

Writtle College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 133804

Name of lead inspector: Paul Joyce HMI

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Type of provider: Higher Education institution

Address: Lordship Road
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Information about the provider

1. Writtle College is a medium sized higher education institution with significant further education provision. It is a partner institution of the University of Essex and offers further education provision from foundation to advanced level in the land-based, sports, art and design and the preparation for life and work subject areas. Student numbers are relatively low in all areas other than in the land-based sector. The college is located in the parish of Writtle near Chelmsford on a large estate with substantial land-based resources.
2. At the time of inspection 954 students were enrolled on courses the majority of whom were 16 to 18 years old studying full-time. The vast majority of students are recruited from the county of Essex with smaller numbers recruited from neighbouring local authority areas. Approximately two thirds of students are female and the vast majority are from a White British background. The college provides training for work-based learners in land-based subjects through contracted arrangements with another college and has no significant employer responsive contract of its own.
3. The socio-economic environment around Writtle is favourable with lower levels of unemployment than found regionally or nationally. However, levels of educational attainment at age 16 are below national levels with fewer pupils leaving school with five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics than is the case nationally.
4. The college's mission is to 'Transform lives and the environment through inspiring education' and its aspiration is to provide outstanding further education provision by 2012.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Harlow College - Apex Partnership (apprenticeships in land-based provision).
 - Havering College of Further and Higher Education (horticulture and dog grooming courses).
6. No other organisation provides training on behalf of the college.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to18)</p> <p>Foundation learning</p>	<p>77 part-time learners</p> <p>166 part-time learners 468 full-time learners</p> <p>33 part-time learners 14 full-time learners</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p>	<p>84 full-time learners 235 part-time learners</p>

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Horticulture and floristry	2
Animal care and equine studies	3

Overall effectiveness

7. This is a satisfactory and improving college that has many good features. The proportion of students who complete and achieve their intended qualification aim continues to rise and while outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall they are good on a number of courses. Success rates are high in sport and on art and design courses but are more variable on land-based courses where overall success rates are around comparable national averages.
8. The quality of teaching and learning is variable across the college and is satisfactory overall. Teaching in practical lessons is generally more effective than that in theory lessons and is mostly good. However, in a minority of practical lessons and more generally in theory lessons activities are not planned well enough to ensure students make the progress they are capable of in the time available.
9. The college provides a good range of courses with appropriate progression routes in most areas. Students develop beneficial skills that prepare them well for higher level study or employment. Partnership working is good and enhances the curriculum. Work-experience placements provide valuable learning opportunities that contribute significantly to developing students' knowledge and understanding and to their enjoyment of courses.

10. Students receive good guidance and support that helps them achieve. Students speak highly of the support provided by staff throughout the college. Arrangements to monitor and support students at risk of not achieving are becoming increasingly effective. Tutorial provision is satisfactory overall.
11. Leaders, managers and governors are successful in improving many aspects of provision. Arrangements to monitor and improve performance are good. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Self-assessment is generally accurate and arrangements to ensure students are appropriately safeguarded are good. The college has a good capacity to make further improvements.

Main findings

- Success rates are high on courses in art and design and in sport. On land-based courses success rates are more variable and are high on some courses and low on others. Overall success rates on land-based courses are around the national average rate of comparable colleges. Pass rates are high on most courses having improved significantly in 2010/11. Retention rates, especially on advanced level courses, are low in several areas.
- The college analyses the success rates of different groups of students and is successfully narrowing achievement gaps overall. However, in some subject areas achievement gaps between male and female students or between students aged 16 to 18 and adult students are too wide.
- Students make satisfactory progress overall although the rate of progress does vary between different courses. Many students develop good practical skills and produce work of a high standard although this is not consistently the case on all courses. The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory. Students make a good contribution to both the college and wider community and most enjoy their courses and college life.
- Students feel safe at college and adopt safe working practices. They have a high regard for health and safety and have a good understanding of hazards and risks associated with the activities they complete. Health and well-being is promoted adequately through the curriculum and students have a satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding to be able to make informed choices about their personal health and well-being.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most lessons are taught enthusiastically. The teaching of much practical work is good and teachers emphasise safe working practices well. However, in too many lessons activities are not planned well enough to ensure students make the progress they are capable of in the time available. The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is improving but best practice is not yet widespread.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning are having a beneficial impact. Good practice is shared through the teaching and learning group. However, internal observers occasionally do not give sufficient weighting to the extent of students' progress when judging the quality

of a lesson. Observation records are not always useful in identifying specific development needs for individual teachers.

