

Merrist Wood.(Guildford College)

Further education college residential provision

Inspection dates		3 - 5 February 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding-1
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding-1
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of service		Outstanding-1
Safeguarding		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings

This college is outstanding because:

- Residential learners make better progress than their non-resident peers. They develop their confidence, knowledge and employability skills significantly during their time at the college.
- Residential learners are supported by committed and experienced members of staff who place their well-being at the centre of their practice. Pastoral support and 'wrap around' packages provide excellent guidance and support.
- Safety of residential learners is embedded in the culture of this establishment. Well-established systems which are implemented conscientiously ensure that residential learners live in a safe and supportive environment.
- Tolerance and mutual support are part of the community ethos. Residential learners say there is no bullying and that they all look out for each other. All residential learners are very clear that they have benefitted significantly from living in the residential provision.
- A very experienced and ambitious management team ensures that there are high standards expected from both staff and learners. This ensures that there is no complacency and there is a committed drive to improve performance and results.

Full report

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve the décor in the small girls lounge in the Merrist Wood annexe.
- Consider contacting references directly as part of the recruitment process rather than verifying references via email.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
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- Residential learners achieve a higher rate of success than their non-residential peers. Living on site enables them to access support more readily from members of staff and this promotes their learning and understanding. The promotion of independence skills and personal responsibility also enable residential learners to become more confident, self-reliant and prepared to work in their chosen industry.
- Residential learners' standard of behaviour is excellent. Support and guidance they receive enables them to develop coping skills, understanding and tolerance. Those with a specific need for support have bespoke packages in place which ensure that they develop insight and understanding of their behaviours. This means that their anxieties and stresses are managed which in turn encourages their development and leads to success in their learning.
- Residential learners develop their confidence and skills to a significant degree. Their chosen areas of study include becoming 'ready for the industry' and this ensures they develop their responsibility and reliability. They attend work experience in order to underpin their understanding of the working environment and take responsibility for their studies and maintaining standards of safety and conduct. 'I've got to be more grown up and responsible now. I'm more independent since I've lived here' is a comment from a residential learner.
- The support residential learners receive to manage their health and maintain healthy lifestyles is excellent. Easily accessible information is available to them in areas such as healthy relationships, sexual health, smoking cessation and e-safety. The emotional support provided is a significant strength of the college. A team of inclusion staff, counsellors and a mental health specialist are readily available to offer support and guidance to any residential learner who needs this. Records of these interventions show that this support is highly effective.
- Feedback from residential learners has been unanimously positive about their residential experience. They are able to take part in enriching and stimulating activities both as part of their courses and during their leisure time. Of significant value to the residential learners is the opportunity to make meaningful relationships and friendships with peers from diverse sections of society. 'You make friends for life here' is a comment from a residential learner.
- Residential learners are excellently well prepared for independence and for the next the step in their lives. This includes learning practical skills such as using washing machines, opening bank accounts and budgeting. In particular they are complimentary about the excellent and consistent guidance they receive to develop task and time management skills.

