

New College Worcester

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117064
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326517
Inspection dates	4–6 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	SC043048
Social care inspector	Martha Nethaway

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Non-Maintained Specialist Special School
Age range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	81
School (total)	36
Sixth form	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body

Chair	Mr Alan Broderick
Headteacher	Mardy Smith
Date of previous school inspection	18 – 19 October 2005
School address	Whittington Road Worcester Worcestershire WR5 2JX
Telephone number	01905 763933
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, an Additional Inspector and two Social Care Inspectors. It included inspection of the boarding and the sixth form provision for students funded privately or by their local authority. An inspection of the post sixteen provision for the college's Learning and Skills Council funded students was carried out simultaneously and the outcomes of this are contained in a separate report of the same date.

Description of the school

New College Worcester is a non-maintained residential special school for students aged 11 to 19 and a sixth form college for students aged 16 -19. A total of 81 students attend New College Worcester, which includes 45 in the sixth form; the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) fund seven of these learners. Apart from a small number from abroad, and one learner funded by the Welsh assembly, all other student placements are funded by their local authority.

New College Worcester meets the needs of students who are blind or have significant visual impairment. In addition, currently ten per cent of students have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college provides residential or day placements for its students. Currently all but two students are full time boarders. Students attend from across England, one student is from Wales and a small number are from abroad.

The college became fully independent from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in July 2007. It achieved specialist school status for sensory impairment in September 2005. This status enables the college to provide specialist outreach services for the external community in connection with visual impairment, as well as additional specialist resources for its own students. The college is committed to the development of students' mobility and personal independence skills and their learning of Braille. The college holds the Bronze Eco Schools Award and an Investors in People Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

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Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good college and students do well here. Many young people say that they are happier here than other schools or colleges they have attended. Close links between the education and boarding staff benefit students' good overall personal and academic progress. Students' personal, independence and mobility skills are carefully assessed as the basis for their individualised learning programmes. Through high quality support, mobility training and lessons in Braille, students progress well in their communication skills developing their confidence and self-esteem. This also ensures they are fully able to access the curriculum, which is shaped by their individual needs and ensures continuity of learning.

Students in Key Stage 3 and 4 make good progress overall, and achieve well, although last year's Year 11 students achieved less well at GCSE level than in previous years. The dip was due to the small size of the cohort and the range of additional learning difficulties experienced by the students. Some of the cohort joined the college at different times during the college year and with lower attainment on entry than is usual for their age. However, students continue to make good progress overall in the sixth form and achieve consistently well in their advanced ('A') level examinations. Success rates across the college are a result of good quality teaching and learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge, with many specialist teachers helping to provide an extensive choice of curriculum subjects. At their most effective, lesson plans incorporate clear learning objectives and much detail to guide the lesson. However, not all lesson plans are consistent in quality as some are too brief and do not detail the learning objectives clearly enough or specify the extended learning for those who finish quickly. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students demonstrate good attitudes and behaviour in lessons. They are supported to try things themselves so that they become as independent as possible. Teaching assistants also challenge and encourage the students well. However, staff do not use the wealth of assessment data effectively enough to provide sharply focused academic targets and sufficient challenge for some groups of students who are capable of greater challenge. Although the college wide collection of data is now in place, and some analysis has begun in response to a point for improvement from the previous inspection, staff have yet to utilise this fully to steer strategies for further improving teaching and learning.

Students successfully access a good range of academic courses and other accredited vocational courses. This provision is strengthened continually by the college's outstanding commitment to partnership working and the links forged with other schools, colleges and professionals. The college nurtures students to develop skills and acquire qualifications that will serve them well as citizens in the future. Almost all post 16 students progress to the higher and further education establishment of their choice. Students are safe, well cared for, well educated, and are able to function independently as young adults.

