

Reaseheath FE College

Reaseheath College, Reaseheath, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6DF

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

Reaseheath College is a specialist provider of vocational education and training in further education (FE) and higher education (HE) for businesses, industries and communities that are mainly, but not exclusively, rural and land-based. The college is situated close to the market town of Nantwich in Cheshire. Six halls of residence on the Reaseheath campus accommodate learners aged from 16 to 18. At the time of the inspection, there are 350 resident learners aged 16 to 18 on roll. These include male and female students. Of this number, 119 students are part-time, or flexi boarders.

Inspection dates 25 to 27 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well young people are helped and protected outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers outstanding

The college provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the college contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for young people.

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Date of last inspection: 26 June 2013

Key findings from this inspection

This college is outstanding because:

- Staff support remarkable experiences and opportunities for students. Students make excellent social and academic progress during their residential placement.
- Students say that being resident is a central part of their lives and promotes development. It helps them to believe that they can achieve their goals.
- Students are invaluable partners in college development. They contribute meaningfully to shape important matters, including senior leader recruitment and student induction programmes.
- Outstanding staff and college systems help students to settle into college life and make successful moves to their chosen work or study destinations.
- Residential students exceed their high-performing day placement peers in educational and emotional achievement. They continue to be successful after they have left college, indicating high-quality development in emotional, social and academic capacity during their college life.
- High calibre safeguarding practice means that students can develop personal strategies for staying safe and receive outstanding support when this is needed.
- Leaders and managers show exceptional levels of competency. They model commitment, collaboration and dedication to the core values of the college. In turn, these values underpin unique experiences and excellent progress for students.

The college's areas for development:

- Further enhance opportunities for review of residential staff performance through individual supervision meetings and staff appraisal. (National Minimum Standards, 30.8)
- Continue to implement the actions arising from the self-assessment of residential provision; particularly that communication systems are integrated to ensure that staff are signposted to essential information. (National Minimum Standards, 8.5)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: outstanding

The college provides outstanding provision. It supports remarkable experiences and opportunities for students. They make excellent progress during their education placement. To paraphrase what many students said: 'The safeguarding (residential) team is the best!' Students told inspectors: 'They are always there; they provide guidance and support. They look after us. They listen, they smile, and they keep boundaries. They make us feel safe and happy; we don't always want to go home.'

Students say that being resident is a central part of their lives and promotes their development. The multidisciplinary team supports this ethos through effective staff–student relationships and highly professional relationships between staff members. Staff work together really well to support and promote the individual success of each student. One student said: 'People never expect kids in care to do well. Staff have helped me to believe I can. They never gave up on me; they could have, but they didn't.' Students have greater chances of employment in their chosen career. Records show that a very high percentage of young people achieve their academic or employment goals. Records show that they continue to be successful long after they leave college. Staff are proud of young people's achievements and the role that staff play in helping them to get there.

All staff collect and assess a very broad range of information about students. They use this baseline information to set students on pathways to achievement. This includes meticulous attention to welfare concerns as well as academic matters. One student said: 'Staff are there for me when I have been really upset. Staff deal with me in a way I want.' Another said: 'They found out I was upset when I left my mum, they came straight to me, and now I prefer it to being home.' This shows the exceptional relationships and strong family values that help students thrive.

Students make choices and learn about group living in an atmosphere of trust and respect. There is a wide variety of formal and leisure systems to meet students' needs and wishes. Face-to-face interviews, house meetings, counselling sessions, tutor interviews, sport and social activities and the student association all contribute to students feeling safe and happy on site.

Staff and returning students work to create a positive community that settles new students. An energetic and creative freshers' programme provides a strong foundation to college life. Almost four times the required number of applications for 'fresher representatives' were made. They lead the social support systems for new students. This enthusiasm comes from students being proud of the college and wanting to contribute to its ongoing success.

