

Sense College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

7–9 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Staff provide excellent behavioural support that enables learners to manage their own conduct successfully and cope well in a range of social situations.
- Learners improve their ability to communicate significantly, so they are able to participate more fully in lessons and increasingly make decisions for themselves.
- Teachers and specialist support staff are very skilled in working with learners who have highly complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, learners make good progress from their starting points.
- An extensive and varied selection of enrichment activities enables learners to increase their self-confidence notably and raises their aspirations of what they can achieve.
- A good range of partnership working continues to bring about many benefits for learners in the form of increased work-related learning and community-based activities.
- Destinations for learners are becoming more ambitious, but managers' tracking of these over time is insufficient.
- While teaching and learning are good, teachers do not always use resources or assistive technology sufficiently well or set specific enough targets for learners to extend what they can learn in lessons.
- Governance arrangements have improved significantly and are mostly good, although governors do not ask leaders sufficiently probing questions about a few areas of the college's work.
- Leaders and managers have been successful in improving much of the college's work. In a minority of cases, however, they are less incisive in their monitoring and scrutiny and, as a consequence, the rate of improvement has been slower in these areas.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Sense College is an independent specialist college and is part of the national 'Sense' parent organisation, a national charity that supports people who are deafblind, have sensory impairments or complex needs, to enjoy more independent lives. The college now operates from six resource centres across the East Midlands and the East of England.
- All the learners are deafblind or sensory impaired. A high proportion of learners have very complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities affecting their communication, emotional and behavioural development. Most learners also have physical disabilities and require mobility support. Currently, 136 learners are enrolled at the college, of whom 30 are funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Nearly all learners follow the pre-entry curriculum, with around a third based at the main Hampton centre in Peterborough. Just over 20% of learners are of minority ethnic heritage.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment even further by:
 - ensuring that where staff set educational targets for learners, these are sufficiently specific and personalised, in order to deepen learning and capture learners' academic progress more effectively; particularly, but not exclusively, in English and mathematics
 - making sure that learners have access to an appropriate range of assistive technology and resources in sessions, and that staff use these resources better to enable learners to make the full progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring that managers provide clearer and more precise feedback to teachers about all the aspects of their teaching practice that could help them improve further.
- Improve the governing body's oversight of the college's work by making sure governors ask more searching questions of leaders about the sustainability of learners' destinations, equality and diversity promotion and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In addition, ensure that governors and leaders are more aware of what best practice looks like in these areas, so they can set even higher expectations.
- Ensure that managers are equally rigorous in their monitoring of the provision and in their recording of day-to-day operational matters. In addition, ensure that all the strengths and weaknesses within the self-assessment report are sharply focused and prioritised, so managers can take the precise actions required. This will aid leaders to move more rapidly towards their long-term mission.
- Ensure that managers analyse the outcomes for different groups of learners in sufficient detail, including any learners eligible for free school meals. This will enable them to better review and report more effectively any patterns in performance over time.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have continued to improve outcomes for learners, several aspects of teaching, learning and assessment and the quality of operational management at the college's geographically dispersed resource centres. Managers have made good progress in resolving the large majority of weaknesses from the previous inspection, although a few still remain.
- Managers have strengthened their monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment across the centres through frequent sharing of good practice. Staff training and development are good and equip teachers and support staff with the specialist skills they require to work effectively with learners who have very complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and managers' monitoring of actions taken to improve is comprehensive. However, the effectiveness of this monitoring is occasionally diluted because managers do not identify or prioritise all the areas for improvement incisively enough. Consequently, this has prevented managers from making more rapid progress in a few areas, such as equalities monitoring and the use of resources in lessons.
- While teaching is good, managers are sometimes too positive in their overall view of classroom-based activities. In a minority of instances, they overlook key points that could help staff develop their teaching practice even further.
- Partnership working remains a significant strength of the college. Managers have further expanded the range of collaboration with community organisations, employers and colleges, which continues to bring about many notable benefits for learners. For example, liaison with a local museum has led to the introduction of exclusive 'sensory tours' for learners. This enables learners to feel the exhibits as they learn about them away from noisy distractions.
- Learners receive an appropriately varied and personalised programme of study. Learners now benefit from an excellent selection of enrichment, community involvement and a growing range of relevant work-related activities, in which all participate to some degree.
- Managers have increased their ambition regarding learners' destinations. Learners, as well as parents and carers, receive thorough and impartial careers guidance to help them prepare for learners' next steps. However, managers recognise that in order to evaluate fully the effectiveness of their curriculum, they need to track more formally how well learners' destinations are sustained once they leave the college.
- Through carefully considered projects and assignments, staff raise learners' awareness of diversity effectively, particularly regarding the appreciation of different disabilities, cultures and faiths. Managers, however, do not analyse equalities data, particularly learners' achievements, in sufficient detail to review and report incisively any differences that may occur over time.
- Staff use their skills effectively to promote British values in a way that most learners will comprehend. As a result, learners demonstrate a good understanding of self-worth, empathy and what it means to be respectful to others. For example, learners undertaking

a guided tour of the college site courteously signalled to visitors to talk more quietly around a group of their peers who were particularly sound sensitive.