- Assessment is frequent and fair. Students' academic progress is reviewed regularly and teachers provide good support. However, while the feedback provided by teachers on the majority of students' work is helpful, on a minority of courses, feedback does not detail what students need to do to improve. In a few instances assignment work is not returned swiftly enough. The targets set on many students' individual learning plans are insufficiently specific.
- Arrangements for initial assessment are good. Students are screened early for any additional support needs and the introduction of additional literacy screening is enabling more bespoke planning of individual support. Information from initial assessment is comprehensive but it is not yet used consistently by all teachers to inform lesson planning.
- The college offers a wide range of courses with good progression opportunities. Progression rates to higher level study or into employment are good. Enrichment activities, including work experience, enhance the curriculum offer and benefit students by enhancing their personal and social development. Partnership working is good and college staff have good links with industry. Opportunities to take functional skill qualifications in mathematics are limited.
- Students receive good guidance and support. Teachers provide very good informal support throughout courses and students speak highly of the support they receive. Students have good access to a wide range of specialist support services. Arrangements to monitor students at risk of not achieving are becoming increasingly effective. One-to-one tutorial support is good; however, group tutorials are not always effective in engaging or supporting all students.
- Leaders, managers and governors set a clear strategic direction and are successful in improving the quality of provision and outcomes for learners. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating performance have improved. Self-assessment is broadly accurate at whole college level although in some subject areas it is not sufficiently evaluative and action plans are not always clear. Communication is much improved and staff morale is high.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students are comprehensive. Students contribute to decision making processes and their views are sought when evaluating provision or making changes. The views of partners and employers are not systematically sought or used to inform improvements to provision. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall. Accommodation and resources are good and the college provides good value for money.

What does Writtle College need to do to improve further?

- Raise retention and success rates on land-based courses, especially at advanced level, by ensuring the consistent application of procedures that have led to the improvements already made to outcomes for learners on other courses.
- Reduce the achievement gaps between different groups of students, especially in subject areas, by monitoring performance data closely and by providing

additional support and guidance to students not achieving as well as their peers.

- Ensure students make consistently good progress by using initial assessment information to plan lessons to meet individual students' needs and ability levels. Ensure the degree of challenge and pace of learning is appropriate to the level of course and further promote equality and diversity in teaching where possible.
- Enhance the rigour of the college's observation process by ensuring observers give sufficient weighting to the progress and pace of learning when formulating judgements. Ensure that written feedback provided to teachers following observations identifies clearly specific development actions.
- Ensure targets on students' individual learning plans are specific, time bound and relevant by sharing best practice and developing staff competence. Ensure all staff mark and return assignments within the agreed timescale and that detailed feedback informs students what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure students are able to gain formal accreditation that recognises the development of their numeracy skills by providing opportunities for students to sit functional skills tests in mathematics as part of their programme of study.
- Enhance the quality and effectiveness of group tutorials to ensure all students are engaged, developed and supported by sharing good practice between teachers and by using a wider range of strategies and resources that make activities more meaningful, memorable and inspiring.
- Develop formal procedures to canvas the views of partners and employers to enable them to become more involved in the design and evaluation of the curriculum and to contribute to self-assessment and improvement planning.
- Enhance the effectiveness of self-assessment at curriculum level so reports are more evaluative and judgements are supported more effectively by a wider range of evidence through developing the evaluation skills of managers and staff. Ensure action plans resulting from self-assessment clearly address weaknesses.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the college's pleasant and interesting learning environments
- staff expertise and dedication
- practical lessons and hands-on activities
- the approachable and supportive staff at college
- the range of facilities on campus
- the variety of animals that are available to work with.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the planning of assignments and assessments in some areas
- the provision of social spaces or study areas
- the speed and accessibility of computers
- the quality of some lessons
- some of the outdated equipment in horticulture and agriculture.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the positive support provided for schools
- the facilities and practical experience the college can offer
- the positive links with staff, particularly within the horticulture provision.

