

Plumpton College

Inspection report for further education college

Unique reference number	SC050962
Inspection date	26/02/2013
Inspector	Liz Driver / Kevin Whatley
Type of inspection	Full

Setting address	Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, Plumpton, LEWES, East Sussex, BN7 3AE
Telephone number	01273 890454
Email	

© Crown copyright 2013

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Information about the college

This is a Further Education college situated in the countryside on the South Downs in East Sussex. The college offers a diverse range of courses from wine making to sports science with a main focus on rural and environmental programmes such as farming, horticulture and equine studies. The college also encompasses a working farm.

The college can accommodate up to approximately 200 students. Around 100 were under 18 years of age at the time of the inspection. The college does not arrange lodgings with host families.

The college was last inspected in November 2009.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality 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**.

Plumpton College is an exceptional provision and is outstanding in all areas. The residential experience is an area of excellence with the college demonstrating it has gone well beyond the recommendations of the national minimum standards.

The numerous strengths of the college have a highly positive impact in students making exceptional progress in their education, vocational studies, personal and social development. Students grow in confidence and successfully move into adult life, including working life, more confidently.

The opportunities for students to gain employment or go onto other educational provisions is extremely high. The transitions for this are highly successful.

There is a culture of safety that embeds all aspects of college life to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students, visitors and staff. Students feel very safe at the college. Training for all staff enables safe practices and appropriate responses to any incidents causing concern.

The college has developed significantly since the last inspection carried out in 2009. Accommodation, catering provision, safeguarding relating to recruitment and the student voice are some areas that have significantly improved since the last inspection.

All national minimum standards have been met, with the vast majority being exceeded. The two recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. These related to risk assessments for some windows and checks on staff. The college has a clear and ambitious development plan covering all aspects of college life, including the residential provision.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The college has a culture of inclusivity and provides a harmonious and respectful environment for students and staff. It celebrates extensively the achievements and diversity of its students.

Outcomes for young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Students make excellent progress across all aspects of their lives as a result of attending the college and experiencing the residential life the college offers. Outstanding progress can be seen in their personal, social and educational development. Students access a wide range of courses and activities both during the educational day and in the evenings. Students confirm they can access a huge range of activities that they have a voice in choosing. The impact of this together with their chosen avenue of study is tremendous.

The residential experience is highly inclusive and students have a huge respect for their individual residential houses and of each other. Students have a strong affiliation to their residential provision which gives them an enriching experience. Behaviours are exceptional with clear commitment seen by students in positively engaging in caring for each other and their environment. Staff are experienced and trained to deal with any challenging behaviours if necessary although incidences are extremely rare. Comments such as, 'I really enjoy the course I am doing' and 'I have

made many new friends since being here' are just a few of the many positive comments heard at this inspection.

The college attaches high importance to the views of its students when planning improvements and introducing new procedures or activities. The Principal meets with every student once during their first year. The culture of the college supports openness and honesty, as can be seen in the college's development plan identifying their weaknesses and strengths.

Students experience excellent induction and transition planning. Clear and robust induction procedures ensure students settle in quickly and are fully informed of what is expected of them and what they can expect of the college. As a result students can focus on their courses and enjoy the social aspect of living on site. Students stated; 'We are listened to and know the consequences if we do anything wrong' and 'I know I will be able to get employment when I leave here, the college helps us gain employment in our chosen area.' Students are extremely well prepared for life after college and as a result access to employment or further educational provision is exceptionally high.

There is a strong commitment to meeting diverse needs of students and great care is taken to meet these needs; for example cultural, religious and dietary needs. The college also meets the needs of those students undertaking courses that result in starting work early in the mornings and working late in the evening; for example ` routines ` when students have to be on duty at the working farm and the unsociable and flexible hours that this entails.

Quality of service

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

The quality of care is exceptional and clearly a strength of the college. Pastoral care is exemplary with all staff having a firm commitment to supporting students to enable them to meet and/or exceed their potential.

The excellent pastoral care that supports educational and personal progress has a tremendously positive impact on the students overall experiences. The quality of areas such as health care, catering arrangements, extra-curricula activities, pastoral support and accommodation all work together seamlessly to provide each student with a hugely positive experience at the college. Students are extremely complimentary about the wardens who are employed for the residential accommodation and who provide high levels of care and support. Numerous comments such as; 'Wardens are cool ` and 'They really do help you ` are a few of the many positive comments expressed by the students.

Healthcare provision is well documented and highly organised in its practice. Students can access the local doctor's surgery and receive first aid from one of many suitably qualified members of staff on site. Great emphasis is placed on students' wellbeing with outside agencies such as the local neighbourhood police officer

delivering sessions to students regarding safe driving, drug abuse and cyber bullying. Students are encouraged to keep fit with the provision of an on-site gym although many of the students are active by the nature of the course they are completing; such as land based agricultural courses, equine courses and forestry courses, all which require some level of fitness and physical activity. Students are able to access a counsellor who visits regularly and offers support for students who are struggling with some of life's problems such as relationships, stress, self-harm, emotional problems and addictions. The Student Services department is also another important area that students seek help and support from.

The residential facilities are of a high standard and very suitable for the students who attend this land based college. They are all very well maintained with significant progress made in developing and improving the provision since the last inspection. There is an ongoing programme of refurbishment and redecoration.

The nature of the agricultural and equine studies mean that students enrolled on these courses often begin their day very early, therefore student accommodation is allocated on a priority basis to these students and students who have come from different parts of the country or from abroad. This is effectively managed with excellent outcomes for students as a result.

