

South Tyneside College of Further Education Corporation

Inspection report for Further Education College

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Inspector	Dennis Bradley
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Dr Winterbottom Halls of Residence provide accommodation for up to 198 learners. The vast majority of resident learners are there because they are undertaking marine-based courses and they are aged between 16 and 55. At the time of this inspection all the learners under 18 were on marine-based courses and were sponsored by shipping companies.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection is a stand-alone welfare visit covering all the relevant key standards for the accommodation of learners under 18. The 10 recommendations from the last inspection were also reviewed with the college.

The college's provision for residential learners under 18 is judged good overall. Areas of particular strength include the pastoral care of learners and the leadership and management of the residential provision. A learner said: 'The halls all in all are a good place to live, it is good for socialising and studying.' A parent of a learner aged under 18 said: 'I would most definitely recommend the halls to other parents. My son has been treated with the utmost respect and has learnt to take care of himself while under the watchful eye of caring and respectful staff.'

Areas for development are: the arrangements for recording checks of fire extinguishers; updating information about how to complain to Ofsted; and clarifying the arrangements for administering non-prescription medicines to learners.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection there were 10 recommendations made regarding the residential provision. Nine of these related to: the arrangements for recording medicines; fire equipment checks; staff training and the vetting of new staff; the arrangements for risk assessment and risk reduction; the student protection policy; and the information for learners and parents regarding how to complain. The college has taken action to address these recommendations and this should help improve the overall effectiveness of the residential service.

The tenth recommendation concerned the standard of decoration and furnishings in the residential accommodation. The college has taken action to address this recommendation which includes, for example, providing new mattresses and carpets in certain areas of the halls, as well as a programme of redecoration of all bedrooms

and communal areas. The longer-term improvement plan includes the refurbishment of the kitchen areas in all the halls and replacement of all the windows.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements to ensure resident learners are able to receive appropriate first aid and minor treatment when needed. For example, the manager of the residential halls ensures there is always a member of staff on duty trained in first aid. The college also has appropriate arrangements to enable resident learners to access local medical and dental services. None of the resident learners have disabilities or significant health problems requiring special treatment or management.

The college has a policy regarding the administration of medicines to resident learners under 18. This states parents must provide written consent for staff to administer medicines to their child. However, the policy does not make it sufficiently clear to parents which non-prescription medicines staff may administer. Consequently, parents could be giving consent to staff to administer medicines their child is allergic to.

Resident learners also have good access to advice and support about any health or personal issues. Staff working in the halls are clear about their responsibilities to monitor and promote the well-being of resident learners. For example, one of the cleaning staff said they have a 'pastoral role', another said they felt more like a 'houseparent' than a cleaner. The parent of a resident learner said: 'Residents are provided with emotional and physical support second only to that offered by parents.' Another parent said: 'I have always felt my son's physical and emotional health needs were met with care and attention.' A resident said the halls' staff are good 'at looking after us'.

Learners can also access advice and support from the college's student services team and the college's counsellor. The team recently achieved Matrix accreditation following an independent evaluation of the care, guidance and support it provides to students.

The college has a new, attractively designed refectory and coffee bar, both of which are well used by learners and staff. The college actively consulted learners about which company should have the contract to provide the catering. This included holding a 'Taste Off' between two of the companies. The meals available in the refectory are varied and nutritious and choices include halal and vegetarian options, and special dietary needs can be catered for. Learners have differing views about the quality of the meals provided and it is evident that the college tries to address any concerns or issues that arise. Residential learners all said the move to a cashless catering system is an improvement, especially as it provides them with more flexibility and choice.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements for protecting the welfare of resident learners and keeping them safe. This includes having clear and comprehensive safeguarding procedures, risk assessments and reporting procedures. Halls' staff all receive safeguarding training and have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in keeping resident learners safe. Learners said they felt safe living at the college and some said the college was good at keeping them safe. A parent said: 'The safeguarding arrangements give me great peace of mind.'

Halls' staff said bullying is currently not an issue and resident learners said there is no bullying. Zero tolerance of bullying is a key part of the college's ethos and there is an appropriate policy on countering bullying and harassment which is implemented effectively. The college's anti-bullying committee regularly monitors all reported incidents to ensure this happens.

The college has a clear and appropriate student disciplinary policy which it makes available to resident learners and their parents. The halls' manager ensures the policy is implemented consistently and sanctions for unacceptable behaviour are reasonable and proportionate. Most resident learners said the halls' rules are fair although some do not agree with all of them. A parent said, 'any behaviour issues are dealt with promptly and fairly'.