What employers would like to see improved:

- feedback on student progress
- lines of communication, including about courses changes.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

12. Success rates are rising and the quality of provision and the student experience improving. While the college remains satisfactory, overall provision and outcomes in some areas are good. The college has made good progress in rectifying the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and continues to invest in improving accommodation and resources for the benefit of students. Leaders, managers and governors have a clear and ambitious vision for the college and monitor performance closely. Students are becoming increasingly involved in decision making processes and satisfaction levels are high.
13. Quality assurance and quality improvement processes are effective. The self-assessment process is thorough and uses a wide range of evidence, including the views of students, to support judgements made. The views of employers or partners are not as well considered as there is no systematic procedure to gather and analyse views. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate in identifying the main strengths and areas for improvement but in some cases, especially at subject area level, is not sufficiently evaluative or objective and some grades are over-generous.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

14. Success rates on long courses in art and design and especially in sport are well above national averages and contribute significantly to the high overall success rate the college achieved in 2010/11. The overall long course success rate for the college's land-based provision, the significant proportion of student enrolments, is around the national average rate of comparable colleges. Success rates on land-based provision continue to rise but remain variable between different courses.
15. Pass rates are high on most courses having improved markedly in 2010/11 and students that are retained generally achieve well. However, too many students on land-based courses, especially at advanced level, leave their courses before the planned end date without achieving. Overall retention rates declined in 2010/11 and significantly so at advanced level.
16. Students make satisfactory progress overall with students in some areas making good progress and producing work of a high standard. Practical activities enable students to develop good skills relative to their course of study and prepare them well for the world of work. The practical work completed by horticultural students around the college estate is of high quality and students in equine and animal care develop a wide range of skills while completing practical duties. Students' written assignment and assessment work is satisfactory overall as is the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.

17. Students feel very safe while at college and have a high regard for health and safety while completing practical activities. Most students enjoy their courses and comment positively about their college experience. Attendance rates are high and further improved in 2010/11. The skills developed by students improve their social and economic well-being and enable them to make a significant contribution both to the college and the wider community. Students are able to make suitably informed choices about their health and well-being through a satisfactory development programme within the curriculum.
18. The college analyses the success rates of different groups of students and succeeded in closing achievement gaps over time at whole college level. However, data for 2010/11, especially at subject area level, does show some underperformance for different groups of students. Success rates for female students are higher than those of male students and success rates are higher for students aged 16 to 18 than they are for adults. Data show that students with a declared learning difficulty and/ or disability achieve in line with their peers and that success rates for the very small number of students from minority ethnic groups vary considerably.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

19. The quality of teaching and learning varies across the college and, although improving, is satisfactory overall. In many cases the teaching of practical lessons is good and enables students to develop relevant specialist skills that enhance their employability prospects. In most lessons, teachers emphasise safe working practices well and students demonstrate a good awareness of health and safety issues. In the very best lessons, in both practical and theoretical settings, teachers' expectations of students is high and students take a more active lead in their own learning. However, in too many lessons the planned activities do not take sufficient account of students' individual needs or ability levels to ensure all make the progress they are capable of in the time available. Tasks are sometimes too easy given students' prior knowledge or experience and often questioning techniques used by teachers do not maximise opportunities to extend students' knowledge or check their understanding.
20. Most lessons are taught enthusiastically and many teachers have recent relevant experience in their specialist field. Students generally enjoy their lessons, especially when completing practical tasks on or around the college campus. Resources for teaching and learning are good in many areas with students in horticulture benefiting from an extensive and diverse landscape on the college site. Animal studies and equine resources have been improved recently and provide good resources for practical teaching. Resources in sport are satisfactory overall although facilities in the sports hall are dated. Information and learning technology (ILT) is used very well to support learning in areas such as horticulture but its creative use in other curriculum areas is not yet widespread.

