

Bedford College

Shuttleworth College, Old Warden Park, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 9DX

Inspection of residential provision
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

The residential component of Bedford College is situated in 500 acres of parkland on a self-contained campus in the grounds of Shuttleworth College. It is one of eight sites that make up this general further education college, offering provision from entry to university level. Shuttleworth College offers land-based subjects, including equine, horticultural, agricultural and fish management courses.

There are currently 40 residential students under the age of 18 and 25 residential students over 18. They are accommodated in five residential halls that are split into under 18, over 18 and male and female halls.

A team of staff that works at the college has additional 'warden' responsibilities to provide residential students with supervision during the evening and overnight. These staff are supported by appointed wardens from the student group as well as the wider student support service staff.

Inspection dates 31 January to 2 February 2018

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

How well young people are helped and protected good

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: Good

Date of last inspection: 17 October 2013

Key findings from this inspection

This college is outstanding because:

- All of the staff have the highest expectations of students. There is a college-wide collective approach to supporting the students. As a result, attending residence leads to sustained improvement in the lives of the residential students.
- Students feel safe. Parents say that their children are safe. A variety of mechanisms are available to students to raise concerns or receive support.
- Students provide exceptional feedback about their experiences. They make social, emotional and academic progress as a result of attending the college.
- Transitions into the service are extremely well managed.
- The students consistently behave well. They say that bullying is not an issue for them or anyone that they know at the college.
- An especially strong culture of research thrives at the college. The staff are able to cite relevant research findings and show how they translate these into practice. Senior managers enable a culture of embracing research as a means to improve the quality of the service.
- There is highly effective use of monitoring and improvement.
- There is a wide range of opportunities for students to contribute to and influence life at the college.
- The staff are highly student-focused. The staff know the students extremely well and provide sensitive and individualised support.
- There is a strong focus on equality and diversity.

The college's areas for development:

- The process for checking references is not strong enough and does not make clear which references have been verbally verified. In one record, there was no recorded evidence to show that discrepancies between information in an application form and information in a reference had been followed up.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that the process of reference verification is recorded effectively so that it is clear what has been verified and checked during the recruitment process.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: outstanding

The quality of the service consistently exceeds the standards of good. While there are some areas in which safeguarding practice could be improved further, there is strong evidence from students, their families and management data that attending the residential provision results in sustained improvement in the lives of the students.

Feedback from the residential students about their experience of the residential provision is exceptional. They speak glowingly of the relationships that they have with the staff who support them. As a result of these relationships, students feel safe, make progress, develop a sense of belonging, increase their independence, develop their social skills and networks and enjoy their time at college. A parent said, 'He has been accepted for who he is. He has thrived. He has found an identity, found who he is.'

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The staff are highly student-focused. They treat the students with respect, and there is a strong focus on the individual. The students are able to develop positive self-images as a result. Staff and managers have a strong approach to equality and diversity, and there are instances of excellent practice that are worthy of wider dissemination, such as the work to support transgender students.

Residential students make greater progress than their non-residential peers. There is higher attainment and higher attendance for residential students. In addition, the residential students and their families report significant improvement in terms of independence, self-confidence and social skills. Students say that attending residence has made a real difference to them. They speak of the additional opportunities it gives them to engage in activities associated with their academic pursuits, such as farming, and it provides them with additional support with their homework and assignments.

The college meets the holistic health needs of the students. The students say that the staff support them if they feel unwell. Students who use medication self-administer, and this is agreed in advance with the student's family. The staff provide the students with sessions on sexual health and relationships.

The staff support the students to maintain their mental health. The students say that they can go to the staff if they are stressed, anxious or worried. The staff have been proactive in securing funding to provide targeted physical activities for students who identify as having mental health difficulties. The students access counsellors and

external mental health professionals who regularly visit the college. The students say that the staff know them really well, spot when they are struggling and give them the right support when they need it. The students' comments included:

- 'The wardens know us well enough to know when you are stressed or upset.'
- 'They also know when to leave us alone.'
- 'They know us well and it helps us.'

The students access a wide range of opportunities through which they can influence life at the college. Regular student voice meetings take place to discuss college-wide issues. Residence-specific meetings also take place. Two students sit on the governing body. An annual student voice celebration day takes place. Students say that they are listened to and that changes take place as a result of the feedback that they give. Students say that they can raise any concerns or complaints with the wardens.

The students have access to leisure opportunities, and say that they can request activities. Some families said that they thought the range of options could be improved, but the students themselves are happy with the range on offer.

Cooked food is provided for residential students three times a day. Various options are available, including vegetarian and healthy food.

The students' rooms meet their needs. A multi-faith room is available for students. In the past, students have been supported to access local religious establishments.

Transitions into the service are extremely well managed. Students speak positively of the support that they receive on arrival. One student described this as a daunting time but she felt it went well due to the support that the staff provided. She said that, as a result, she felt at home in the residential provision and could not wait to return after her weekends at home. Other students said that they were made to feel welcome very quickly. One student spoke of the effectiveness of the use of experienced students to support new students. Students spoke of lasting friendships arising from these arrangements.

How well young people are helped and protected: good

The students feel safe. They cite this as being the most important thing that any inspector should know about their experience at the college. The students say that there is no bullying, and that the staff support them well to manage relationships. They say that they get on well with their peers. Parents are confident that their children are safe in residence, and say that the staff know their children well and are able to respond to their needs. Good, positive relationships between students were seen throughout the inspection.