Resident learners' complaints and concerns are appropriately responded to and they know how to complain. However, the information resident learners and parents receive about how to complain does not include the correct contact details for Ofsted, should they wish to make a complaint concerning their welfare. Halls' staff respect the privacy of resident learners and there have been no searches of residents' bedrooms since the last inspection.

There are good arrangements for protecting learners from the risk of fire and other safety hazards. These include implementing an effective system of risk assessment and risk reduction, as well as carrying out regular checks of the halls' fire safety equipment. However, staff are not recording checks of the halls' fire extinguishers in the fire log. This makes it more difficult to monitor whether staff carry out the checks as often as the fire authority recommends.

There is evidence of careful selection and vetting procedures for all staff to make sure the college employs suitable people. Residential learners have their own living accommodation with resident-only access. There are good security arrangements in place to prevent unauthorised access to the halls and their grounds by the public.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Resident learners under 18 years of age receive good levels of personal support. For example, as well as the support they receive from the halls' staff they each have a personal tutor. Learners can also access an independent counsellor about personal problems or concerns. The very good communication between halls' staff, student services staff and teaching staff helps safeguard resident learners and promotes their welfare. A parent said: 'The college provides exceptional support to students throughout their residency.'

There are good arrangements for making sure learners do not experience inappropriate discrimination. The college has a clear policy on promoting equality and diversity and the leadership team effectively monitors its implementation. This helps to promote mutual respect and tolerance between learners within the college.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements for enabling residential learners to contribute to the operation of the college's residential provision. For example, the manager of the halls holds regular focus groups to enable residential learners to raise any issues or concerns they may have. The manager also asks residential learners, and parents of those under 18, to complete surveys to obtain feedback about the service. Residential learners confirmed they are able to make their views known and have a say about what happens in the college and residential halls. A parent said: 'Feedback is taken on board and proactively sought.'

There are good arrangements for the induction of residential learners that help them settle in quickly. For example, all new residents receive a handbook which includes key information such as the rules and routines of the halls. Parents also receive a copy of the handbook and are encouraged to visit to discuss the residential arrangements. Where appropriate, staff support residents to maintain private contact with their parents and families. Parents confirmed they feel well informed and kept up to date.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements in place to make sure the organisation of the residential provision helps to safeguard resident learners' welfare. For example, all bedrooms are lockable and they are all single rooms. In halls which accommodate male and female residents there are separate designated areas for bedrooms, bathing and toilet facilities. Also, key pad locks help ensure only female residents can access their designated bathing and toilet facilities.

Residential learners have access to sufficient toilet and washing facilities. The recent refurbishment of these facilities in all the halls means that residents now have appropriate privacy when using them. A team of cleaners ensures these facilities, as well as bedrooms and communal areas, are kept clean. A parent of a resident said: 'The toilet and shower renovations are a vast improvement and the single rooms give them privacy. The maintenance programme which is ongoing is making a real difference.'

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Resident learners benefit from receiving good information about the principles and aims of the college's residential provision. This information is included in a handbook that also includes details of the support services available to them.

There are good arrangements for ensuring resident learners receive appropriate supervision within the halls. Security staff who work in the halls are clear about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding resident learners who are under 18. The electronic system for enabling residents to sign in and out of the halls and gain access to their rooms also facilitates the supervision of resident learners. Risk assessment and recording systems contribute effectively towards the promotion of learners' welfare.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The halls accommodate a diverse range of learners, and staff actively promote inclusion and endeavour to meet the individual needs of resident learners.

Staff working in the residential provision have appropriate access to training to enable them to carry out their duties. For example, security staff receive first aid and fire warden training, as well as training in de-escalation techniques to enable them to deal with difficult and aggressive behaviour. Halls' staff all receive training in safeguarding learners.

The halls' manager ensures staff have access to clear, comprehensive and up-to-date written guidance regarding the supervision and safeguarding of residential learners. Regular staff team meetings help to ensure staff understand and implement this guidance consistently.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that records clearly demonstrate regular testing of fire equipment, in particular the visual checks of fire extinguishers (NMS 24.3)
- ensure that residential learners and their parents are informed how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning their welfare (NMS 5.3)
- ensure the college makes clear to resident learners and parents their policy on the administration of medication to learners under 18, in particular the administration of non-prescription medicines. (NMS 14.8)