

Exeter Mathematics School

Rougemont House, Castle Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 3PU

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

Exeter Mathematics School is a state-funded sixth form jointly sponsored by the University of Exeter and Exeter College. The school provides education for young people who have a particular interest in mathematics, physics and computing. Young people attend from across the South West and can access residential accommodation to avoid excessive travel.

Inspection dates 17 to 19 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: good

Date of last inspection: 14 June 2016

Key findings from this inspection

This college is outstanding because:

- Staff and students work in partnership producing an environment where students thrive academically, socially and emotionally.
- Uniqueness is valued. The service provided is bespoke, and students make life-changing progress.
- Leaders and managers are inspirational. They lead by example and make decisions that are informed by research, experience and from meaningful consultation with students.
- The staff adapt their approach and the school's residential provision to meet the needs of individual students. Students quickly realise that they can trust the staff to keep them safe, thus enabling the students to make progress.
- Students who access the residential accommodation make better progress educationally than day students. This progress is also above the national average.
- Governance of the school is supportive, challenging and thorough. Leadership and management is strong and effective.

The college's areas for development:

- While safeguarding records contain a wealth of information, the records are not always concise and well ordered.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: outstanding

Leaders, managers, staff and students have successfully created a positive environment that helps students to flourish. Staff and students interact positively with one another, and there is a clear focus on partnership working and respect. Students have said that this is the first time they have felt accepted and valued for their unique differences. Students describe the school as life changing. One student told the inspector he could not find the words to express the positive difference this school had made to him.

The residential provision is an important and highly valued aspect of the school. Residential students succeed very well because of the bespoke support that they receive for their social and emotional needs. Residential students make better progress academically than non-residential students and better progress than is nationally expected. This progress has continued to increase year on year.

The help and support given to students ensures that they are very well prepared for the workplace and to study at university. Students are provided with individualised opportunities to apply their mathematical learning in real-life situations. Because of these opportunities, students develop skills in public speaking, problem solving and undertaking research.

There are many examples of students making outstanding progress, particularly evident in the development of their emotional resilience, confidence and independence skills. A parent told the inspector that he dropped an 'anxious, scared student (who had previously been bullied and really struggled in the past) off at the school for the first time on a Monday and the difference in five days was unbelievable. The student I got back on the Friday was barely recognisable and couldn't wait to return to the school.' Several parents and students describe the staff as 'wonderful' and the school as 'transformational'.

Support provided to students is personalised from their first initial meetings with staff. The small numbers of students mean that any concerns or difficulties are easily and readily identified. Action is taken swiftly to ensure that students feel comfortable, safe and included.

Two residential student mentors help those new to accommodation to integrate, fostering friendships and avoiding any student from becoming isolated.

Students who stay in the residential provision develop practical independence skills (particularly around food preparation and cooking), self-reliance and interpersonal skills, which increase their confidence and self-esteem. Alumni of the school report that they feel at a distinct advantage over their peers at university, who are starting from scratch in looking after themselves.

How well young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Inclusivity, mutual respect and equality are convincingly embedded into practice and seen throughout the provision. Relationships between staff and students are exceptionally good because staff take time to get to know students' individual needs, listen to them and help them to successfully meet their personal goals. Students report that they can readily approach any member of staff with concerns and trust them to act in their best interests.

Leaders, managers and staff have successfully dealt with several safeguarding issues in imaginative and constructive ways to return students to safety and/or avoid anxiety. Research is used effectively by leaders and managers to explore support services for those students who have unique complex needs. Leaders are not afraid to challenge others when services fail or fall below expectations in supporting students. A tenacious and resourceful approach secured the status and financial support needed to provide accommodation for a student who was found to be homeless. A wealth of information is maintained regarding safeguarding concerns. However, not all safeguarding files are currently concise or well ordered.

Behaviour management is built on clear expectations and modelling of respect for others by both the staff and students. Arbitrary rewards and sanctions do not play a part in managing behaviour. A passion for learning, drive to succeed and a genuine working partnership between staff and students promotes positive behaviour and commitment. Leaders, managers and staff know students well and identify subtle nuances in behaviour or attainment and provide the right support and guidance. Restraint to manage behaviour is not a feature of this school, neither are there any incidents of students going missing.

A rigorous recruitment process is followed by staff. Leaders and managers seek to understand the suitability of candidates through several interviews and testing of their ability and understanding. Students are actively involved in the recruitment process.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers lead by example, using creative ideas and research to help them to provide students with bespoke care. They have high expectations for both students and staff and are open to new ideas and innovation. Academic improvement is well evidenced and has been sustained over time. The strengths and weakness of the school are understood and well documented in development plans.

Students' views are highly valued and meaningfully obtained. Student representatives attend governor meetings, where they have equal opportunities to challenge leaders and managers about the development of the school and the residential provision.

Much of the positive practice in this school is worthy of wider dissemination to other providers. Managers share best practice through their attendance at providers' forums. Some staff also provide training to others to boost their skills and knowledge.

Meaningful partnerships exist with other agencies such as academic institutions and industry. These partnerships enhance the opportunities available to students both

academically and socially. Good use is made of a partner college gym and well-being facilities. Links with industry provide students with work experience opportunities where they can apply their learning and be involved in research and take part in solving real world problems.

Staff are highly committed to ensuring that their students have the best possible experience while at the school. Many students have previously experienced bullying and isolation due to their mathematic ability. As one student put it, 'Here, being a "geek" is positive and valued.' Overwhelmingly positive feedback has been received from both current and previous students, who cite numerous examples of the difference the school has made to increasing their confidence, reducing anxiety and valuing their unique skills, while also ensuring that they make friends.

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: 1238047

Principal/CEO: Kerry Burnham

Inspector

Janice Hawtin, social care inspector

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