Students are invaluable partners in college development, for example, by joining governors to create person specifications for senior management positions. Students requested that induction programmes feature smaller group activities and fun sessions. This was because some students felt overawed by large group living. A new programme helps new students to enjoy circus skills training and small group activities. This helps them to get to know the people in their houses. Preparation includes taster days with their families, using safe internet pages set up by college to chat to other new students, and information about what to expect when they arrive.

Staff support young people who have identified needs to get ready for starting college. The college transition officer takes part in school planning meetings. He meets young people from age 14 to prepare them for college life. Hall meetings and visits from safeguarding staff and student representatives help all students through any initial nerves or anxiety when starting college. As a result, many already feel very settled by the time that they are two weeks into their first experience of living away from home.

Staff and students create an individual residential development plan (IRDP). This work underpins the support and college systems that help students to achieve their personal goals. Also, there is a detailed and personalised electronic recording system called 'Promonitor', which all staff and students can access. This captures and communicates all other aspects of young people's lives. It helps staff to support students in ways that include giving a 'wake-up call' if students have not arrived for their education, and responding to any concerns. The two systems are being integrated to ensure that all information is in one place. This is a work in progress, which occasionally means that the records do not match. Due to effective informal communication, emails and detailed logs, this has not affected the progress that students make.

Students' experience of moving on from college is excellent. An independent careers officer helps young people to move on to the next stage of their lives. He offers individual personal contact about jobs. He arranges high levels of work experience. He seeks financial support for those who need it. Overseas students get excellent support to understand about living in Britain. As a result, students have an equal opportunity to enjoy college life.

Managers have a clear idea about the needs of students that the college can meet. They use thorough application processes to ensure that students are suitable for the college experience provided. This means that they can focus on the successes, complexities and challenges that those students bring. Staff and students are involved in innovative projects, including an accredited peer mentor scheme with a local university. This is helping further education students to understand the scope and impact of domestic violence.

Students value the welfare systems available to them. They engage really well with staff, seeking reassurance from safeguarding staff late at night. They work with the well-being team to identify and use strategies to improve their resilience and management of difficulties. Living at college enriches and maximises the progress that they make.

How well young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Students experience outstanding help and protection at college. This is because students and staff take part in training, and this enables all to take immediate and effective action when necessary. Leaders contribute to local safeguarding board initiatives. This continuously updates and improves their own knowledge. In turn, they share new ideas and information with staff and young people. This creates a culture of reflection and continuous improvement in safeguarding practice.

Students say that they feel very safe in the house and on campus in general. Staff educate them, counsel them and care for them. This helps them to learn about the risks and challenges of becoming young adults. It supports them to experiment, to take acceptable risks, and to make mistakes and learn from them. The safeguarding team offers a highly effective family model of care. Staff skilfully create trusting and respectful relationships. Their approach to discipline is fair and proportionate. Students value this balanced approach. Many students said that college does it better than their families. Staff approach problems by identifying what small change would have the greatest impact. This builds resilient young adults who make positive life choices.

Staff learn about students' needs before they arrive. They use this information to offer seamless support. They have a genuine interest in students' welfare and happiness. Young people and parents say that residential staff 'go the extra mile' to ensure that young people are kept safe. Boundaries and expectations are set out for new and returning students. Staff consistently and compassionately enforce these from the outset. This means that incidents are infrequent. Students know the rules. One said: 'Staff will find out when we are doing something we shouldn't be, and then we have to talk to staff about what we've done.' Others said that they helped their friends to think about the consequences of their actions, so that the student community was a happy one. Staff deal with any misdemeanours promptly and proportionately, building trust and reciprocated respect. Students feel secure enough to disclose sensitive information, and this helps them to stay safe. Staff work to reduce risks such as alcohol misuse through meaningful discussion, information and counselling. If appropriate, they make external referrals to professionals to provide continuous support.

