

# 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 the Activate Learning organisation. It is a specialist land-based college and is located three miles from Guildford town centre. The 400-acre site provides a range of vocational further education and higher education courses. All residential accommodation for students under the age of 18 is on the main site in three different halls of residence. Currently, there are 28 residential students.

### Inspection dates: 28 and 30 September 2021

**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.

**Date of last inspection:** 19 February 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Residential students enjoy living in a safe supportive community where variety, difference and individuality are celebrated and enjoyed. The students thrive and enjoy their success. The community is lively and has a strong feeling of mutual support and respect. Data gathered shows that residential students achieve at better levels than their non-residential peers. This adds 'extra value' to the residential experience.

Residential students describe living in the halls of residence as relaxing and welcoming.

Relationships between the students and the wardens caring for them are warm, trusting and understanding. Students speak highly of the staff who care for them and particularly praise the approach and support they receive from the residential services manager. One residential student commented, 'I just know I can go to her; I know she'll listen.'

The monitoring and evidencing of students' success are exemplars. Detailed records show how each student has thrived both academically and with their social and life skills. Each student receives bespoke individualised support aimed at their level of confidence and understanding. Wardens encourage and enable students to develop their independence and they give extra support to those who need it. One parent said about their son, 'He was shy and reserved at first and has become more confident in just three weeks, forming friends, which he had found difficult before.' Another parent commented about her daughter, 'She has grown hugely in confidence, which is great to see.'

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' emotional and academic growth has been very well managed. Of particular note was that a number of students chose to remain in the residential provision during the periods of national lockdown because the setting gave them stability, security and support. Students who were at home and who needed extra support during this time received regular contact from staff to check up on their welfare and to offer support and guidance where needed. Staff's interest in their students' well-being helped to strengthen the bonds and underpin the trusting relationships through a difficult time.

This a community which offers support to each other and which will advocate for others if needed. There is a strong sense of communal togetherness. This ensures that no one is isolated. The residential students feel that although they have differing identities, beliefs and backgrounds, they are part of a safe and welcoming community where they are respected and valued.

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

There is a strong safeguarding culture in the residential provision and wider college campus. Residential students live in a safe environment where they are listened to and staff respond to their needs and vulnerabilities.

Safeguarding systems have been reviewed and strengthened following concerns about their effectiveness 18 months ago. Managers have addressed the shortfalls decisively and have ensured that there is now a stronger culture and raised awareness of safeguarding issues.

Students feel safe and supported. This view is endorsed by parents, who are confident that their children are safeguarded effectively and have very positive relationships with the staff who care for them.

Although there are no current concerns in relation to students going missing from the residential provision, drug misuse and child sexual exploitation, all members of staff know what to do and who to inform if they become aware of any of these issues. This includes knowing what to do if there are contextual safeguarding concerns which need to be shared with other agencies or colleges. Staff are well grounded and knowledgeable in this area. However, although staff know who to contact as far as external agencies are concerned, they are not consistently clear regarding which manager to inform if an incident occurs outside of office hours.

There are clear risk assessments which inform staff practice in relation to the activities the students take part in and students' individual vulnerabilities. For example, there are personal emergency evacuation plans for students who need additional support. These are known and understood by the staff and students' peers.

Residential students say that there is no bullying or discrimination. One parent reported, 'My son is free to express himself in the way he wants, something he could not do at school.' Students treat each other with respect and form supportive relationships.

There is good communication with external safeguarding agencies. Prompt liaison with the police or with child protection services ensures that issues are addressed swiftly and students' well-being and safety are promoted to a good standard. Records of incidents examined by the inspectors confirmed that decisive action is taken when it is needed.

Internet safety is an embedded part of the curriculum. Students know how to keep safe when using the internet and social media, and they know how to raise any concerns.

Safer recruitment is followed on the whole. Records of interviews are not of a consistently thorough quality. On one occasion, the reasons why a member of staff had left their previous employment had not been recorded although recruiting officers reported it had been discussed at interview. Although in this case the safety of the students had not been compromised, it was a missed opportunity to evidence the thoroughness of the recruitment process.

The physical environment is well maintained and safe. The team responsible for the maintenance and safety of the large estate is effective in ensuring that routine checks are carried out and deficiencies addressed. Fire safety is underpinned by the regular assessment of fire equipment and regular fire drills for the residential students.

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

Residential students are cared for by a team of staff who have their well-being and progress at the centre of their thoughts and practice. The students have an array of staff who they can go to for support and advice. A highly motivated team of wardens who are managed to a high standard, skilfully provide guidance, nurturing and advice.

The individualised support provided to students is a particular strength. It shows the insight of the staff, bearing in mind that they are providing support to a range of students who are keen to develop their careers and independence. The students wish to be treated as young adults while at the same time being under 18. The wardens manage this time of transition with skill, sensitivity and insight.

The residential wardens work in other areas of the campus during the day, so they are aware of any events or dynamics which may have an impact on the residential students. Consequently, they are able to follow through concerns in a consistent and knowledgeable manner. Communication between different disciplines across the site is excellent. Issues are shared swiftly and action plans put in place if needed.

Liaison with stakeholders is effective and prompt. Safeguarding concerns are shared swiftly with relevant agencies and strategies put in place to manage situations when they are needed.

There has been a significant change in the leadership of the residential provision in the last 18 months. This has been welcomed by the students, who report that the new manager and the wardens are approachable, caring and warm. The significant positive change in culture has led to a stronger feeling of a supportive community and a sense that issues can be raised and discussed openly.

Innovation and opportunities to improve the service are welcomed and encouraged by the leadership team. Examples include the use of geo location equipment to improve responses to maintenance issues on the large site and the installation of new recording systems to streamline responses to issues raised by

students or if there are safeguarding concerns. Additionally, the use of technology has meant that students can raise issues with student support services by using easily accessible internet links available around the campus.

Staff are trained and knowledgeable about their roles and the needs and vulnerabilities of the students. They attend regular meetings and daily briefings to ensure that they have the information they need in order to be aware of which students may need additional support. Their knowledge of each student's character, strengths and issues which may be of concern is excellent and insightful.

There is active engagement with external stakeholders both statutory and industry related. For example, safeguarding services are contacted if needed and prospective employers are invited to visit the college so that students' abilities and skills can be promoted.

Staff take pride in students' work and achievements and promote these on a wider basis in the community. This enhances students' chances of employment and career opportunities beyond their time at the college. It also encourages transparency and a sense that external stakeholders are welcome and that information is shared appropriately and promptly if needed.

## **What does the college need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that records of recruitment interviews contain all the relevant details.
- Ensure that members of staff know which manager to inform of any safeguarding concerns which occur outside of office hours.

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people, 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:** Sally Dicketts

### **Inspectors**

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector  
Keith Riley, Social Care Inspector

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