

Guildford College - Merrist Wood Campus

Inspection report for further education college

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Information about the college

Merrist Wood Campus is part of Guildford College. The campus is situated three miles from Guildford town centre. This 400 acre-estate hosts a broad range of learning and recreational resources including woodland, wetland, live stock and an Equine centre. Merrist Wood offers specialist subjects in land-based industries and sport for residential, international and day students.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Summary report

Overall effectiveness of the provision	outstanding
Outcomes for young people	outstanding
Quality of service	outstanding
Leadership and management	outstanding
Safeguarding	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

The last inspection of this college was an integrated inspection of education and residential welfare on 11 May 2009. This stand alone social care inspection identified that great strides have been taken since the last inspection in raising the profile for the residential provision. In doing so, student numbers have increased and there is great emphasis on promoting positive behaviours and student empowerment.

The robustness of management monitoring, planning and quality assurance systems signifies the breadth of work undertaken in not only meeting but exceeding all but one of the national minimum standards assessed for this provision. In-house and external monitoring processes commissioned by the college are comprehensive and

wide ranging. These are measurable against outcomes and targets for achievement are clearly identified.

The sustainability of staff, the wide range of resources and effectiveness of communication between staff are all contributing factors to students' success. All aspects of student safety are carefully considered before, during and after admission to halls of residence. The emphasis placed on individual care and support often helps students work through matters and situations which are not related to the college. This is an excellent example of how holistic needs are considered and without judgement of a student's background or presenting issues. Fairness and equality are evident in written guidance and practice. These qualities are expressed by students who give very positive examples of how they are supported in integrating into college life.

Students have mixed views about rules for under 18's and student who are 18 years plus. However, students accept that the college has a duty of care towards them and their whereabouts during residential times. The vast majority of students including international students are enjoying their residential experiences and learning opportunities. Student's views are valued and as a result, changes are made within reason. For example, the squash courts have been converted into sports hall. This provision is benefitting all students including those who are resident.

The quality of care is wide ranging and very personal to the individual student. The numbers of staff on duty at anyone time, ensure that students are guaranteed the individualised care and attention they require. Supporting evidence shows the extent of care and how this relates to meeting students' holistic needs and well-being.

Students' safety is paramount in all aspects of college life. Written documentation and practical arrangements for ensuring student safety are consistent. Robust systems are in place for ensuring that key lines of enquiry are communicated between staff across all remits of the college. In doing so, staff at all levels are kept fully abreast of measures in place for safeguarding and protecting students at all times.

Staff speak extremely highly about their relationships with each other, students, students' parents and other relevant individuals. In turn, these well-established relationships contribute to students' success and accessibility to services they require. Parents' written accolades to the college are indicative of their appreciation and satisfaction of the residential provision and the varying types of individualised services available to students.

With the exception of limited social space and matters regarding privacy in one hall of residence, students speak positively about their accommodation. Two recommendations are made to further review and improve two areas in a hall of residence occupied by male students.

What should the college do to improve further?

To improve the quality and standards of care further the provider should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- expand the social space in the hall of residence occupied by male students (41.2)
- improve the privacy and changing facilities in the shower area used by male students. (NMS 40.1)

Outcomes for young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

The residential provision is at the heart of students' welfare and experiences. There is no differentiation between students regardless of their backgrounds. One student commented that they love being at this college and that opportunities are great. Another student reflected on their development in terms of independence and their reluctance to leave now because they have found their own identity as an individual. The college is a thriving and purposeful environment. It is a very enabling and nurturing place where students' emotional well-being, past experiences of study and anxieties around learning are all supported. This helps students overcome fears and anxieties and helps prepare them in achieving exceptional outcomes.

Support services for students are unquestionable. The extent of individualised and group support enables students to thrive and do well. On rare occasions when students are experiencing difficulty, staff are quick to intervene and do so in a very sensitive and understanding manner. The extent of work undertaken with students is relevant to their home life, additional learning support needs such as sensory impairments and learning disabilities, and other personal matters. Students are flourishing as the result of the individualised support services they receive. In addition, the types of support extend to preparing students for returning home or moving on to other educational provisions. Former students often visit the college informally or for special events. This is an inspiration for staff, as it gives them an indication of how students' experiences of this college, help prepare them for adult life. Existing students praise the staff and opportunities available to them in helping them plan and work towards their future goals.