The governance of the provider

- Effective clerking, along with strong leadership of the governing body, has significantly strengthened governance arrangements. The board now has a broader range of relevant expertise and experience, which is used to good effect.
- Governors use their new subcommittees well in order to scrutinise most of the college's work effectively. They have improved their oversight of the dispersed educational provision through formal governor links with each resource centre. In addition, each governor now undertakes occasional visits to a centre to assure themselves that sufficient progress is being made against the college's quality improvement plan.
- In the majority of cases, governors use information and data effectively to challenge senior leaders. However, they are yet to ask sufficiently probing questions about all areas of the college's work, including how well different groups of learners achieve over time, or review the quality of teaching beyond the grade profile presented.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff use their safeguarding awareness training effectively to help keep learners safe. Managers' monitoring of health and safety is good and risk assessments are thorough. The proportion of behavioural incidents is low and has decreased notably over the past two years.
- Staff are particularly skilled in understanding dysphagia, a condition which affects many learners at the college. They use their knowledge and training well to help learners with the safe consumption of food and drink. Staff also apply their training in the Mental Capacity Act well in this regard.
- Managers have taken positive action to promote and implement the 'Prevent' duty. While staff work closely with learners to help them understand about the dangers of extremist ideologies, managers recognise their need to extend this further to ensure that all learners, including those with lower cognitive ability, understand all the potential dangers of internet use.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan sessions well and are highly skilled in working with learners who have very complex multi-sensory impairment. As a result, learners make good progress and develop the skills they need to aid their future independence.
- Staff apply a range of communication approaches effectively including signing, symbol use or switches, where required. They appropriately allow extra time when learners need longer to process information and use skilful questioning to check that learners understand.
- Learners receive very good in-class support. Staff encourage learners to participate fully

in activities through clear instruction and continuous communication. As a result, learners are motivated and involved. For example, staff supported non-verbal learners to move their fingers and feet to music. Staff prompted throughout the activity to encourage learners' independent rhythmic movement and effectively reinforced simple numeracy.

- Staff, along with specialist therapists, assess thoroughly the support learners require when they start at the college. In most cases, they ensure that any bespoke assistive technologies or resources required are put into place quickly. In a minority of sessions, teachers do not utilise resources effectively enough to assist the progress learners could make. In a few cases, staff do use technology innovatively, such as a recent project involving learners wearing camera-mounted headwear to shoot a film of what life is like for a learner with sensory disabilities.
- Teachers' monitoring and recording of any incidental progress are excellent. Staff are therefore able to review comprehensively all the smaller steps of progress learners make and use this information to set more stretching personal targets.
- Teachers assess the majority of learners' targets well. In most cases, learners apply the communication and mathematics skills they have learned effectively, which helps increase their independence. In a minority of cases, teachers set academic targets that are too broad, which sometimes prevents them accurately assessing the progress learners make. In a few cases, staff do not set sufficiently challenging targets to develop the writing or reading skills of the small number of most-able learners.
- In many lessons, teachers effectively promote the values of respect and dignity, and the importance of learners recognising their own and others' unique individuality. Staff use praise well to reinforce understanding and learners respond positively by extending their participation in an activity or confidently repeating their achievements.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Staff continue to manage learners' behaviour extremely effectively. Over time, many learners gain a range of strategies to help them begin to control their own conduct and actions. Most learners are calm and are able to deal effectively with a wide range of social situations. Consequently, they develop an increased sense of self-awareness and good skills to support their future independence.
- Learners participate in an increasing number of work-related learning sessions both within and external to the college. These sessions enable them to develop good functional mathematics skills, such as counting, adding and subtracting, where this is appropriate.
- Learners benefit notably from a wide range of high-quality and varied enrichment ventures including museum visits, community projects and additional qualifications, such as British sign language courses. In addition, many participate in an outstanding range of sports activities including sensory yoga, new-age curling, indoor wall climbing, rowing and wheelchair football. As well as aiding physical fitness, these activities help increase learners' team-working skills and significantly increase their aspirations as to what they are capable of achieving.
- Learners make significant gains in self-confidence and in handling different social environments. For example, learners who had only ever experienced exercising in a hydro pool are now able to attend the local swimming baths and cope well with the increased

noise and busier surroundings.

- A number of learners develop good computer skills. For example, a few learners, who struggled to communicate easily through switches, were supported by staff and specialist therapists to trial a range of different communication devices. Learners then applied the progress they had made in using social media to create their own blog entitled 'Diary of a Frustrated Head-switch User' to evaluate their experiences.
- Learners receive a comprehensive induction that incorporates basic e-safety awareness and how to stay safe when working away from college. Learners feel safe and know who to turn to if they have a concern. Learners enjoy their studies and, given the frequent medical requirements of many learners, attendance within lessons is high.
- Learners' understanding of democracy, liberty and the rule of law is good. Learners are able to relay their views effectively through frequent learner forums where they can vote democratically regarding decisions affecting their resource centre. For example, learners have contributed their ideas for a sensory garden design, chosen equipment for a new kitchen and elected places to visit for days out.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The majority of learners make good progress through their programme of study. All learners who take accredited qualifications achieve these within the time allocated.
- College data shows no differences in the achievements of different groups of learners, with the exception of those aged 19 or over, who consistently achieve better than the much smaller cohort of those aged 16 to 18.
- The standard of learners' work is good, including in work-related settings. For example, employers describe learners undertaking a supported work placement in retail as role models, because they demonstrate good customer service skills and teach customers to sign while they serve them.
- On leaving the college, most learners progress into day provision, in line with their long-term goal. In 2015/16, for the first time in the college's history, one learner moved into further education at a local college and one entered weekly voluntary work. While a few learners progressed into supported living, the large majority who left the college returned to their family home.
- Learners make good progress in developing their functional mathematics and excellent progress in improving their communication. As a result, learners are able to relay their wishes and decisions and thereby take greater control of their lives. Evidence of how well all learners utilise their skills, or sustain their intended destinations over time, however, is too anecdotal.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132011
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	34
Principal	Pat Dyson
Telephone number	01733 425053
Website	www.sense.org.uk/content/sense-college

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+
	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	30							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency							
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 college as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college'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 across five of the six college resource centres. The inspection took into account all relevant EFA-funded provision at the college.

Inspection team

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