

# Plumpton College

Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, Plumpton, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 3AE

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

This is a further education college situated in the South Downs in East Sussex. The college offers a diverse range of land-based courses from agriculture, equine and wine science to outdoor education, with a focus on integrating theory with practical skill development. It also has a sports academy facility and an 800-hectare commercial farm. The college is currently accommodating 181 students. Around 102 were aged between 16 and 18 years of age at the time of this inspection. The college does not arrange lodgings with host families.

Inspection dates 18 to 20 September 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking in 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:** 8 March 2016

## Key findings from this inspection

This college is outstanding because:

- The students benefit from strong leadership by an effective management team. Senior leaders and managers are highly competent, experienced and confident in maintaining an inspirational culture. They are influential in making changes and have the drive and the ambition to continually develop the college. Leaders have high expectations of the staff in changing the lives of students.
- Students thrive, learning and living in a culture where success is highly supported and celebrated. Staff work closely to ensure that each individual student not only achieves but in many cases exceeds their potential.
- The residential students live in an inclusive and highly supportive community, which enriches their experience and makes an exceptional difference to their lives. The students' voice is listened to and action taken as a result.
- The staff are passionate about their roles and responsibilities. They are both creative and innovative in developing systems and course content to ensure that students are 'industry ready' and, in particular, able to embrace the developing technology required in their chosen career.
- The monitoring systems in place are effective in identifying the college's strengths and areas for development. The corporation (governing body) meets regularly, provides challenge and has an excellent oversight of all aspects of college life.
- Safeguarding the residential students is at the centre of the staff's practice. Highly effective planning manages and minimises the risks to students inside and outside of the college.

The college's areas for development:

- Implement individual care plans (known at the college as 'safety plans') for all students who not only have a healthcare need but also emotional and mental well-being needs.

## Inspection judgements

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

Residential students make excellent progress across many areas while enjoying their time at the college. Being a residential student at the college improves their attendance, achievement and attainment. Once qualified, many of the students return to undertake a higher level of study in their chosen field.

The residential experience provides the opportunity for students to develop life skills including forming friendships, undertaking tasks such as washing their own clothes, and independently getting up in time for their courses. This is of particular importance for those students who undertake early morning farming and equine duties.

This inspection found that students thoroughly enjoy their time at the college and make outstanding progress across many areas of their lives including raising their self-confidence, developing coping strategies and increasing their resilience. This ensures that they are 'industry ready' for subsequent full-time employment.

Pastoral support is strong. Residential students benefit from high levels of support delivered by a team of experienced staff that provides appropriate levels of nurture. All staff across the college (academic, residential and student support staff) work collaboratively to support the students and liaise closely with each other to ensure that each individual student receives the most appropriate support at the time needed. The high-functioning and effective student services department has a crucial role in supporting the welfare needs of the students. The student services staff are supported by experienced managers who offer relevant support and guidance to both staff and students. The students speak highly and positively about the student services staff.

The staff have a continuous focus on the well-being of the residential students and of their emotional and mental well-being. The staff are alert to the signs of emotional stress and anxiety and are trained to provide appropriate support. In addition, the staff can refer students to counselling services if needed. External health professionals visit to offer sexual health advice and guidance. Care plans (known as 'safety plans') are written for those students who have a health need. These are not currently completed for students who have an emotional or mental well-being need.

The students are influential in decision making around residential issues. A significant area of development since the last inspection is the emphasis placed on the student voice being heard and acted on by the college staff. Learner voice mechanisms are effective and highly responsive in addressing student feedback. Examples include: the creation of more communal space and kitchenettes in the residential houses; a drop-down cinema screen; and the development and accreditation of a highly successful Student Union. The catering manager is responsive to feedback from residential students regarding the changes implemented to the food provision since the last inspection. There is now a much healthier diet on offer, including less processed food and more fresh meat and vegetables. The students like the fact that home-grown meat from the college farm

is used. Current catering is of a high standard with plans to continually make changes in response to student feedback.

Student feedback pre-inspection raised concerns about the lack of enrichment activities on offer. However, during the inspection no concerns were raised to the inspectors. There has been a significant increase in the range of activities on offer both on and off site. Students engage in the enrichment programme, which provides further opportunities for them to take part in external events and competitions: for example, climbing, equestrian pursuits, a shooting team, clay club and floristry. Social events, which the students enjoy, occur regularly. These help the students to be active and responsible participants in residential life. Overall, residential students are happy with the activity and enrichment programme on offer and the staff are alert to suggestions to develop the range of activities still further. In addition, students are encouraged to be involved in local, wider and global communities through charitable events and open days.