Students enjoy the many opportunities for integrating into the local and wider community. These are often linked with sporting events, culture days and supporting local and national initiatives. Detailed processes are in place for ensuring that students are fully prepared, appropriately trained and supervised when undertaking activities both internal and external. The on-site facilities are complementary to students gaining the necessary skills when involved in on or off-site activities. These roles encourage students to excel in their chosen subjects, hobbies or interests.

Students are encouraged to motivate themselves through constructive and meaningful activities. Events are negotiated between staff and students and when necessary, risk assessments are generated for appropriateness and safety purposes.

There is a real sense of respect and value for each other. Students have no concerns about feeling safe or coming to harm as a result of their residential and learning experiences. Students speak very positively about the diverse range of support systems available to them. This includes cultural preferences, academic support and preparing for moving on. The expertise and deployment of staff enables students to confront personal matters in a number of ways and at different times of the day.

Networking with external professionals and agencies is excellent. In doing so, this not only provides one-to-one support for students but it also creates opportunities for students to engage in external projects and initiatives. For example, the college employs a careers advisor who is now based on site. The accessibility of this person helps students focus on their objectives and future career prospects. Prompt action is also taken in securing help for students who may find studying a challenge. Students are doing exceedingly well as a result of these well-established links.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **outstanding**.

Robust systems and processes are in place for ensuring that students' holistic health needs are met. This includes the detailed screening of young people's health needs prior to and after taking up residence. The outcomes of health assessments are managed sensitively and thoroughly. As a result, this encourages students to access relevant health services without fear or anxiety. In-house health provisions are central to students' emotional well-being. Trained professionals such as counsellors and college staff with areas of speciality are accessible to students. This ensures that students are guaranteed proper support, guidance and reassurance at all times. Very clear guidelines are in place regarding students' responsibility for the safekeeping and administration of their medication. Staff are meticulous in monitoring the safety of medications with students.

Effective systems are in place for the reporting and monitoring of incidents and accidents. Prompt action is taken in response to emerging trends and patterns. This helps reduce and prevent the specific types of incidents and accidents reoccurring. In addition to students having their own bedrooms, a dedicated room is allocated to students who are ill. The location of these rooms increases the necessary supervision students may require.

Written guidance and practical support are available to students for registering with a General Practitioner and other primary health care professionals. Excellent systems are also in place for signposting students to other relevant health professionals or support groups including sexual health and emotional well-being. The college hosts a broad range of workshops, initiatives and student forums around health and well-being. These opportunities are becoming increasingly popular and evolving, taking into account student requests and interests.

Pastoral care is exceptional and all aspects of students' care and welfare are fully

supported by college staff or external professionals. Students are very positive about ways in which they are supported. This they say is as a result of college staff who they refer to as 'cool', 'good' and 'approachable'. The initial admission process is very well-thought through, taking into account students' age, circumstances and placement criteria. This process enables students to quickly form new friendships and adjust to college life in residence. Halls of residence are only provided on a weekly basis. However, the emphasis placed on students' emotions and transitions into the college are extraordinary. Families are equally prepared and supported for these changes and transitions. A sampling of correspondence from families to the college is indicative of families' gratitude and appreciation. These letters of 'thanks' also are excellent examples of the extent of pastoral care shown to students and their families.

As a result of listening to students, the choices and quality of meals provided have greatly improved. The main dining area (cafeteria) is a very respectful and social environment, where long periods of waiting to be served is not an issue. A 'swipe card' system is in place for monitoring students' dietary intake. In addition, adjustments are made to ensure that students involved in sporting activities are receiving appropriately balanced diets and regulated meal times. Specialist diets are provided and staff are prompt in communicating student's individual needs and preferences with the catering team.