The catering provision has improved hugely since the last inspection, especially the quality and variety. Students are able to participate in focus groups where their views are fed back to the catering manager, and acted on. Food is plentiful and meets the needs of the students, special diets are catered for very well. An impressive high percentage of the college's meat is from their own stock and is therefore traceable from its origin. The catering department has introduced cooking classes to enable students to gain some basic cooking skills they will need in adult life. This has been enhanced through the addition of a booklet produced by the catering department which covers areas such as food safety and healthy choices plus healthy recipes; which students can use in their adult life after college. Students expressed a variety of opinions about the food however the majority were extremely complimentary about the food.

Clear and robust procedures are made easily available for students, parents and staff to raise concerns or complaints. The number of complaints the college has dealt with since the last inspection are extremely low. Students feel at ease to raise concerns and feel they are taken seriously. Students commented; 'There is always some one to talk to.' There are clear and well documented disciplinary procedures that students are very well informed of and when activated are effective in their outcomes.

Students are free to contact family and friends and do so with ease.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management are **outstanding**.

The residential provision is effectively organised and extremely well managed for the

benefit of the students in the college's care. Routines and procedures are clear, well established and operate consistently to provide an orderly and safe community. A highly skilled senior management team operate with dynamism, drive and ambition. Senior management are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the college.

Excellent leadership and management provide a secure basis for further development and quality improvement. Progress in rectifying areas for improvement since the previous inspection has been addressed. The college's self-assessment is honest, accurate and a reliable reflection of the key strengths and areas for improvement, such as accommodation, activities and security. Managers and governors successfully promote ambition and raise standards. Governance is outstanding. Governors are knowledgeable and very well informed. They perform exceptionally well in supporting and challenging senior managers and in helping shape the character of the college.

The strong and highly effective residential management team are fully committed to further developing the residential experience for students. This results in the residential community being fully integrated into the heart of the college. Together with the strong and consistent messages of high expectations delivered by the staff team, students aspire to excel.

The residential facility is effectively managed and operates in accordance with the college's own policies and procedures. This ensures consistency in practices so students are able to focus on their chosen course and provides a safe and orderly community. A highly effective head of residential services is fully active in the day to day operation of the college.

A wealth of information is available which clearly sets out the aims and principles of the college and provides students with clear information about the residential experience. An extremely useful website provides comprehensive information regarding the whole college.

Staffing levels are excellent with very suitable deployment that enables students to easily access staff for assistance. Staff supervision, training and support is outstanding. Staff receive excellent support from the head of residential services who operates in a very open manner enabling staff to keep up to date with individual students and any difficulties they may be experiencing. A large number of staff have worked at the college for some considerable time and enjoy the contact they have with students; as do the students with staff.

The college's approach to equality and diversity is outstanding. The college places the individual needs of students at its core with equality and diversity a central theme to the culture and experience of living and learning. The college has developed both student and staff awareness of equality and diversity over the last few years and it is now a strength of the college in meeting individual needs. The atmosphere at the college is wholly inclusive with no particular course or individual being seen or experienced anything other than equal.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding arrangements are **outstanding**

The college achieves an outstanding level of safeguarding and protection for its students. A culture of safety embeds all aspects of college life to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and visitors.

A robust and comprehensive approach to health and safety ensures students are kept as safe as possible. All necessary actions are taken to highlight and reduce areas of concern with an appropriate balance maintained between risk awareness and allowing students to participate fully in all aspects of college life. Rigorous systems including the routine servicing of fire fighting equipment, alarm testing and regular evacuation drills ensure students understand what to do in the event of an incident occurring. Strategic planning and training with the emergency services further cements the college's position of being prepared for situations of potential risk or danger.

Safeguarding is embedded in the ethos of the college in a manner which is holistic and robust. All staff, irrespective of their roles or responsibilities, receive a comprehensive induction programme which includes child protection awareness. Continued training ensures staff are kept up to date with current procedures, while designated members of the senior management team make up an extremely experienced, knowledgeable and pro-active safeguarding team. The high regard placed on keeping students safe is continued throughout the college with key responsibilities being taken on by the members of the governing body. Students stated categorically that they felt 'safe' at the college.

The notion of mutual respect permeates the atmosphere of the college with a zero tolerance attitude toward inappropriate behaviour of any kind including issues of bullying. A strong sense of community is evident across the college with students consistently encouraged to consider the wider context of negative attitudes, thoughts or behaviours. No students raised any concerns that such behaviour took place and aired strong views that they themselves would challenge any such incidents or report any issues to staff who would take swift action.

The college implements robust and appropriate rules and boundaries which are made clear to students on their arrival. Students say they are made fully aware of what the expectations of behaviour are and feel they are treated 'fairly' and with 'respect'. Observations of student behaviour and conduct and interactions with them throughout the inspection were exemplary.

An excellent process is in place to respond to matters of concern or complaint. Students confirmed that they clearly understood how to make a complaint or raise issues. The openness of the college and approachability of staff ensures students can express their views easily. The college take all issues raised most seriously with swift responses made to matters arising. Coupled with this is a commitment to address any situation in a forward thinking manner thus leading to improved outcomes.

The privacy of students is taken with the utmost regard. Toilet and bathing facilities allow for appropriate personal privacy.

A comprehensive approach ensures students are only cared for by staff who have been rigorously checked. All staff undergo all required checks before being allowed to work with them, while any person who may have contact with students who are not employed by the college are subject to the same procedures. A rolling programme of re-checking for existing staff is in place.

All accommodation is secure from persons without permission to enter. A highly efficient electronic entry system ensures student accommodation is as safe as can be expected. Since the last inspection further CCTV has been installed which offers increased levels of monitoring.

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 the inspection of accommodation in further education colleges.