The staff show commitment and passion in helping and supporting students; in getting it right for the students. The professional practices observed during this inspection consistently exceeded the standard of good.

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

Safeguarding the residential students is embedded across all areas of college life. A skilled and experienced safeguarding lead and supporting safeguarding team respond effectively to all concerns raised. The corporation (the governing body) has a safeguarding representative who is kept up to date with any active cases. The safeguarding lead maintains regular contact with external agencies to ensure they are up to date with legislation and practices and of current or emerging local and national risks. Joint working with the police and partner agencies is strong. Effective systems are in place for the staff and students to raise concerns or to make an allegation. Appropriate referrals are made to the external safeguarding agencies. If required, robust investigations are undertaken and the safeguarding team seeks the guidance of the external safeguarding agencies in response to their findings. Any risks identified as a result of investigations are assessed, minimised and closely managed. Staff maintain comprehensive records of safeguarding incidents and monitor these well.

Effective systems are in place for the staff and students to raise concerns. The students are confident in their surroundings and say that they have staff they would go to if they were worried or upset. Educating the residential students to keep themselves safe is a priority at the college. The comprehensive tutorial programme covers a range of subjects that inform the students how to, for example, keep themselves safe from online risks such as grooming, bullying and extremism. Students say they are confident that any concerns they raise will be dealt with effectively. Constructive relationships with external agencies provide the safeguarding team with expert advice and assistance to support students who are at risk of harm.

The staff, regardless of their individual roles, undertake safeguarding training to enable them to identify and report concerns. All are vigilant in recognising and appropriately referring concerns. A member of the corporation with specific responsibility for overseeing safeguarding practice in the college provides an additional level of scrutiny and challenge to ensure that the safeguarding practices are effective.

Positive behaviour is consistently promoted across the college and residential provision. Incidents of challenging behaviour are very low and are managed through the college's disciplinary processes. The staff are consistent in their responses and students know what is expected of them. The college has clear values that all students are fully aware of.

Health and safety is managed very well at the college. The residential students take part in fire evacuation drills so that they know what action to take if a fire occurs. Recruitment procedures are thorough and meet the required standard in the checks undertaken.

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

The senior management team is very strong. The principal leads by example and is visible across all areas of the college life. He creates a culture of ambition and positivity with high expectations for the staff and the students. Leaders are competent and experienced, and inspire a culture where both students and the staff can thrive. Leaders, managers and the corporation have implemented an ambitious development plan that will further develop the college over the next six years. This is a college that embraces development of each individual subject area and the residential provision. Leaders and managers have the skills and desire to ensure that students are provided with the most up-to-date learning and supportive resources that ensures that they are extremely well prepared for their chosen career. The staff share the senior management team's passion and determination.

The residential staff are suitably qualified and experienced. All the staff share a common aim of providing an excellent residential experience for the students to enhance their learning and life skills. The residential staff are professional and committed to providing excellent levels of support, assistance and guidance so that students can succeed. The students are complimentary about the residential provision; warm and caring relationships between staff and students were consistently observed.

The staff work collaboratively to support the individual needs of the residential students. The smart use of cross-college systems to track and support students (Pro Monitor and Pro Solution systems) capture all aspects of the student's experience. This enables timely interventions to any concerns. The systems provide detailed knowledge of each individual student's vulnerabilities and support needs. The residential, support and academic staff share information to ensure that the residential students receive a consistently high standard of care. This approach has a positive impact on subject

attendance. The training that staff receive focuses on their ability to meet the changing needs of the students, so that the high standard of care can be maintained. Students are welcomed to the residential provision and settle in quickly. The staff are observant of any student who may be struggling in the initial weeks of the term. They encourage students to engage in activities or staff spend time with them individually. Improved data collection during the pre-arrival stage informs events and welfare arrangements. Students have personal goals that are regularly reviewed.

The quality of monitoring and auditing has significantly improved since the last inspection. The improved systems better inform leaders and managers of the college's strengths and areas needed to improve. A comprehensive development plan identifies areas for continued investment and development over a seven-year period.

Leaders and managers actively promote tolerance, equality and diversity. The college can adapt to meet individual needs, although the current cohort of residential students does not require any special arrangements to meet religious, cultural, gender or linguistic needs. The college is successfully meeting a range of health and physical 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:** SC050962

**Principal/CEO:** Mr Jeremy Kerswell

### **Inspectors**

Liz Driver, social care inspector

Janet Hunnam, social care inspector

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