A dedicated team oversees students' leisure and recreational pursuits. A broad range of activities are offered to students, ensuring that they use their time constructively. This includes, lunchtime sporting activities, outdoor pursuits such as rock climbing and organised trips to one-off events. Students are very involved in promotion events hosted by the College such as mental health awareness, HIV awareness, religious events and disability awareness. These contribute to students chosen topics of interest and learning.

The halls of residence are very secure and appropriately supervised at all times. Students speak very confidently about feeling safe as a result of the devices used for them gaining access to halls of residence but keeping intruders out. Appropriate security arrangements are in place for policing the site out of normal college times.

Overall, student accommodation is well presented, well managed and clean. The improvement plan shows that significant developments are being considered as part of the rolling maintenance and refurbishment programme. This includes proposed developments in the halls of residence. The majority of students enjoy the benefits of adequate social space. Action has been taken to improve privacy in one of the shower areas in the male hall of residents. However, there is still scope for improvement, particularly in the changing area. There is also limited social space in this area of residence. With the exception of this one hall of residents, students enjoy very comfortable and spacious accommodation. The communal areas are popular with students and include a bar and games facilities. All students are accommodated in single bedrooms and can furnish their rooms in line with college guidelines and safety rules.

Students placed in lodgings known as 'homestay' by the college are well protected. These arrangements are usually in place for international students. The process for accepting, accommodating and monitoring the welfare of international students is extensive. The college's international department visit host countries prior to students taking up college placements and homestay arrangements. This two-way process contributes immensely to the success of students' placements. Families providing homestay placements are carefully vetted, inspected and monitored by the college. These processes are well documented and any matters arising are dealt with promptly and efficiently. One host family refers to these arrangements as being 'an extended family'.

Mobile telephones and various electronic forms of communication are popular with students. In addition, a payphone is provided for students to make private calls. A dedicated telephone is accessible to students in the halls of residence for contacting emergency numbers. This includes direct contact to college staff and the external service.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management are **outstanding**.

The Statement of Principles and practice are embedded in a range of documents. A good number of these are located in the student handbook. In addition, electronic versions are accessible to students, their families and significant others including the college website. There is clear evidence that the Statement of Principles and associated policies and procedures are reviewed and updated at least annually.

Students are fully aware of policies and procedures relevant to them. These are detailed in the student handbook. Student information is treated in strictest confidence. Codes of conduct are in place regarding data protection and information assurance. Stringent processes are in place for ensuring the safe handling of information and use of the internet by staff and students. Storage facilities for confidential information are very secure. Great care is also taken for ensuring that electronic forms of communication do not breach confidentiality and put students at risk.

A very comprehensive complaints system is in place and the data collected is used for monitoring the quality of service. A new student complaints policy has been devised and approved by the college's relevant committee. Other aspects of the complaints process has undergone review in recent months including developing ways for reporting complaints and raising awareness of the complaints procedures.

Students are actively involved in consultation groups including: welfare projects, politics, residential initiatives and learning zones. Students are encouraged to 'speak out' and their views are not undermined. For example, students voiced their preference to text or email their observations regarding repairs and faults. This

replaces a card system which students were not in favour of. In addition, a wealth of information is accessible to students through notice boards and other means.

The warmth of relationships established between staff and students is a contributing factor towards openness and honesty. As a result, the numbers of formal complaints are very low because students do feel that they can approach staff about anything at an early stage. Students have access to a number of independent people they may contact if they wish to discuss concerns or worries. Students are fully aware of these professionals and contact details are easily accessible.

The leadership and management team creates a culture of inclusion and respect for diversity. These principles are strongly embedded in policies and practice. Student individuality is highly recognised and celebrated. Staff are not complacent in developing new strategies for student support and learning incentives. The broad range of projects, forums and other major events includes scope for students' learning, support and awareness about 'growing up' and developmental matters such as sexuality, sexual orientation, culture and religion.

The leadership and management team are dynamic in their approach to developing the residential provision. This includes the views of staff and students which are incorporated into strategic planning. The 'learner involvement strategy' is an excellent example of how students are engaged in decision-making initiatives. This includes opportunities for consulting with students on training and responsibility opportunities. The student resident meeting provides opportunities for students to comment specifically on residential matters. There is demonstrable evidence that students' views are taken into account and where necessary, action taken to influence change. Staff respect students' ages and adopt a well-balanced approach towards students having appropriate supervised time with the flexibility of also undertaking activities independently.

