

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 on the South Downs in East Sussex. The college offers a diverse range of land-based courses. It has an 800-hectare commercial farm. At the time of this inspection, the college was accommodating 121 students, of whom 55 were aged between 16 and 18.

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 May 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

The diverse residential population is a thriving community of students who enjoy being part of an accepting and stimulating peer group. Relationships between the staff and students are positive. Staff provide nurturing support and are genuinely caring and respectful.

Effective communication between the disciplines across the campus ensures that students' well-being is at the centre of practice. As a result, students feel valued, respected and listened to.

Residential staff know the students very well. They know their characteristics and personalities, their strengths and vulnerabilities. Consequently, staff are swift to pick up on any concerns and ensure that students receive the support and nurture that they need.

Students are confident in voicing their thoughts and opinions. They have numerous avenues that they can use to express their opinions or raise complaints. Complaints from residential students are rare and are appropriately and effectively resolved.

Leaders are aware of the impact that COVID-19 has had on students who have missed out on schooling and socialising for a significant period. They ensure that students are well supported, and any needs are addressed quickly and effectively.

Students' anxieties about starting college are managed and alleviated with considerable skill and insight from members of staff. Careful, bespoke planning acknowledges the challenges for the students. Each student is supported in a way which is right for them.

The provision of varied and stimulating activities is a strength of the college. The wide range of subjects which students study are supported by a wide variety of activities. These help students gain confidence, make friends and enjoy the diverse personalities around them.

The strong culture of acceptance and tolerance is a valued and meaningful asset in this community. The promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion is evident across the campus. Any specific needs or traits are acknowledged and catered for sensitively. Staff have a deep insight and understanding of the individual challenges and anxieties which some students may have.

Students enjoy a varied menu in a well-ordered and well-run cafe. Students' sensory needs have been considered in the design of the cafe. Students who have specific dietary needs or eating disorders are provided with sensitive support by the catering staff, who share any concerns with key staff in the college.

There is a strong emphasis on preparing students for their chosen careers. This helps them to focus and use different opportunities to reach their goals. A student told the inspectors, 'This place has changed my life.'

How well young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Students say that they feel safe in the residential accommodation and across the campus. They know that the support staff know them well and notice if they are feeling upset or distressed. They refer to the college as a 'close-knit community' and the staff as part of their 'wider family'.

Staff are acutely aware of each student's risks and vulnerabilities. They understand the processes to follow should they be concerned for a student's welfare or safety. Joint working with partner agencies is a particular strength. Staff charged with safeguarding lead responsibilities are constantly seeking to improve links with the local authority to keep students safe. When shortfalls in practice are identified, leaders respond swiftly and learn from any incidents.

Staff help students to learn the skills that they need to manage challenges, for example, when for some there are difficulties with their families or members of the community who do not recognise their gender identity. Students are helped to develop strategies to manage when they are away from the college. Staff also have strong links with charities which can continue to provide support and guidance at these times. The college has recently held a 'Plumpton Pride' event and is working closely with a local LGBTQ+ charity to ensure that they are providing the best possible support for students and staff.

The college environment is thoughtfully designed to provide emotionally and psychologically safe or sensory spaces for students to be calm and relax. Those who are neurodiverse know that the college is a safe place to be themselves.

Thoughtful risk assessment and safety practices mean that students, staff and visitors' safety is paramount. When risks are identified, they are remedied immediately. Electronic alerts mean that all staff are notified of any urgent or immediate risks and swift action is taken to keep students safe.

Safer recruitment practice is efficient and effective, reducing the risk of students encountering unsuitable people. Staff who live on site are clear about the boundaries and expectations should they have family or friends visiting.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The college is led by a highly aspirational senior leadership team. They are passionate about improving the opportunities and life chances for all students. There is a culture of ensuring that no matter what level a student can learn at, there is a place and course for them.

The progress of students is monitored closely and sound advice and guidance helps students to succeed in their chosen careers. Good use of progress monitoring data helps to guide students and increases their desire to learn and achieve. When it is identified that a course, or the college, is not right for a student, they are supported to find more suitable options.

Communication between staff is swift and effective. Students receive the support and guidance necessary to achieve and know what is expected of them. This also means that staff across the college can help and support students in times of need.

The governance of the college is highly effective. The board consists of members with a varied knowledge base who work alongside the senior leaders as critical friends. They have an active presence in the college and provide strong scrutiny of safeguarding procedures and the college residential provision. Leaders and governors acknowledge that the residential areas require refurbishment in some areas, and plans are in place for this.

Residential staff feel particularly well supported by the senior staff. There is a low turnover of staff, leading to a predictable environment for students. Weekly one-to-one sessions and team meetings are exemplars of good practice. They allow staff a safe space to discuss their emotions and enable valuable support to be provided to students. In addition, staff with designated safeguarding lead duties are provided with specific supervision sessions. The importance of supporting staff and their emotional well-being is recognised by senior leaders. The induction for new staff is well structured and ensures that they have the key training and skills that they need before spending time with students.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Point for improvement

- College leaders should ensure that the residential provision is suitably maintained and refurbished where needed.

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: SC050962

Principal: Jeremy Kerswell

Inspectors

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector

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