Leadership and management are good. Staff, governors and trustees work closely together. The college has continually strengthened many of its policies and procedures. Good financial management is securely in place. The college continues to monitor its budget closely and match this to the college improvement plan. The

re-organisation of the committee structure within the governing body has helped college leaders to improve their analyses, evaluation and understanding of the work of the college and its current position, although some analyses are better embedded than others, which are only more recently being looked at and refined. There is a good commitment to staff training and professional development, particularly in relation to ensuring the college fulfils its statutory duties with regard to students' welfare and safety although there are issues to be resolved particularly in the residential accommodation.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The provision in the sixth form is good. Students continue to achieve good standards, which are often above those expected nationally. However, students sometimes score below their predicted levels in the first year of the sixth form. This is because staff are not using the information from assessment sufficiently well in Year 12 to determine how well students are doing, nor do they make enough use of this information to provide sufficiently challenging learning targets for each individual. This improves in Year 13, however, and by the time they leave the college, students attain well in their 'A' level courses. This is due to the provision of good quality targeted support for students in their last year at the college and better quality teaching overall in Year 13. The most successful lessons are those where staff encourage independent learning and take account of the capabilities of the students, ensuring the lessons build on their existing knowledge.

The overall progress made in students' personal development is good. Students enjoy their education and benefit from the good variety of curriculum subjects and extensive enrichment activities on offer. Care, guidance and support are also good. Staff provide excellent personal guidance, helping to develop students' confidence, mobility and independence, and equipping them well for their future lives. The school is also able to provide vocational courses for students because of its close links with local further education colleges and other partners. Students comment that although they receive good advice to help them to choose a university or other higher or further education establishment, they do not as yet get the same level of advice about alternative career pathways or routes into employment. However, this is improving and there are better-established links with the Connexions advisory service than previously. Sixth form students successfully take on greater responsibilities and roles within the college, for example by taking part in peer mentoring having taken a special training course provided by 'Childline'. Staff have appropriately identified strengthening communications with parents of sixth form students as an area for development, as communication links here are not perceived to be as strong as those for parents of Key Stage 3 and 4 students.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 3

The overall quality of the boarding provision is satisfactory. New College Worcester has addressed the previous 12 recommendations from the last inspection visit. The outcomes for enjoying and achieving is judged as at least good and the outcomes for being healthy and organisation are judged as good. Staying safe is judged as satisfactory and this is connected to compromising fire security related to fire doors and a previous incidence of the school not applying its own recruitment

procedures sufficiently rigorously.. Making a positive contribution and achieving economic wellbeing are judged as satisfactory.

Students' physical, social and emotional well-being is well supported by staff. Positive steps are taken by staff to promote good outcomes for students' health and this is underpinned by good policies and procedures. Students have full access to good quality health care facilities. These include an on-site school nurse, and a well-equipped surgery and sickbay that are of a high standard. All students have a documented health care plan and this information is located in the nurse's surgery where all health care needs are monitored and reviewed. Good systems are in place to ensure communication is effective between the residential staff and the school nurse. Staff are provided with clear procedures related to the storage, administration and disposal of medication. These arrangements are overseen by the school nurse. Arrangements for students to receive routine medication are satisfactory; however staff are not trained to administer emergency prescription medication to those students with complex health needs who may need it. The school nurse has identified this as a shortfall which will be addressed. Students enjoy healthy and nutritious meals. The catering team provide a good range of menus to ensure a balanced diet is being maintained for students. They are able to choose from a variety of dishes. Specific dietary needs are catered for including those related to culture, religion, food intolerance and for allergies. Students are learning about the principles of healthy eating and all available opportunities to prepare and cook meals in the residential accommodation.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The principal is keen to promote this area actively in order to embed the policy into practice and has worked with teaching staff to list what the school currently provides.