Leadership and management support is accessible to all staff and students, and this is highly valued. Staff at all levels are motivated and empowered through the vast array of professionally recognised and in-house training opportunities available to them. Students learning and welfare needs are met and supported by a small but dedicated and well-qualified residential team. All staff however, demonstrate their passion and a strong commitment to students including: opportunity, equality and a positive experience of residential college life. The vast majority of residential students are exceeding expectations and thriving as a result of the additional and consistent support they receive. In particular, residential students are achieving exceedingly high marks academically.

The impact of residential and other types of college provisions are heavily scrutinised through robust quality assurance and monitoring systems. These processes are used effectively in generating developmental plans and self improvement. Forward planning and evaluating the quality of the residential provision are strong elements of the management process. The self assessment report is a comprehensive document, covering a wide range of areas for improving and developing the residential provision. The quality improvement plan clearly demonstrates how

objectives are targeted for ensuring improved outcomes for students. This includes action taken as a result of listening to students. Students are encouraged to complete surveys distributed by the college. The feedback from these surveys is valued and used effectively for future planning.

At the last inspection, one recommendation was made to improve the quality of evidence on recruitment checks for catering staff. This recommendation is met. The written contract between the college and the catering company has been satisfactorily updated to reflect this.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding arrangements are **outstanding**

Students are adamant that they have no experiences of bullying or harassment at the college. This close-knitted community is very vigilant in minimising and avoiding issues relating to bullying. This includes: responding to changes in behaviour, acting on students' feelings and enabling students to speak out, with and for each other. Robust systems are in place for protecting students from engaging in matters relating to cyber bullying. These systems detect inappropriate use of electronic systems and deter students from attempting to place themselves at risk. Documentation and policies relating to student safety are accessible in a variety of forms and included in the student handbook.

The safety and protection of students is central to a vast array of management-led systems and student welfare. Staff demonstrate exceptional awareness of safeguarding procedures and potential risk factors which may hinder student's learning opportunities and safety. The whole college approach towards applying rules and guidelines on safeguarding is consistent. Communication between staff and remits within the college is very effective. As a result, the reporting of suspected or known incidents are managed efficiently and effectively. Records show the extent of transparency and fairness involved with students when sanctions or conditions are imposed. Staff attend a broad range of safeguarding training and this contributes to a safe and well-managed environment which all students experience.

Extensive work is undertaken in respecting students as individuals and as young adults. Students benefit immensely from the range of opportunities in place, enabling them to demonstrate responsible behaviour while gaining independence skills. Students' safety is an inclusive and interactive process in all aspects of college life. Initiatives 'by students and for students' are innovative and enhances opportunities for students who excel in 'looking out for' and supporting each other. These opportunities are also useful for when students have more independence from the age of 18 and spend longer periods of recreational time away from the college. A very low percentage of students do not agree with all of the safeguarding boundaries in place such as times when they must return to campus. However, students appreciate why this is necessary for varying age groups, particularly those under the age of 18.

Stringent processes are in place for screening the suitability of prospective staff at interview stage. This is followed by a very comprehensive induction process and ongoing support and supervision. Staff are assessed for their competencies through an equally well-managed selection process.

Health and safety systems are wide ranging and data is carefully scrutinised for the safety of students, staff and visitors at all times. The extent of risk management covers a raft of areas including the types of land-based activities students are involved with. New initiatives are in place for giving students the opportunity of reporting hazards or areas of the college including halls of residence requiring attention. This process is a whole college approach, ensuring that everyone takes responsibility towards maximising safety at all times.

Students in homestay arrangements are guaranteed appropriate facilities and services as agreed between families and the college. The robustness of monitoring student placements ensures that the quality of service provided for each placement is maintained. In addition, the college's international department surveys students' experiences of college and homestay arrangements. Positively recent outcomes collated, indicate high satisfaction levels with arrangements.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for accommodation in further education colleges.