

# Sparsholt College Hampshire

Inspection report for further education college

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## Information about the college

Sparsholt College is a specialist land-based college located a short distance outside of Winchester, Hampshire. The college offers a variety of courses both full and part-time and in other areas as well as land-based subjects. Students can be of any age from 14 upwards. Sparsholt is the only college of its kind within Hampshire and has been designated as a centre of vocational excellence in two specialist areas of land-based learning. Examples of land-based subjects offered include equine studies, horticulture, agriculture, countryside management and fishery studies. The college campus is extensive and encompasses a large working farm, an equine unit, an animal management unit, an aquatics training centre, a small lake and a horticultural area. Additional facilities include a sports field, sports hall and gym, a rifle range, large library and an IT centre. The residential accommodation for students on-site comprises of 12 separate halls of residence of which four accommodate students under the age of 18. All residential students under 18 years old have single rooms with en-suite toilet and washing facilities. Catering and recreational facilities for students are located centrally within the campus. There are self-catering hostels used by adults only and all halls for students under 18 years old have kitchen and common room facilities.

### 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
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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**.

Residential learners at the college benefit from living and learning in a stimulating and socially diverse residential community. The college website and published information conveys an accurate picture of the college's residential provision. A comprehensive induction programme, that is both informative and fun, has proved extremely successful at introducing new learners to college life. Learners spoke in positive terms about their lives at college and felt their views were regularly sought and suggestions for improvements appropriately considered. Special mention was made of the level of support they received from wardens, tutors, senior residents and pastoral staff. Although there was general satisfaction with the quality of the accommodation a number of comments were received about the lack of suitable storage for outdoor clothing.

Since the last inspection there have been a number of significant changes within the college. The senior management team have developed an integrated approach that has resulted in more collaborative working between tutors, wardens and pastoral staff. A 'one stop shop' now provides learners direct access to a range of support services. The comprehensive review of the college's conduct and performance policy has resulted in the introduction of stricter rules for those under the age of 18 years. The new rules have been consistently applied and have resulted in a dramatic decrease in anti-social behaviour. The changes have been welcomed by the majority of learners who feel that the campus feels both safer and more relaxed.

The colleges operates with an extremely motivated and committed staff team who aim to ensure that learners not only achieve academic success but participate fully in the colleges comprehensive social and recreational programme. The colleges quality assurance systems are outstanding and result in continuous improvement in the welfare provision for residential students. Evidence indicates that all the national minimum standards are being met and although there is one recommendation arising from the inspection it is aimed at further improving an existing safeguarding protocol and does not reflect on the overall provision which is outstanding in all areas.

## 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):

- develop a protocol for under 18 students to ensure staff are aware of their movements and expected return times during evening and week-ends. (NMS 29.1)

## Outcomes for young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Learners are provided with a comprehensive educational experience that prepares them well for adulthood and the responsibilities associated with the world of work. The specialist range of courses offered by the college means that learners are drawn from both urban and rural communities throughout the British Isles.

Learners' social development is enhanced by living and learning within an open and inclusive residential community that both recognises and celebrates diversity. Learners from different courses are accommodated together and this provides opportunities for individuals to extend their social networks beyond the confines of their own courses. The successful introduction of a 'Respect' campaign and joint social and sporting events that promotes the value of diversity, has helped to create a vibrant residential community in which learners from very different social and cultural backgrounds can peacefully co-exist. Learners spoke in positive terms about their lives within the college and special mention was made of the friendships they have made, the knowledge and skills they have acquired and the fun they have had.

Each learner admitted to the college is treated as an individual with their own specific needs. Staff aim to meet the needs of students regardless of gender, race, religion, disabilities or sexual orientation. Learners with specific needs or particular vulnerabilities are appropriately identified on admission and individual support plans are developed. The college has excellent support systems for students who need support with complex learning and/or physical difficulties. The social interactions between staff and learners was observed to be both spontaneous and warm. It is evident staff and learners have established mutually respectful relationships.

Learners health and well-being is effectively monitored by staff throughout the college and across all departments. Learners can access medical support on campus by visiting the college nurse, who is available each weekday. The college doctor is accessible in a health centre in nearby Winchester. A student counsellor provides support for learners experiencing personal problems. Any personal issues are dealt with sensitively and in confidence. Staff are pro-active in ensuring that learners with mental health difficulties can gain access to appropriate specialist services. All the wardens, who provide twenty four hour cover, are first aid trained and are called upon in the event of an accident. Learners are provided with information and advice on a range of health related areas including alcohol, smoking and the use of recreational drugs. An experienced specialist nurse provides advice on sexual health.