Students are supported to retain their privacy and staff promote the principle of mutual respect. Students have good access to telephones and the internet and can keep in touch with their families and friends outside the school. Staff promote students' welfare and this protects and keeps them safe. Students commented that they 'feel safe and secure at the school'. Staff are provided with a comprehensive level of guidance related to the safeguarding and protection of children. These are clearly understood by staff, and they are aware of their role and the importance of reporting concerns about students' welfare. Senior staff have attended appropriate training New College Worcester has a clear complaints policy and procedure in place. Students know and understand how to make a complaint if they are unhappy. Students are confident that they have a 'voice' and if things are not right, that adults will listen to them. Records demonstrate a professional and sensitive approach being adopted by staff. Senior managers monitor these records. Student and staff relationships are positive. The standard of students' behaviour is generally good and they readily identify that staff expect good standards of behaviour. Students consider that the sanctions that are used when they misbehave are fair and proportionate. All staff are trained in the use of physical intervention. As there have been no incidents requiring physical intervention, staff need regular reminders of how to complete the pro-forma records fully.

Staff monitor the whereabouts of students and there are good procedures to follow should any unauthorised absence from the school take place. The number of these

incidents is low and 'safe and well' checks are being completed. Students have been instrumental in devising a system of establishing zones on the campus that can be accessed by those with different levels of skill and responsibility. Fire safety checks are being completed and fire drills involve students so that they learn what steps to take in the event of an emergency. Shortfalls are identified in the use of wedges to prop fire doors open and this compromises the fire security for the residential accommodation. Although risk assessments are completed to ensure the health and safety of children and staff, the system of management and review of the structure of risk assessments requires attention.

Whilst the school has good recruitment procedures in principle; these are not rigorously applied in practice. Although all staff hold a CRB check one member of staff was found to have begun work without a reference..

Relationships between staff and students are good, and students express confidence in the adults caring for them. Students are articulate and sensible in their suggestions about how the school is organised around them and are clear about the democratic routes available to them such as school council, junior house meetings and have easy access to the principal. Some sixth formers said they would welcome small unit meetings with their house parents to iron out minor issues. The working relationships between residential staff and teaching staff are effective. Regular meetings and good lines of communication are maintained and this benefits students in meeting their needs. Staff work hard at creating an environment that promotes academic achievement. Students have good access to facilities that support their educational studies including a purpose-built library. They have access to good facilities for private study. Students are actively encouraged to achieve. There are varied opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities and this helps build their social and interpersonal skills and self-esteem.

Care plans are of variable quality but are generally satisfactory, though it remains to be seen how they will be audited and reviewed and implemented in practice. Students living in the boarding houses have sufficient space to meet their needs. Students generally share bedrooms although there are some single rooms. Students find the accommodation homely and the sixth form accommodation has been improved with new furniture and soft furnishings in the communal area.

New College Worcester has a Statement of Purpose and student prospectus that describes what can be expected from the school. Care staff are experienced and sensitive to the needs of students. Staffing levels have improved and this has had a positive impact on the achievement of continuity of care for students. Senior staff have not yet introduced a staffing policy for the residential accommodation.

Standard 33 visits are to be strengthened and completed by external individuals with a clear mandate to review the performance of the setting and its impact on the outcomes for students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the systematic use of assessment data to inform target setting for the college as a whole and for individual students.
- Within lessons, develop and use agreed approaches for sharing clear learning objectives, so as to provide sufficient challenge for all students in order to raise standards further.
- Ensure that school staff who may need to carry out medical or nursing procedures are trained to do so and have written authorisation to carry out the procedures. (NMS 14.23)
- Implement a system for monitoring children's absence from school without authority. Where a worrying pattern of absence is recorded, the school should issue both a review of the care plan and the relevant current care practice of the school. (NMS 8.8)
- Implement a fire risk assessment under the Fire Regulatory Reform Act 2005 and risk assessments for children and particular risks arising from the disabilities of any child at the school. (NMS 26.3 and 26.7)
- Ensure a satisfactory recruitment process is recorded in writing. This is with reference to the date staff begin to work with children, checks on qualifications and that all references have been returned. (NMS 27)
- Review how the opinions and views of sixth form students are actively sought. (NMS 2.4)
- Review the implementation of the written placement plans as outlined in Standard 17.1. (NMS 17.1)
- Ensure that there is a staffing policy that covers all elements of standard 28.2 and that the duty rosters demonstrate achievement of this standard. (NMS 28.2).

