

# Guildford College – Merrist Wood Campus

Merrist Wood College, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey GU3 3PE

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

Merrist Wood Campus is part of Guildford College. It is a specialist land-based college, located three miles from Guildford town centre. The 400-acre site provides a range of vocational further education and higher education courses and has links with sports academies. All residential accommodation for students under the age of 18 is on the main site. Currently, there are 15 residential students.

Inspection dates 19 to 21 February 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking in 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:** outstanding

**Date of last inspection:** 2 February 2015

## Key findings from this inspection

This college is outstanding because:

- Residential students make better progress, including greater attendance and higher grades, than their non-resident peers.
- Residential students are extremely well supported by committed and experienced members of staff who place students' well-being at the centre of their practice. Residential students receive excellent pastoral support and guidance, leading to increased social skills and confidence.
- Students say that they feel safe in the college. They say that they have staff they will go to if they are worried or upset. For some students, it is the first educational experience where they have felt safe to express who they are without fear of bullying.
- Students feel listened to and their opinions matter. Their voices are heard through the student representatives, but also in groups, about specific issues such as catering and meal choices.
- The senior management team is highly experienced and these individuals are highly committed to their roles. They value the residential provision and seek to make it as rewarding an experience as possible for the students who stay there. High-quality monitoring of the service ensures continued development and improvement.

The college's areas for development:

- The designated safeguarding lead and designated safeguarding person are related to each other. All members of the senior management team have access to the safeguarding information on the computerised system. However, they do not record their review of decisions, without which there may be insufficient professional challenge.
- The environmental health report from 2016 has not been fully acted on.
- Catering staff who are employed by external contractors are not fully aware of who to report safeguarding concerns to.
- The college does not verify references for staff, despite this being recommended at the last inspection in 2015.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of young people: outstanding**

Residential students make excellent progress as a result of their stay. Being a residential student at the college improves the attendance, achievement and attainment of students. In addition, it provides students with the opportunity to develop life skills that they will need as independent young adults, including forming appropriate social relationships.

The designated head of learning, and curriculum staff, liaise closely with the residential staff to ensure that attendance levels are high. Current levels range from 85% to 99.6%. For some students who previously had poor school attendance, this is a significant improvement. Students benefit from the high levels of support and, where necessary, bespoke learning programmes. Staff across the college work collaboratively to support each student to make excellent progress and to be successful. All data and records demonstrate the positive impact for students of staying in the residential provision.

Extremely well-designed systems capture all aspects of the students' progress at the college, with data collected at very regular intervals. Therefore, any dips in attendance, achievement or attainment can be quickly identified. Where needed, additional support is put in place. Courses are adapted, when this is possible, to meet the needs of the students.

Residential students are extremely positive about the residential experience. They are able to take part in enrichment activities, which are mostly held on site. Students present as being comfortable about seeking out guidance and support; this is due to the excellent relationships that they have with the staff. Records of the pastoral intervention demonstrate that this is a highly effective area of practice. In addition, students have access to a chaplain if they feel they cannot approach staff with an issue or concern. Residential students are supported to maintain close contact with their families and friends. Information technology ensures easy contact with family members who live abroad.

Students are encouraged to maintain healthy lifestyles and understand what this means for them. Staff help them to develop the skills that they need to take responsibility for their own health needs, specifically for administering their own medication and carrying their own Epi-pen where needed. The staff across the college provide information, guidance and support on a wide range of issues such as smoking cessation, sexual health and mental well-being. The acknowledgment of and support put in place regarding mental well-being is highly commendable. Emotional development is deemed to be an essential aspect of educational attainment. The recent focus on mental health awareness and training is being extended across the college, with training provided for staff on areas such as mental health first aid and mental health awareness. This includes areas such as resilience and managing anxiety. Pastoral care is strong and helps students to develop strategies to manage their difficulties.

Residential students are provided with an excellent range of nutritious food. Students are

complimentary about the food choices. Inspectors observed warm and nurturing relationships between catering staff and students, with these staff offering guidance on healthy and sensible eating. They pass on any concerns about diets or eating disorders to the residential and pastoral staff. All dietary needs are catered for, including culturally specific foods.

### **How well young people are helped and protected: good**

Residential students are confident in their surroundings and say that they have staff they would go to if they were worried or upset. They do not raise bullying as a concern, and staff rightly identify the monitoring of residential students' relationships as a key part of their role. Students who have struggled with bullying in the past display a new-found confidence in the college. All differences are welcomed and accepted by students and staff.