The concept of 'healthy living' is promoted throughout the college and learners are encouraged to eat wisely and take regular exercise. Learners can keep fit by accessing a range of sporting and recreational facilities on-site including a well-equipped gym, indoor sports hall and soccer pitches. A new sports centre is nearing completion. Learners can access food via a number of different food outlets across the campus. Staff encourage learners to eat healthily and monitor their eating habits to ensure they are receiving a balanced diet. Any concerns regarding nutritional intake are discussed with the individual. The majority of food is produced on-site by a dedicated catering team. Seasonal menu variations incorporate local fresh produce. Learners spoke in generally positive terms about the range of food available. There was a general consensus that the quality of food has continued to improve.

The college aims to ensure that residential learners not only succeed educationally, but have an enjoyable and stimulating time during their stays. There is a strong emphasis on helping learners, many of whom are living away from home for the first time, build up their self-confidence. The support system developed by the college is extremely successfully in helping learners settle quickly and achieve positive educational outcomes. Learners who reside on campus consistently perform better than those who attend their courses on a daily basis. Attendance levels amongst residential learners are exceptionally high and warden's and teaching staff have established excellent lines of communication that ensure learners movements are monitored. Each learner has an assigned personal tutor who meets with them regularly and monitors their progress. Most residential learners achieve a level of educational attainment that allows them to either progress on to higher level courses or seek employment in their chosen field. The college has established excellent relationships with a large number of employers who greatly value the knowledge, skills and work ethic that learners acquire through the successful completion of their courses.

Since the last inspection college staff have developed a new behaviour management strategy that provides learners with a set of clearly defined expectations relating to their personal behaviour. All learners are made aware of the college's policies relating to bullying and discriminatory behaviour and that failure to comply could result in expulsion. Learners feel that staff are fair in applying the rules. There is now a zero tolerance of any individual under the age of 18 years consuming alcohol. The consistent application of the new behavioural boundaries has had a extremely positive effect. Learners have reported they feel safer, there has been a significant decrease in incidents and damage to property has dramatically reduced. As one learner reported, 'Since the changes the atmosphere around the campus has been much more relaxed.'

### **Quality of service**

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

The college's dedicated staff team provide an extremely stimulating educational and social environment that provides many opportunities for learners to develop their practical and social skills. A full weeks induction programme helps new learners settle

in by familiarising themselves with their new environment, meeting staff and establishing new relationships. The comprehensive induction programme ensures that all new learners are aware of the support services available, the role of key personnel and the college's expectations in regard to behaviour. All learners are made aware of how to raise concerns or make a complaint. Student services provide a comprehensive support system and any learner who is identified as struggling on their course or having difficulty with the demands and compromises associated with communal living are provided with additional support. Communication between wardens, tutors and pastoral staff is excellent and there is little chance that a learner experiencing difficulties would go unnoticed. The retention rate of residential learners is excellent.

A wide range of extra-curricular social and recreational activities provides many opportunities for learners to try new things and extend their social horizons. The college is not risk averse and learners are encouraged to live full and active lives including participating in off-site activities. There is a well-established procedure in place to protect students whilst accommodated away from the college site. Learners are regularly consulted about the type of activities they would like to be made available and events are arranged on both the campus and local area. Recent social events have included a summer ball, quiz nights, fancy dress parties and a 'fun sports day'. A recently appointed 'sport maker' is already making a positive contribution to the development of regular sporting events. The colleges sporting and recreational facilities are well used and everyone is looking forward to the opening of the new indoor sports facilities which is due to be available for the start of the new term. Learners reported that they accessed the communal areas within their residential blocks as well as the college bar and many food outlets to meet and socialise. The college bar is open to all but alcohol is only available to learners who have reached 18. During their college life many learners become involved in voluntary activities in the local area and recent activities have included landscaping the gardens of a local primary school, undertaking a beach cleaning exercise in Bournemouth and participating in a sponsored walk for charity.