Quality of service

Outstanding

- Excellent pastoral arrangements ensure that residential learners receive effective and robust support if this is needed. Individual needs for support are known across different teams and packages developed which provide a 'wrap around' service. This is underpinned by effective, regular (weekly) liaison between key departments so that residential learners with specific needs for support are discussed and action plans put in place, Analysis of data shows that these packages are effective and improvements are shown in areas such as attendance, ability to take exams and academic success.
- Support plans identify specific needs of individual residential learners. These plans outline areas of concern and how they are to be addressed. As a result residential learners with a need for support are confident that there is always someone to talk to and that guidance and reassurance is readily available.
- Residential learners undertake a rigorous induction process which prepares them for the 'residential experience.' This ensures that they know the routines and behavioural expectations and what is expected of them. The process is underpinned with a 'Ready to Learn' passport which is an induction module covering areas such as e- safety, health and safety, equality and employability. Completion of this process ensures that all learners are clearly aware of what expectations are in place.
- Residential learners have a varied choice of activities available to them. Many take part in challenging and enriching activities as part of their studies. Trips abroad and other residential trips are regular and this encourages their knowledge of the wider world and a development and understanding of different cultures. Residential learners say that they are not bored and enjoy the onsite activities and opportunities to socialise with friends. The provision of homework clubs is seen as a particular value to the residential learners, especially during times of exams or when assignments are due to be handed in.
- Learners are able to maintain close contact with their families and friends. Electronic communication is the preferred method of maintaining contact and this ensures all residential learners, including those from abroad, are easily able to speak to those important to them.
- Residential learners are able to represent their peers in fora such as the College Parliament, where elected representatives are able to make suggestions and comments to college directors and managers. There is also a residential forum where residential learners are welcomed to attend and voice their opinions about the quality of service and accommodation they are receiving. Residential learners have confidence in this system and report positively about it. 'They do listen and change things,' commented one residential learner. This approach ensures that residential learners feel their views are valued, gives them an opportunity to take responsibility for their living areas and increases their confidence and ability to express their views.
- Accommodation is comfortable and very well maintained. The accommodation blocks are clean and have undergone refurbishment which has improved facilities such as showers. One of the lounges in the female accommodation, although clean, is stark and underused. This could be made more welcoming if more attention to décor was made in this one small area. All other areas of the four accommodation blocks for under 18 residential learners are comfortable and welcoming. Residential learners' room are warm and well furnished. They are able to personalise them with posters and pictures if they wish and this encourages them to have an investment in their personal areas.
- Food is of an excellent standard and residential learners are complimentary about the quality of food and choice available to them. Meal times are well ordered social occasions. Specific dietary needs are known and met. These include whether a learner has a dietary need based on cultural, religious or medical reasons. Members of staff monitor meal attendance for residential learners so that any concerns with regards to diet or eating disorders can be identified swiftly and support put in place for those that need it.

Safeguarding

Outstanding

- Protecting the safety and the well-being of all members of the community is a central and embedded tenet for this college. Policies and procedures are explicit and guide all members of the community in their obligations to promote theirs and others safety. A health and safety forum meets to discuss safety and compares the analysis of the college's own safety record with that of similar establishments. This enables those responsible to share any learning points and to examine whether their safety measures are effective as those of their peers.
- Risk assessments, particularly those for high risk activities, such as equine studies and arboreal studies, are detailed and comprehensive. Learners and members of staff are acutely aware of the potential risks related to these areas. Learners are educated to embed safety awareness to the standard expected of them in the industry for which they are studying.
- Checks on equipment in the college are rigorous. These include checks on electrical equipment which the learners bring in from home. Fire drills are regularly carried out so that all residential learners know what to do in the event that there is a need to evacuate their accommodation in an emergency.
- Residential learners unanimously say they feel safe living at the college. They say that there is no bullying and that they all look out for each other. Additionally, all members of staff know what signs to look for if there are concerns about possible self-harm, bullying, child sexual exploitation (CSE), or other causes of unhappiness. The inclusive culture of caring for each other ensures that residential learners receive support from peers as well as members of staff at times of stress and anxiety. All residential learners report that they have someone to talk to if they have a concern. 'There's always someone to have a chat to, no problems' said a residential learner.
- There is a clear policy and procedure for members of staff to follow in the event that they have concerns about residential learners' safety. Members of staff are aware of these procedures and the Local Authority Designated Officer reports that the college engages well with the Local children's Safeguarding Board. Records show that concerns have been thoroughly investigated and reported and action plans put in place to ensure continued safety.
- There have been no reports of residential learners being missing from the college. Conscientious checking by members of staff about who is on site ensures that any absences are noted quickly. A rigorously implemented signing in and out process ensures that under 18 residential learners know the importance placed on letting members of staff know where they are. Additionally, all residential learners are checked upon every morning by a member of staff to ensure that they are safe and well. In the event that a residential learner could be missing, there is a clear protocol for members of staff to follow to ensure that their safety is promoted.
- Residential learners have excellent access to information and support with regards to issues such as bullying, homophobia, child sexual exploitation, e-safety, cyber bullying, racism and sexism. The information is supported by the learners having ready access to members of staff, such as wardens, counsellors and members of the inclusion team. This means that issues can be explored and addressed swiftly and effectively. This further underpins the message to residential learners that there is always someone around to whom they can turn to for help and advice.
- Behaviour around the campus was observed to be excellent. Residential learners report that rules are fair and are made clear to them before they arrive to live on site. The use of the disciplinary system is rare, verbal guidance and suggestions being the main form of rectifying any misbehaviour. Residential learners report that they like being treated as adults and they know that expectations of them are based on their increased self-responsibility and maturity. 'I'm treated like a grown up, I'm not living at home with my mum anymore,' was a comment from a residential learner.