21. Assessment is frequent and fair. The college's central hand-in system for assignments works well to raise the importance of meeting deadlines amongst students. Written feedback on the majority of students' work is clear and helpful in identifying what can be improved. However, on a minority of courses, assignments are not always returned swiftly enough for students to benefit from the feedback provided. Students' academic progress is reviewed frequently and staff provide good informal support. However, the quality of target setting within students' individual learning plans is too variable. Targets are not specific enough to enable students' progress to be measured effectively. Arrangements for initial assessment are good. Students are now screened much earlier for any additional support needs and the introduction of additional literacy screening is enabling the more bespoke planning of individual support. Information from initial assessment is comprehensive but it is not yet used consistently by all teachers to inform lesson planning.
22. The college has invested considerable resources in improving further the quality and consistency of teaching. Good practice is now shared more extensively and the college's teaching and learning group raises awareness around the promotion of equality and diversity and the importance of developing students' functional skills. In a few lessons, staff integrate these themes exceptionally well, making them meaningful and interesting, but in other lessons reference and relevance is more cursory. Internal observers provide good support for staff in improving the quality of teaching although the quality of observation records are variable and in some instances the written feedback given to individual teaching staff on how they can improve is not specific enough to target training and development effectively. In a few cases observers do not give sufficient weighting to the pace or progress learners make during the observation period when forming an overall judgement about the quality of the lesson.
23. The curriculum meets the needs and interests of students well. The range of courses offered provides good progression opportunities and progression rates to higher level study or into employment are good on many courses. The curriculum enables the development of literacy and numeracy skills although opportunities for students to gain formal accreditation for the skills they develop in mathematics are limited. Courses develop students' employability skills very effectively and many students demonstrate good team working and communication skills. Enrichment opportunities are good and include work-experience placements, trips and visits to exhibitions and conventions and a range of recreational and sporting activities. The training for apprentices that attend the college from another provider is very effective in meeting the needs of local employers who speak positively about the college provision.
24. Partnership working is good. The college has strong and productive working relationships with a range of diverse partners including employers, other providers and voluntary agencies. Many college staff have developed strong links with industry organisations and employers that benefit students significantly and enhance their learning and development. The college works productively with local schools and contributes to career days, option evenings

and assemblies. It delivers a wide range of taster sessions and short courses that enable school pupils to experience the specialist provision offered by the college.

25. Guidance and support are good. Initial advice and guidance are much improved and ensure students' suitability for a course in relation to their levels of prior attainment and to their future career aspirations. Students receive good informal support throughout their courses and most have a high regard for the consistent levels of support provided for them by teachers and other college staff. Arrangements to monitor students at risk of leaving courses or of not achieving are becoming increasingly effective and in-year retention and attendance rates are high on many courses. Students have access to a range of specialist support services and the college has appropriate links and referral arrangements with these agencies.
26. Tutorial provision is satisfactory overall. The support provided during one-to-one tutorials is good and most teachers provide timely advice and guidance in relation to students' next steps. Advice and guidance in relation to career options, further training, higher education and employment opportunities are comprehensive and well received. However, group tutorials are not as effective, as often teachers use a limited range of strategies to engage students in discussion and debate around topical issues to further develop their personal and social well-being or their understanding of equality and diversity. The promotion of health and well-being through the tutorial programme is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