Positive behaviour is consistently promoted across the college and residential provision. Incidents of challenging behaviour are low, and are managed through the college's disciplinary processes. Staff are consistent and students know what is expected of them. Staff focus on why a student is doing something, rather than reacting to what they are doing.

Staff benefit from regular training on child protection and safeguarding, including targeted areas such as exploitation in all forms and radicalisation. Externally contracted staff receive training from their direct employer, and this has resulted in catering staff not being able to identify who the safeguarding leads are in the college.

Joint working with the police and partner agencies is strong. Liaison has led to increased security on-site, with only registered vehicles allowed to access or leave the site after college hours. The safeguarding leads attend a regular safeguarding group within the local residential college sector. Few incidents have been reported to partner agencies, and the designated officer for the local authority told inspectors that no issues have been raised with them for this site. Exploration of the wider college group shows strong responses to safeguarding and child protection concerns, including excellent joint working with the local police with regards to drug use, sexual exploitation and potentially harmful relationships.

Risk assessments for high-risk activities, such as equine and arboreal activities, are detailed and fit for purpose. Clear and strong messages are given to students and staff around the risks involved in all activities, with close oversight by senior health and safety leaders.

Health and safety is managed well at the college. Residential students take part in fire drills so that they know what action to take should a fire occur. Due to changes in the leadership and management of health and safety over the last two years, actions resulting from the environmental health agency visit have yet to be fully completed.

The designated safeguarding lead and designated safeguarding person are personally related; as a result there is a risk that they will fail to offer professional challenge in the context of their familial relationship. Other senior managers do have oversight of safeguarding decisions, but they do not routinely record these decisions and this makes

it unclear if there has, or has not, been sufficient questioning of initial decisions.

Recruitment processes are generally thorough. However, the college is still not verifying references for staff, despite this being a recommendation at the last inspection in 2015.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The senior management team is very strong. All members of the team know their roles and responsibilities and deliver these to a high standard. They are guided by an extremely experienced principal. Leaders and managers have high aspirations and expectations for those who attend the college and stay in the residential provision. Residential staff say that they are well supported and can approach the senior team at any time. The head of the residential provision is always available and meets with the duty warden daily.

Residential students benefit greatly from the co-ordinated approach across educational and residential provisions, including staff who work in both areas. Students are complimentary of the residential provision and observations showed warm and caring relationships with staff.

Students are welcomed to the residential provision as a group. Meticulous planning ensures that all students arrive at a similar time, and that parents and carers leave students to settle at a set time. The students are supported to settle in and to get to know each other. Staff are keenly observant of any students who may be struggling in the initial weeks of term, and they encourage the students to engage in activities, or staff spend time with them individually. The Guide to being a residential student' is detailed. It is currently being reviewed to ensure that it is relevant to the service being provided. It reflects the statement of principles, which is effectively implemented and practised by staff in the residential provision.

Joint working with parents is rightly considered by residential staff to be essential. Parents are actively encouraged to be part of the college and residential provision, and staff remain in contact with them throughout their child's time in the college. Parents speak very positively about the support offered to students who stay in the residential provision and how the college supports their individual achievements. Parents are also very positive about the communication between the college and home, including the residential staff.

Complaints are managed effectively. Students' views are shared through student voice and student representatives. An ongoing concern about the quality and range of food on offer has been thoroughly investigated by the senior management team. Students have been engaged in meetings to explore what they would like and at what times of day. Those with specialist diets have indicated what food they enjoy. As a result, the meals and food choices on offer have significantly improved.

The residential provision is currently undergoing a phased refurbishment. Many rooms have already been updated with new vanity units and these are of a good quality. The rooms that are to be refurbished are clean and safe, and presented to an acceptable standard.

The comprehensive development plan is aspirational and focuses on how best to drive the residential provision forward. It takes account of how to provide the best experiences for residential students. It also addresses how the residential provision will meet and exceed the national minimum standards and how it will respond to forthcoming changes to the standards. The head of the residential provision attends provider meetings with the Department for Education, and will contact them directly for any clarification that is needed. Senior staff liaise with other land-based colleges and attend regular meetings and forums to ensure that they keep abreast of developments in the sector.

## **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:** SC066736

**Principal/CEO:** Jacki Hughes

### **Inspectors**

Jennie Christopher, social care inspector

Liz Driver, social care inspector

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