The students are able to identify a range of trusted adults with whom they can share concerns, and are able to give examples of when they do this. They report that staff listen to and act on the concerns that they raise. Safeguarding records demonstrate that students confide in the staff, and the records evidence the strong relationships between students and the staff. There are times when students open up to staff about experiences that they have had prior to starting at the college, including historical abusive experiences. The staff ensure that these concerns are shared with relevant

professionals, and they support the students to access the college's counselling scheme.

There is a zero-tolerance approach to drug use. This is reflected in the disciplinary policy. The students are made aware of this, and this information is provided in the guide for students and during the enrolment process and induction days. The students say that they understand what is expected of them and that the staff are fair and proportionate in their actions.

The students consistently behave well. There has only been one incident of a student going missing from the college. There have been no restraints in the residential provision. The students have access to a counsellor, and records show that students are referred for support as necessary. The students say that staff support them to manage their behaviour, and that the staff will intervene when students are misbehaving.

All students spoken to said that bullying was not an issue for them or anyone they knew at the college. Parents stated that they had no knowledge of any bullying concerns.

Students who had experienced high levels of bullying in previous education establishments spoke of the positive, inclusive environment at the college. The wardens are available to students to discuss any concerns. The students consistently emphasised how well they get on with each other. Observations supported these assertions. For a number of students, these good relationships were the most positive element of their residential experience, reflecting significant progress in their social and emotional skills.

There have been no allegations against members of staff and, as a result, no referrals to the designated officer. The staff are aware of the processes for raising concerns.

All staff undergo a standard recruitment process, including safeguarding checks. However, the process for checking references is not strong enough. Evidence of reference verification is currently only captured through a signature on the record. This does not show what has been verified. In one record, there was no recorded evidence to show that discrepancies between information in an application form and information in a reference had been followed up. Although an individual member of staff was able to articulate what had been done, this information existed solely in their memory, and if that member of staff was to leave, this information would leave with them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

All of the staff have the highest expectations of the students. Three-hour evening study sessions are facilitated twice a week, and these are well attended. Staff act as a good parent in encouraging, challenging and improving the academic undertakings of the students.

Students and their families talked about how the experience of attending residence has made a significant difference in their lives. They cite the progress that the students have made, not just in terms of their academic attainment but in their life skills, their confidence and independence and in making friends.

There is a strong focus on equality and diversity. Disabled students speak of the support that they receive to access the college and the residential provision. They say that staff have an excellent understanding of their needs and work with them to overcome barriers that they may face. As a result, they are able to access, enjoy and benefit from the

residential provision. There are examples of innovative practice at the college, including work to support transgender students. This work has contributed to students being invited to Parliament to discuss transgender issues with members of Parliament, and to deliver training to national professional bodies such as Sports England.

A very strong culture of monitoring is in place. This includes internal and external audits against the national minimum standards and the Ofsted inspection framework. This monitoring enables the staff and managers to reflect on practice, identify areas for improvement and make those improvements.

The college maintains strong links with partner agencies. Child and adolescent mental health service workers attend the college fortnightly. A vice principal sits on the local safeguarding children's board. The college is an active member of Land Based Colleges Aspiring to Excellence. The staff engage with external agencies such as Sports England to develop opportunities to improve the lives of the students whom they support. The staff engage positively with the local police and, as a result, the police have been involved in delivering safety events at the college. These links contribute to the overall effectiveness of the college.

Feedback from families is very positive. Comments gained during the course of this inspection included:

- 'The staff know the children very well and provide them with excellent care and support to meet their individual needs.'
- 'The college is absolutely fantastic. The way they [the staff] are with the students and the reassurance that they give you is absolutely fantastic.'
- 'If it was not as supportive as it is, he [my child] would not have thrived as much as he has.'
- 'I have been very impressed. He [my child] is loving the course. The tutors have been amazing in terms of being easy to talk to and get on with. They respect and assist the students. It is second to none.'
- 'I just feel really grateful that they have taken him on. He is quiet, and away from home for the first time. He has made friends and is getting on, and this is down to them.'

There is a strong, joined-up approach across the college to support the students in residence. There is a sense of communal responsibility, with course managers, personal tutors, support staff and wardens all invested in the students. The staff work together to support students who may be struggling in a particular lesson. One student said, 'The wardens are always aware of what you need to do and how well you are doing.' This knowledge and understanding enables targeted support to be provided.

There are clear systems in place to monitor progress. These systems allow for data to be broken down across a range of characteristics, including the residential provision. Data shows that the residential students make greater progress than their non-residential peers. Students cite the additional support that they get from wardens as being pivotal to this.

When students are struggling with settling into the residential provision the staff work with them. Students talk about the support that they had when they moved in. This includes students who found this process difficult. As a result of the support that they received, they have managed to maintain their placement in the residential provision and, in turn, their placement on courses that they enjoy.

The staff receive the necessary support to carry out their role. The residential staff receive an annual appraisal and they attend regular meetings. The staff talk of a culture of openness at the college, and discussions with staff show their willingness to share their views. The staff have access to training courses to support them to meet students' needs.

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: SC041911

Principal/CEO: Ian Pryce

Inspector

Ashley Hinson, social care inspector

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