Regular meetings within each of the residential blocks, surveys, individual interviews and tutorial sessions are used to illicit the views of learners on all aspects of residential life. Although learners stated they were aware of the college's complaints procedure they indicated they would, in the first instance, register any worries or concerns with their wardens, senior residents, tutors or member of the pastoral staff. It is evident that the majority of concerns raised are niggles associated with communal living and these are effectively resolved by staff before they develop into full blown complaints. Learners reported that their views on the development of the college are appreciated and that senior staff are generally responsive to their suggestions. Joint working is well established and staff and representatives of the student council are currently engaged in the planning of an internet café.

The college provides opportunities and facilities for learners to maintain contact with their families. Learners can access computers with internet connections to maintain contact. While there are a number of phones within the halls of residence, the majority of students now use their own mobile phones. College staff maintain

appropriate contact with parents. Recent questionnaires indicated parents' high level of satisfaction with college provision.

Accommodation was observed to be clean, tidy and in good decorative order. There is a rolling programme of improvement and refurbishment. Since the last inspection laundry facilities have been upgraded with the introduction of more robust commercial equipment. There is an extremely effective system for identifying and addressing maintenance issues. The halls contain male and female corridors each with their own bathroom and toilet facilities. Toilet and shower facilities were assessed as being appropriate and learners reported there is a consistent supply of hot water. A number of the rooms have en-suite shower facilities. Communal areas are comfortable and there is provision within each residential unit for making drinks and snacks. Although students were generally satisfied with the quality of their rooms a number mentioned the limited storage available for outdoor working gear.

## **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management are **outstanding**.

The college is extremely well managed by highly motivated staff who are ably led by an experienced Principal. The team are not content to rest on achievements that have been nationally recognised. Staff continuously strive to improve the quality of the college's experience for learners.

The management team and governors recognise the unique contribution residential learners make to college life and are committed to improving provision. The college is extremely 'learner focused' and each learner receives excellent support to maximise their educational potential. Learners indicated that staff aim to ensure that they not only get a good education but access the many social, recreational and cultural opportunities available that can contribute to their social development.

The senior management team work effectively together and the success of bodies such as the 'wellbeing committee', that draws its membership from across the whole college, has demonstrated the value of integrated working. The management team consult widely on new developments and the views of learners and staff are regularly sought. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership amongst learners and those spoken with appreciated being able to influence the decision making process. Senior residents reported that life within the college is continually improving.

There is a culture of training and development within the college and expectation that staff will regularly update their knowledge and skills. For example, staff have recently arranged specialist training on autism so they can respond more effectively to the increasing number of learners who present with the condition. Although staff have specific responsibilities, much of their work is collaborative and crosses traditional boundaries. For example, a number of tutors also assume warden duties at least once evening a week. Communication systems between wardens, tutors and pastoral staff are excellent and key information relating to learners is appropriately shared.



## Safeguarding

Safeguarding arrangements are **outstanding**

The college places a high priority on the safety and security of learners and staff. Due to the nature of the courses offered, learners occupy an environment with many potential hazards. Health and safety considerations underpin all policies, procedures and working practices across the college campus. Risk assessments are appropriately used to identify areas of concern. All accidents and incidents are recorded and analysed monthly and any preventative measures identified are disseminated throughout the college. Learners receive information and presentations on personal safety as part of their induction. Given the large population who reside on campus, fire safety is given an extremely high priority and smoking is not permitted within any residential block. Regular fire drills ensure students remain familiar with evacuation procedures.

There are appropriate safeguards to ensure that the campus is not subject to unwarranted access. All visitors must report to reception and provide identity. All learners occupy lockable single rooms and access to each residential block is limited to those with the requisite switch card. Learners said they felt safe on the campus and that security measures were appropriate and did not compromise their privacy. Although there is a well-established protocol for tracking learners who are absent during the day, arrangements for those leaving the campus at other times are not currently robust.

A rigorous recruitment procedure ensures that all staff are appropriately vetted and found to be suitable to work in an educational setting that caters for a diverse population, including vulnerable groups. All college staff are subject to Criminal Record Bureau checks. The college is committed to ensuring that all staff are aware of their individual responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and all receive appropriate training.

Tutors regularly meet with learners to discuss all aspects of their lives at college and will intervene if they feel they are experiencing difficulties in their relationships with others. Staff are aware of the many different ways bullying can manifest itself and keep abreast of trends. For example, a recent staff training initiative raised awareness of the dangers and often devastating effects of cyber-bullying. Learners reported that for the majority of time they enjoy each other's company and peacefully co-exist. None had experienced any form of bullying or discriminatory behaviour. A 'well-being' committee meets regularly and discusses all issues related to learners' welfare.

## 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.