- All members of staff have relevant background checks carried out on them prior to commencing employment at the college. This ensures that only adults with acceptable backgrounds and working histories are able to work on site. While references from previous employers are verified by emails, they are not routinely telephoned to further improve the recruitment process' robustness. This is not a breach of any regulation or standard, but this could further strengthen the recruitment process.
- All members of staff receive regular training in safeguarding matters. Additionally, contractors and learners themselves also receive training in this area. This embeds a shared community responsibility to protect each other's well-being and safety. All contractors endorse a form outlining the expectations of their behaviour while on the college grounds and this means that safeguarding awareness is raised and is at the forefront of their practice and conduct while on site.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leadership and management are excellent. The well-being of residential learners is central to practice at the college. As a result they benefit significantly from the support and guidance they receive from all members of staff.
- Analysis of data ensures that the progress of residential learners is monitored thoroughly. This ensures that any areas for development or support are promptly identified and effectively actioned. Close links between all relevant disciplines, such as residential staff, tutors and student support services, means that communication is maintained to a high standard. Residential learners have benefited and experienced success as a direct result of action plans for support being put in place.
- Constant evaluation of data and close communication involving key members of staff ensure that practice and effectiveness is reflected upon. As a result, there is no complacency and there is an embedded drive to pursue high standards.
- Members of staff responsible for residential learners receive regular supervision and appraisal in their roles. This means that they are up to date with their practice and are able to reflect upon their effectiveness and how their role protects residential learners as well as promotes their learning and development.
- Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are relevant and up to date. They are accessible to staff and residential learners alike so that everyone is aware of their own responsibilities and the college's procedures regarding specific matters, such as discipline and health and safety.
- Liaison with parents and other external agencies is excellent. This ensures that all relevant information is shared and that specific measures are put in place to support residential learners if needed. For example, changes to duties in work experience settings which meet learners' individual needs for support but which also enable them to benefit from their placements and to develop their skills.
- Parents speak positively about the levels of support offered to learners and how placement at the college has enabled them to experience success, develop confidence and to broaden their circle of friends. Records reflect the high level of satisfaction that parents have regarding the level of support and the effectiveness of communication maintained between home and the college.
- Learner's views are valued and encouraged. Residential learners are confident that their opinions effect change and that they have a meaningful influence in the running of the

residential provision. Décor, repairs and extra equipment have been improved upon as a direct result of residential learners' expressing their views on these issues.

- All the National Minimum Standards are met or exceeded.

COLLEGE DETAILS

Type of college	Further education college residential provision
Age range of learners	16-18
Approximate number of learners in residence	60
Principal/CEO	Mike Potter CBE
Date of previous inspection	February 2012
Website address	www.merristwood.ac.uk

Purpose and Scope of 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.

Contextual information

Merrist Wood Campus is part of Guildford College. The campus is situated three miles from Guildford town centre. This 400 acre-estate hosts a broad range of learning and recreational resources including woodland, wetland, livestock and an equine centre. Merrist Wood offers specialist subjects in land-based industries and sport for residential, international and day students. The site is also undergoing major rebuild and refurbishment, a new Animal Management Centre is under construction and is due to open in September 2015. Additionally, a Supported Learning Centre is also under construction and this is due to open in the autumn of 2015. This will provide a supported learning environment for up to 64 learners.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Paul Taylor SCRI
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One Social Care Regulatory Inspector, carried out the inspection with short notice. The Inspector took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The Inspector also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help make judgements. The Inspector used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and other records to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Evaluation schedule for inspection of residential provision in further education colleges 2014*

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/evaluation-schedule-for-inspection-of-residential-provision-further-education-colleges>

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