27. Leaders and managers are clearly focused on improving the quality of students' experience. They continue to make improvements to the quality of provision that are now starting to impact positively on student outcomes. Following a thorough review of provision and operating procedures, the curriculum offer has been refined and the college estate rationalised. The Principal, together with the Head of Further Education, provide strong leadership and set a clear strategic direction for the college. The head of further education, ably assisted by his deputy, manage provision well and set ambitious targets to aid improvement. They monitor and evaluate provision effectively and are driving improvements across the college although the rate of improvement is inconsistent. While outcomes for learners and the quality of provision are good on some courses this is not yet consistently the case in all subject areas.
28. Governors provide good support for college managers and hold them to account effectively against well considered key performance indicators. Governors have a wide range of skills and expertise that they use effectively in the performance of their duties. They receive regular reports that are informative and detailed; they frequently request additional information to assure themselves that improvements are being made and last year requested a mid-year self-assessment report to help them monitor progress. Governors

fulfil their statutory duties in relation to equality and diversity and child protection legislation and play an active role in the life of the college. Link arrangements with subject areas enable governors to speak to staff and students and help keep them informed.

29. Arrangements for safeguarding students are good. Recruitment vetting procedures, including Criminal Record Bureau checks, are completed for all staff and governors and an up-to-date single central record is maintained. The college places a high priority on ensuring students are appropriately safeguarded and have clearly defined policies and procedures in place that are well understood by staff and students. Staff receive appropriate training and designated child protection officers are in place. Links with external agencies are maintained and referrals made when required. Students are confident that issues reported are dealt with effectively and efficiently. Arrangements to ensure the safety of students on work-experience placements and for those aged 16 to 18 living in residential accommodation at the college are secure. Health and safety is well managed and promoted throughout the college and in the curriculum.
30. The college analyses the success rates of different groups of students and overall achievement gaps are narrowing. However, in some subject areas achievement gaps between male and female students and between students aged 16 to 18 and adults are too wide and insufficient action has been taken to remedy the situation. The college does analyse the outcomes of student surveys by age, gender, ethnicity and disability but does not complete this level of analysis against the full range of management information available. A single equalities scheme is in place and equality impact assessments have been completed. The college is prioritising the promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum and in lessons and teachers have undergone training to improve their practice. However, lesson observation records and inspection evidence confirm that, although improving, good practice in relation to the promotion of equality and diversity is not yet widespread.
31. Arrangements to gather and use students' views to evaluate and improve provision are well developed. Participation by students is good and they make useful and relevant contributions. The student council and student union are becoming more effective in enabling students to play a more active role in decision making processes. At council meetings students are confident in expressing their views on a wide range of issues and the college takes appropriate account of their views when making changes. Several beneficial changes are made following student suggestions including the establishment of a multi-faith room called 'The Space'. Arrangements to involve partners and employers in the monitoring and evaluation of provision are underdeveloped. Views are not formally canvassed, collated or analysed and employers do not have a channel to inform decision making processes at strategic level.
32. Arrangements for quality assurance, including self-assessment, are effective. Monitoring and evaluation identify strengths and areas for improvement and contribute to self-assessment and improvement planning processes. The use of

data and other management information in self-assessment and to drive improvement is more effective at whole college level than it is in subject areas. In some areas self-assessment is not sufficiently evaluative and action plans are not always clear. Procedures for observing teaching and learning are leading to improvements although, as recognised by the college, too much teaching remains satisfactory and too few lessons are good or better.

33. The college continues to improve accommodation and resources for the benefit of students. New facilities in equine and animal studies have improved resources for teaching and learning. Financial management and control is sound and the college now returns a small operating surplus. Sustainability is promoted well within the curriculum and the college is taking action to reduce its carbon footprint. Outcomes for students and the quality of provision are improving, attendance rates are high and in-year retention rates have improved. The college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Horticulture and floristry

