

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. At the time of the inspection, there were 40 young people staying in the residential accommodation.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 March 2023

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking into 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.

Date of last inspection: 18 September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: outstanding

Students thrive in a welcoming and inclusive boarding environment. They say they would 'absolutely' recommend boarding at this college. Students like meeting new friends from different backgrounds. They value the dedicated support from boarding staff, whether this is helping them learn how to cook or navigating exam stress. They say staff are always there if they need them. Staff nurture students' interests and help them achieve balance with their academic commitments.

Students benefit from a variety of stimulating opportunities to expand their interests. Some students enjoy exploring the city or playing sports. Others like meeting as a group to play a variety of table-top strategy games. Students enjoy relaxing in the kitchen at the end of their day, sharing their news with their friends and staff. Staff support students to develop their independence in preparation for their future. All students cook on a rota basis and leave the provision with a qualification in food hygiene. Staff support students to cook for other residents, and to be more adventurous in what they eat. This builds their confidence and provides creative opportunities for staff to spend meaningful time with them.

Students in boarding accomplish excellent education outcomes. They achieve results that support them to progress to university and degree apprenticeships. Students flourish as a result of a well-rounded education. Leaders embed opportunities for group working and public speaking into daily life. They encourage students to run their own clubs and activities, reflecting their interests. This helps them to develop leadership and negotiation skills. The voice of students is highly valued. The strong student council includes representatives who board, and their perspectives become incorporated into planning. Students treat each other with respect and support those who are less confident to have their voice heard.

Parents say their children thrive in boarding and have access to a range of excellent opportunities to develop their social skills. They say that their children develop the skills they need to live independently and that staff achieve a balance between pastoral care and giving young people independence. Most parents say they are happy with the level of information they receive from staff and that communication is effective. One student's parents have raised concerns about the level of communication and the support offered to their child. As a result of these concerns, leaders are undertaking a full review of communication and information-sharing.

How well young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Pastoral welfare has a high priority in the boarding provision. Since the last inspection, the college has appointed a dedicated pastoral lead. This person has close oversight and responsibility for boarding. Seamless communication takes place between boarding, pastoral and college staff. As a result, staff take action to support students where needed.

Students say they feel safe living in the boarding accommodation. They feel safe in the physical environment, but also in being able to express their identity. One student said, 'There is no pressure on anyone to be anything other than themselves.' Staff proactively support students to develop their understanding of important issues such as mental health and healthy relationships. Staff use research and data to help students learn about these issues, in a way that meets their needs.

Staff confidently identify and respond to safeguarding concerns that arise. When students have gone missing, staff act immediately and robustly to reduce further risk. Staff work effectively with statutory bodies and other support services to meet students' needs. Staff are proactive in seeking support for students. Clear information-sharing and partnership working happen where needed. Professionals say communication with staff is excellent. They say staff develop positive, trusting relationships with students. This helps to keep students safe.

Staff recruitment follows the relevant statutory guidance. Staff maintain a safe physical environment, with relevant health and safety and fire checks completed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders create and inspire a culture of acceptance and inclusion. As a result, staff and students treat each other with mutual respect. Leaders understand the social and emotional challenges faced by many of the students who board. The holistic package of support created in response is transformational for their futures.

Since the last inspection, an additional member of boarding staff has been appointed. This has created a strong, supportive boarding team. They work together collaboratively to provide students with excellent opportunities. Boarding staff receive regular supervision with their line managers. In addition to this, they receive external supervision from a therapist to further reflect on their own practice. They say both are highly supportive to their development.

A culture of learning, development and improvement is evident throughout the whole provision. Leaders seek regular feedback from students, parents and staff, and make changes as a result of these consultations. Boarding staff visit other provisions to inform their practice. Reports written following these visits show the learning and development identified. As a result of these visits, staff employ critical thinking and reflection into their own practice.

The governing body provides a high level of scrutiny and challenge to leaders. Governors support the drive for continuous development through their oversight.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Point for improvement

- The college leaders should ensure learning from the review of communication is put into practice.

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: 1238047

Principal/CEO:

Inspectors

Clare Nixon, Social Care Inspector - lead

Clare Davies, Social Care Inspector

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