Excellent work continues both internally and with external providers about prevention of extremism. College has conducted a 'lock-down' drill for the site. Leaders are planning a second event, to put in place learning gained from the first. They have shared their learning by developing a procedural document for all schools in the area. Local area safeguarding officers are complimentary about the impact of this innovation on local area pupil and staff safety.

A recent initiative has been to engage with national and sector groups to champion improvement in student mental health. This is a good practice model for how staff identify and meet students' mental health needs. There is a balanced mix of educational material and interactive work; a well-trained, responsive and enthusiastic well-being team; and continuous discussion with external professionals. This supports confidential reporting and sensitive handling of concerns, which protects students. It helps them to develop individual support systems for their long-term health.

Security on the large site ensures that all approved persons wear a lanyard and an identification pass. This has been further developed to a colour code system. In this way, for example, first year students and visitors can be spotted easily and offered help when necessary. Staff challenge strangers. Students sign in and out, and staff track their return times, chasing up when they are late. This means that students do not go missing. The safeguarding team speaks to parents when students travel home during term time, to make sure that they have arrived. This attention to student safety is commendable and worthy of wider dissemination.

Inspectors found many examples of innovative and outward-facing work. These include: work with a local university to educate students about domestic violence; the college's own 'Be Ready' brand programme, which educates and prepares students for safe and happy futures; and significant commitment and contribution of senior managers to the work of the local safeguarding board and safeguarding children operational group. Governors ensure that safeguarding practice continuously improves and has direct impact on student safety and welfare

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers show exceptional levels of competency. They model commitment, collaboration and dedication to the core values of the college. These are: people; responsibility; integrity; diversity; and excellence (PRIDE). They embed these values in all aspects of college and student development. They reinforce this by setting clear objectives for professional development. This provides the very best experience for students that improves their progress.

Leaders have excellent knowledge about student group and individual progress. They easily show the extra value that comes from being a residential student. They use baseline data and collated student data really well to track across all areas of a student's life while in residence. These include and embrace non-academic progress. This means that all staff understand what they need to do to help individuals to improve. Residential staff are seamlessly included in staff communication and development systems. Students identify their learning and social goals. They are confident to talk about the support that they expect to receive from staff. This inclusive and collaborative approach applies to the most senior position and to the newest student. It underpins the continuous development of the college.

The residential (safeguarding) team is a growing resource. Residential managers contribute significantly to students' academic progress and positive experiences. Managers have time available during the day for liaison and development. They capably lead shifts which include part-time staff who all have other posts within the college. However, this limits their availability to develop as one residential team, as it reduces opportunities for group and individual reflection about their performance. This issue is addressed and the impact on students reduced through a high-quality recruitment, selection and induction support system where shift leaders oversee team practice and ensure that student care remains first-rate.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the development strengths and needs of the college. They have ambitious plans that are regularly reviewed, to enable the campus to be a welcoming and tolerant place. The college engages well with the local and wider community. Students lead many profitable fundraising schemes to support their chosen projects. Leaders have engaged external voices to deliver mental health awareness through 'WellFest', which provided a festival, interactive atmosphere. This demonstrates a clear commitment to helping students to learn in the most effective and accessible way.

Leaders have identified both points raised for further improvement by this inspection, which are included in the current development plan for the college. They have addressed the two previous points for improvement. All staff and students are trained to a high level of competence in safeguarding. There is continuous investment in new and high-quality accommodation available on-site. Older properties are comfortably maintained.

Leaders, including governors, are proactive in building effective relationships with partnership agencies. They engage directly with government departments and sector leaders to raise the profile of land-based college work. This helps students to benefit in the long term, for example, by getting the financial or planning support that they need. A recent initiative has been for senior leaders to work with others to understand the needs of young people who are not in education or employment. Leaders and staff help young people to thrive. Students say that being part of this college is, and will continue to be, key to their future success.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of young people. They watched how professional staff work with young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the college knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Further education college with residential accommodation details

Social care unique reference number: SC041920

Principal/CEO: Meredydd David

Inspector(s)

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Chris Scully, social care inspector

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