Grade 2

Context

34. The college offers full- and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level. At the time of inspection 190 students were enrolled on courses. The vast majority of students are aged 16 to 18 and most are on full-time courses. The majority of students on floristry course are female and the majority on horticulture courses are male. Very few learners are of minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. Success rates on foundation and intermediate level courses are high. Success rates on advanced level courses improved significantly during 2010/11 but remain below average. Pass rates are high on most courses and retention rates are improving with in-year retention being high on many courses.
- Students make good progress and produce work of a high standard. They develop good practical skills and make significant gains in their knowledge and understanding. The standard of students' portfolio and assignment work is high. Many students achieve additional industry relevant qualifications that enhance their employability prospects. Progression rates into industry-related employment are high.
- Students have a very good awareness of hazards and risks and work safely using tools and equipment confidently and competently. Students make a significant contribution both to the college and wider community with horticulture students completing landscaping projects both on the college campus and externally to very high standards. Floristry students produce high quality floral displays both internally and for high profile external events.
- The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good and motivate students to achieve. Practical teaching is highly effective with teachers making good use of their vocational experience to develop students' knowledge and understanding. Practical demonstrations are good and enable students to observe different techniques.
- In the minority of less effective lessons, usually in theory classes, students are not engaged sufficiently in activities. In these lessons teachers talk too much and do not provide sufficient challenge to motivate and engage students. Questioning techniques are not used effectively to stretch and challenge or to keep the attention of more able students.
- Assessment practices are good. Students' progress is monitored effectively and students at risk of not achieving are given additional support. Assignments are well designed and encourage students to use ILT resources for research. Assignments are generally marked in an appropriate time-scale and feedback is

provided. However, the quality of feedback is variable and not all teachers provide sufficient detail to help students improve their work.

- Courses meet the needs and interests of students very well. Most full-time courses enable students to gain additional qualifications that enhance their employability skills. Horticulture students make good use of the college estate to develop their skills. Enrichment activities such as trips, visits and guest speakers significantly enhance the curriculum and students' enjoyment of courses.
- Partnerships with employers and industry associations are good and benefit students. Work-experience placements provide valuable learning opportunities for the majority of students. Partnerships with local schools, including a special school, enable pupils to experience the specialist provision offered by the college. Employers speak highly of the college and of staff.
- Guidance and support are good. Revised recruitment procedures and improved initial advice and guidance are now more effective at ensuring students are placed onto the correct courses. Students at risk of leaving or not achieving are monitored closely and given additional support. Staff provide good informal support and set appropriate targets for students to achieve. Students speak highly of the support they receive that helps them progress.
- Leadership and management are good. Significant improvements have been made to the quality of provision that are now impacting positively on outcomes for learners. In-year retention and attendance rates are high and the vast majority of students are on target to achieve their intended qualifications. Communication is much improved and staff are now sharing good practice that is improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The success rates of different groups are monitored although actions to improve the performance of groups that achieve less well than their peers are not always identified. While students have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity issues, opportunities are missed in the curriculum to develop knowledge and understanding further or to reinforce key concepts.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and identifies the key strengths and areas for improvement found at inspection. However, the resulting quality improvement plan does not always identify specific enough actions to be useful in guiding staff to make improvements. Targets are not always specific or measurable and improvement actions are not always reviewed and updated in a timely way.

What does Writtle College need to do to improve further?

- Raise retention and success rates, especially on advanced level courses, by reviewing the suitability of the qualifications offered and by developing flexible approaches to learning that enable study to meet individual needs and personal circumstances.
- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring students are sufficiently motivated and engaged in all lessons. Plan learning activities to

meet individual needs and ability levels and use questioning techniques to stretch and challenge students more.

- Ensure the feedback provided by all teachers is sufficiently detailed so it informs students what they need to do to improve their work further and achieve higher grades.
- Enhance students' understanding of equality and diversity by ensuring opportunities to celebrate diversity and to challenge stereotypes are included in curriculum activities where appropriate to do so. Identify actions to narrow achievement gaps between different groups.
- Ensure the actions identified in quality improvement plans are sufficiently detailed to guide staff in making improvements and that progress can be measured against specific criteria. Review action plans frequently and update targets as necessary.

