly supported. New arrangements have been put in place to improve communication across teams, but it is too early to fully evaluate the impact this is having on the quality of provision. Self-assessment accurately recognises the key strengths and areas for improvement identified in inspection. However, quality assurance is underdeveloped and inconsistencies in the quality and implementation of target setting and monitoring of learner progress are still evident. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

## Vocational skills and employability

Good: Grade 2

### Context

39. The college offers provision for adult learners funded by the Residential Training Unit (RTU) through its associate programme and via a newly established Advance to Work (A2W) programme. The associates work in a mainstream setting and receive additional support from staff at QAC. There are currently five associate RTU learners. The nine learners on the A2W programme work towards a range of accredited qualifications including literacy, numeracy and ILT, as well as undertaking work placements. The main aim of the programme is progression into employment. Four of the learners on the associates programme are female. The remaining ten RTU learners are male.

### Strengths

- Good achievement and progression into work
- Challenging teaching with a good focus on employability
- Good work experience well matched to individual learner's job aspirations
- Very effective support for learners
- Good team working to improve the provision.

### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient focus on specific skills development in individual learning plans (ILPs)
- Insufficient tracking and measurement of personal development skills.

### Achievement and standards

40. Achievement and standards are good. Since the start of the new A2W programme in April 2007 there has been a 68% rate of progression into jobs. Achievement of qualifications is good and shows an upward trend. The majority of learners gain at least one qualification and many attain several. These include qualifications in manual handling, health and safety and word processing. Qualifications are well linked to job aspirations. The overall success rate for associate learners is good and shows an upward trend. In 2006/07 there was a 100% success rate on mainstream courses. Learners increase their confidence and self-esteem. The majority of learners are well motivated and attend well.

### Quality of provision

41. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers challenge learners well and make good links to employability skills they need to progress. Each learner has an individual programme that is reviewed regularly to reflect changing needs and requirements. There is a good match of work placements to learners' future career aspirations. There is good communication between the work

placement provider and the college. Work placement providers are well informed about what learners hope to achieve.

42. Support is good both within the college and when learners are out on work placements. Several learners detail how specific dyslexia support has enabled them to overcome long-standing problems with learning. Staff who work on the associate programme provide good support that is well linked to learners' mainstream programme of study. Learners are well prepared for the world of work through a range of job search activities.
43. There is insufficient focus on specific skills development within ILPs with generalised comments on some reviews. There are missed opportunities to note previous work related experience and existing transferable skills. The tracking and measurement of gains in personal development skills to enable learners to recognise their achievement is not fully recorded. ILPs do not always indicate when learners improve their self-esteem, confidence and readiness for work.

#### Leadership and management

44. Leadership and management are good. There is good team working to improve the provision. Managers and staff know the learners well and organise programmes very effectively to ensure they develop good vocational and employability skills. Minutes from the regular team meetings indicate the commitment to improvement which is swiftly carried out in practice. Self-assessment and observations of teaching and learning are broadly accurate. Staff are well qualified and experienced, and attend a good range of development activities.