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the college at different stages in their educational careers. Attainment on entry varies significantly. Many are at the levels expected of their age, but some are below expected levels in some areas of the curriculum when they join. Students make at least satisfactory progress and many make good progress from these starting points in Key Stages 3 and 4. Different groups of students, for example those who have additional learning difficulties, make similar progress. This consistent picture of progress is due to the good quality support students receive, such as the individual Braille lessons, and their teachers' good specialist knowledge.

In Key Stage 4, there has been a dip in standards more recently and GCSE results were below national expectation. There is caution in making too much of these figures as the cohort size is small. Achievement across the college is consistently good. In fact, students with complex needs are assisted to achieve academic success in line with other students. Students achieve above the national average in their 'A' level courses. Their economic wellbeing is good as they achieve well in their basic skills prior to leaving the college. They are also prepared well for the world of work by undertaking courses relevant to their chosen career path. There is a high success rate of students gaining vocational qualifications and going on to gain places of their choice in further and higher education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Outcomes for students are good because the staff plan well for all outcomes. Students know how to keep themselves safe around the college and on visits due to the excellent mobility training. They gradually build up their knowledge of the college site and gain confidence with known routes in the locality. Consequently, they feel safe. They are also aware of implications for the continued safety of others. Most students adopt healthy lifestyles by taking part in regular sporting activities, of which there is an excellent take up. However, a small minority in the sixth form do smoke in an allotted area on the college site. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are well motivated and enjoy their education. Attendance is in line with the national average. However, the number of fixed term exclusions in the recent academic year is rather high, although there have only been a small number of permanent exclusions. Despite this, the behaviour of the majority of students is good, although there are occasional incidents of bullying. Students are assured that these are always dealt with effectively. In lessons, students work well together in pairs and are mutually supportive of each other. Self-confidence and self-esteem increase well, often from very low starting points. They learn how to relate socially to others around them, how to use public transport, and how to co-operate with their peers. Students develop their thinking skills well as they work independently. They learn how to express themselves clearly. They are confident when meeting the many visitors to the school and when they make visits in the locality, for example in their increasing involvement in community activities, where they make a positive contribution.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good across the college overall. A significant proportion of lessons are outstanding. Here the students are really engaged in their learning and there is a buzz of excitement and an excellent range of activities. The best lessons are well planned because teachers know the students well and make excellent use of the teaching assistants, who are also highly skilled and make a good contribution to students' learning and progress. Teaching is well matched to the range of students and builds well on what has gone before, so that they all make good progress, including those who have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the satisfactory lessons, objectives are not as clearly identified and teachers talk for too long before setting students to task. Occasionally, higher attaining students have to wait too long for others to catch them up, or staff provide help that is not necessary. In all lessons, teachers demonstrate a good knowledge of their subject and of visual impairment. Teachers use a wide variety of well-considered activities to take account of students' preferred styles of learning and provide appropriate resources, for example, if the students are Braille or large print users.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The college provides a good and improving curriculum, which meets all statutory requirements and the needs of all the students, including sixth formers. Students' enjoyment of the curriculum is high because it is made relevant to them. There are recently implemented new schemes of work in all national curriculum subjects for Year 7 students. Staff have introduced a wider range of science options for those students who wish to continue their scientific study into the sixth form. With each cohort, the school successfully responds to the changes in students' needs and provides a well-matched and individualised learning programme for each. Even if there are small numbers in a group, specialists are brought in to offer a full range of subjects. The curriculum is enhanced further through a wide range of enrichment activities. The evening curriculum is also interesting and students take part in valuable learning activities both on and off site, such as swimming and shopping, which they really enjoy. The skiing trip is a popular feature of the college year and students also particularly enthuse about the outdoor pursuits in Wales, including canoeing and other adventure activities. The college has forged very positive links with other colleges, universities and other external stakeholders, which contributes effectively to the curriculum provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The college provides high quality pastoral care and sound support and guidance. Staff know the students well and continue to be committed to raising their achievements, including their personal development, mobility and independence. Students have targets set related to their personal development, although they do not consistently work towards sharply focussed academic targets based on the assessment of their work. There is close working between care and teaching staff ensuring students are safe and well cared for. Students are always sure about whom to turn to if they need help or someone to talk to.