Animal care and equine studies

Grade 3

Context

35. The college offers full- and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level. Of 426 students, just under three-quarters study on animal care courses and the remainder on equine studies courses. Most students are aged 16 to 18. The large majority of students study full-time and most are female. Very few students are of minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates on foundation level courses and most intermediate level courses are high. Success rates on advanced level courses are average, in the majority of cases because retention rates are low. Pass rates are generally high or very high. The quality of students' written work is often good. The majority of students make progress at least in line with expectations.
- Students' practical skill development is well supported by their involvement in routine duties on the animal unit and stable yards. They complete feeding and watering, cleaning out and grooming activities daily in a realistic work setting, which prepares them well for employment. They develop confidence, social skills and ability to work as part of a team well. Students' attendance has improved and is good.
- Students use information and communication technology confidently and are familiar with researching using the internet. Students' knowledge about health and safety is good; in particular, they show good awareness of the risks involved in handling animals.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The majority of theory teaching is good; experienced teachers use a wide range of interesting and engaging activities well in these lessons. The use of technical language, such as anatomical terms, is reinforced and links to practical situations, such as those that occur in veterinary practices, are made well. However, questions are not always sufficiently probing or demanding.
- A minority of lessons are less effective with insufficient focus on meeting objectives, a slow pace and some unproductive time. In a few, too little learning takes place. Less experienced or new teachers lack skill in lesson planning to ensure that students are fully engaged and encouraged to work and learn quickly enough. Questions are not used to check on learning frequently and thoroughly enough.
- The range of courses is good and has been recently developed by adding provision at foundation level in equine studies. Links with animal and equine industries are good; the higher education aspect of the college's work enhances students' opportunities and raises their aspirations. Partnership working is good and enhances the curriculum. Good links with land-based industries help students in finding work placements and employment.

- Guidance and support are good. Students benefit from a marked increase in the quality of support and guidance. Frequent tutorials and close monitoring of attendance have helped to increase attendance and improve retention rates. Considerably more students have remained on their courses in the current year than previously. Targets set in learning plans are often too general with insufficient focus on academic achievement.
- Improvements to the advice and guidance provided to students on their choice of course include the appropriate revision of entry requirements. Students receive and value good one-to-one support from tutors. Identification of students at risk is used well to target additional support.
- Students' well-being and awareness of equality and diversity are promoted in a range of ways, but not all, including some group tutorials, are fully effective. Arrangements for safeguarding of students are good and are implemented fully at the equine and animal units.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers' actions to increase achievement are coming to fruition, particularly with the increased focus on retention and attendance. Integrating new and part-time teachers, or teachers returning to work, into teaching teams has proved challenging and efforts to ensure a consistent quality of provision have not proved wholly successful.
- Resources have been developed well. The new animal centre is spacious and well designed to support learning. A second indoor riding arena provides a very good learning resource with good viewing facilities. The range of animals, including horses used for equestrian training, is good.
- Aspects of self-assessment lack rigour; some judgements are not fully supported by evidence and are over-generous. The use of data is underdeveloped. The difference between the success rates of several groups, such as between male and female students in animal care, has increased and is not identified through analysis.

What does Writtle College need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the improvements to in-year retention rates by embedding the new arrangements for identifying students at risk and providing prompt support where needed. Monitor retention rates closely at all levels of management.
- Support new or less experienced teachers to plan their lessons thoroughly including by setting clear objectives, matching activities to students' abilities and ensuring that the range of activities fills the lesson time productively.
- Develop teachers' questioning techniques to provide a higher level of challenge and to increase the extent of checks on learning and understanding.
- Ensure that targets set in individual learning plans are sharply focused on specific actions for improvement.
- Increase the rigour of self-assessment by developing managers' skills in evaluation and analysis, including in using data to inform judgements. Ensure that data for different groups of students are analysed and actions put in place to close gaps.

Information about the inspection

36. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the college's Deputy Head of Further Education, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
37. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes across a range of subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Writtle College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	692	562	130
Part-time learners	262	86	176
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	2		
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2		
Leadership and management	2		
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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