Pastoral care is good for all students, including those looked after students or those experiencing difficulties. Staff work closely with those who are at risk of exclusion, although are not always able to help prevent this. Appropriate training in child protection and safeguarding procedures has taken place for all staff in the school. Good links with outside agencies means that there is a wide range of support available for students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management is good. This judgement matches the college's self-evaluation. Leaders and managers are successfully focussed on raising standards and are effective in promoting students' personal development and wellbeing. After a period of instability, the college now has a full senior leadership team, who are setting a clear direction for improvement and are creating a common sense of purpose amongst staff. They meet regularly and have a unified vision and determination for improvement, using their specialist knowledge and expertise to good effect. There have also been significant changes within the governing body and only recently has there been a full complement of governors. However, they are

committed to doing their best for the college and recent training is improving their effectiveness. The college is now fully independent of the RNIB and the governors successfully managed this period of change. The vast majority of parents and students express satisfaction with how the college is led and managed.

The senior leadership team, ably supported by a dedicated staff group, ensure that achievement is at least good and that students with additional learning difficulties progress as well as other students. Despite good teaching, standards have not been sustained in all year groups because of the transient nature of some of the cohorts and some students joining classes mid-year, with some significant ground to make up. Standards therefore, for example, have slipped at GCSE and at the end of the first year in the sixth form. However, staff have not been complacent. Intervention and individual support programmes ensure that progress is good throughout the college and that 'A' level results continue to be above the national average. Staff have responded to the point for improvement from the last inspection to analyse data more effectively across the college. Staff now track students' progress more effectively but the use of this information to inform their whole college target setting is still being developed.

Staff have an accurate view of their strengths and weaknesses. The college improvement plan contains a sensible list of priorities and provides a useful steer for the future. The college meets its duty to promote community cohesion well. It is continually strengthening its links with the local and wider community and works exceptionally well in partnership with others, such as other schools. College leaders also ensure that equality of opportunity is considered carefully in all aspects of the college. They are also aware of implications for the continued safety of others; inclusion is integral to the college ethos. The leadership team has identified that it has more to do to successfully promote this throughout the wider curriculum, for example by further challenging the most able students. With its usual track record in ensuring students achieve well and make good progress, and the committed staff team, the college has a good capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16–19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	No



07 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of New College Worcester

Thank you very much for the warm welcome and for being so friendly to the inspection team during the college's recent inspection. Coming into the lessons to get a feel for what you do, and meeting groups of students, were the most enjoyable part of the inspection. We valued how sensible and mature you were in giving your comments and we agree with you that this is a good college. Your teachers have much good practice to share with others outside the college about working with students with visual impairment. The specialist college status also ensures that there are extra resources available for you to use. We think you achieve well and make good progress. The college offers you a wide curriculum, which is enhanced by lots of exciting trips and activities outside the college. You receive mainly good quality teaching and the college often provides specialist teachers, ensuring it has the right expertise to cover all of your chosen subjects. Because of the good quality individual support you receive and the specially tailored resources available, you all seek, and most secure, placements in further or higher education.

However, there is no room for complacency and the inspection team have made some recommendations to the school. We have asked the leadership team, trustees and governors to make sure that they meet all of the rules for your safety and well-being in the boarding provision. We also want school staff to make sure that they:

- Start to use the information from when your work is marked, or when you are tested, to provide meaningful learning targets for you
- Share clear learning objectives for each lesson with you and make sure the work set makes you all think hard, so that test results keep getting better.

You can play your part by making sure you know your targets and asking for new ones once you have achieved them. Also, make sure that you tell your teachers if the work is too easy or hard.

We wish you well in all that you do at the college and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector