

Inspection of Plumpton College

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 March 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Plumpton College is a small, specialist further education college in East Sussex. It provides courses mainly in land-based subjects. The main campus is on a large rural estate near Lewes. There are also courses provided at Stanmer Park in Brighton. At the time of this inspection, the college had just over 1,000 students aged 16 to 18, 618 adult students, 370 apprentices and 74 students in receipt of high-needs funding. The majority of young students are studying on level 3 programmes, such as animal management, floristry and agriculture. Of the apprentices, 56 are under the age of 19 and 314 are over 19. A large proportion of apprentices complete their studies at level 3 on the small animal veterinary nursing standard. There are an additional 210 students aged 14 to 16 on school link programmes, or for those who are electively home educated.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students flourish in the positive and inclusive culture at the college. Students studying equine management support others through the 'Changing Lives Through Horses' programme for disadvantaged adults and young people from the local community. Students studying level 3 agriculture are taught to challenge and support one another effectively when evaluating farming produce business ideas and farm designs. The vast majority of students and apprentices are polite, respectful and courteous of others. They celebrate one another's differences and enjoy learning in a diverse environment.

Students and apprentices develop the attitudes and behaviours required to work in industry. Apprentices studying the veterinary nurse standard embrace the professional code of conduct for nursing and uphold high standards of animal care. Adults studying the level 2 dog grooming standard adhere to professional standards when grooming client dogs, such as considering dog skin disorders, grooming equipment maintenance and biosecurity. Students quickly learn and demonstrate the professional competencies required for the sectors in which they wish to work.

Students value the purposeful and professional learning environments that replicate the industries in which they want to work. For example, students on the bakery apprenticeship learn in a purpose-built bakery, where they use industry standard specialist equipment. Those studying viticulture learn in a professional winery, working in high-quality laboratories and tasting rooms. Adult students particularly value the opportunity to learn at 'One Garden Brighton', as this facility is designed specifically for adult learners studying horticulture. Students and apprentices are well-prepared to work in specific industries.

Students and apprentices have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy their learning and are motivated to be successful. The vast majority of students and apprentices progress to positive destinations.

The vast majority of apprentices, adult students and students with high needs attend well and are punctual. However, too many young students' attendance on full-time level 3 courses is too low and, consequently, they miss valuable learning time. This negatively impacts upon their progress.

Students and apprentices feel safe at the college. They learn how to keep themselves and others safe, both in the practical learning spaces as well as in the workplace. For example, apprentices studying the veterinary nurse standard recognise that they must not handle certain medication, due to the possible negative effects. For example, they can explain the adverse effects that steroid medication can have on pregnant women. Young students studying motor vehicle level 1 are able to assess risks in the workshop, spotting hazards such as oil before starting their practical work. Students know how to report any concerns they have if they arise, and value the support services that are available to them.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

The senior leadership team has established extremely effective relationships with an extensive range of relevant stakeholders. Senior leaders use these links very well to understand the current and emerging skills needs of the local, regional and national land-based industries. They are very active members of various stakeholder representative groups. For example, they work closely with the Sussex Chamber of Commerce, other sector specialist bodies and employer groups.

Curriculum staff have very well-developed relationships with stakeholders across all curriculum areas and use these links to learn more about their sector's changing needs. For example, the impact of climate change, digital ways of working and sustainable practices in production horticulture. Stakeholders provide frequent masterclasses to showcase the latest thinking and research on sustainability. As a result, students are learning content that is preparing them well for the world of work.

Leaders also work thoughtfully and responsibly with a range of local authorities and schools to meet a broader range of needs in their local community. They are passionate about raising awareness of the importance of their specialist sectors. They are keen to encourage students in the community to benefit from their industry standard facilities, particularly those who have never considered studying land-based programmes.

Curriculum staff work effectively with employers, universities and a broad range of specialist sector bodies to understand their vocational specialism and how it is evolving. This helps staff to keep up with the latest developments. For example, a recent stakeholder forum considered the digital advances in agronomy and how digital advancements are increasingly used in crop protection and soil management. Staff use this information to review and modify their curriculum, making sure it teaches the skills needed for the sector.

Leaders and managers have rapidly developed new and modified existing provision to address employer needs. For example, they now offer a range of smaller specific courses on topics, such as soil science and tree felling. They are acutely aware of the projected growth of the viticulture industry and the resultant staffing needs, and are working diligently with employers to plan for this growth.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have carefully considered the rationale for their curriculum, which is well designed to meet local, regional and national skills gaps in the land-based sector. They work collaboratively and effectively with employers and stakeholders to ensure the curriculum remains current and supports the ambitions of young people and apprentices to work within the sector.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have significantly improved the quality of the provision for students with high needs. Managers and teachers implement highly effective teaching strategies and tailored support to make sure students reach their full potential. Students with high needs make excellent progress towards their planned outcomes.

Leaders and managers effectively strengthen the quality of training for apprentices. Managers successfully identify apprentices' support needs early and implement interventions and adaptations swiftly to make sure they stay on track. Leaders and managers have been highly effective in ensuring employers are actively involved in apprenticeships. As a result, apprentices attend well, are highly motivated, and most apprentices remain on their apprenticeship. Many apprentices achieve a distinction grade.

Leaders and managers have developed a highly relevant range of adult education programmes with the aim of teaching people, who are out of work or retraining, the skills they need for employment. For example, students swiftly learn the required skills in forestry and arboriculture to gain the licences to practise in the industry. The Royal Horticulture Society adult provision prepares students well for entry into employment, addressing skills gaps within the horticulture sector. Adult students progress exceptionally well on to higher level qualifications, employment or self-employment in their chosen sector.

Leaders and managers have designed a well-planned curriculum. Teachers on the veterinary nurse apprenticeship start by teaching anatomy and physiology, before building on this knowledge to teach learners the more complex theory of anaesthesia. Adults studying level 2 dog grooming learn about dog breeds, coats, behaviour and handling before progressing to practical grooming. As a result, students and apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours and can complete tasks that increase in complexity over time.

Young students benefit from relevant and good-quality work experience. Students talk to visitors about animal care and run touch table activities at Drusillas Zoo. Students develop their understanding of how to apply complex legislation when working with a wide range of species at Heathrow animal reception centre. Students are developing workplace skills essential for the industries and settings into which they wish to progress.

Leaders have designed a curriculum which is ambitious. Students with additional learning support needs and those with high needs feel at ease and welcomed within the college. They are supported very effectively by specialist staff to make sure they can access the curriculum and study successfully alongside their peers. Students with high needs are well-prepared for their next steps into further education, employment and towards greater independence.

Teachers use their industry expertise and knowledge well to engage, inspire and share current industry challenges and trends. Teachers of horticulture discuss

climate change and the realistic challenges this has presented to the sector. Teachers share their own industry experiences, such as activities from a recent weekend shift in an emergency animal care setting. As a result, students better understand the relevance of what they are learning, as well as the challenges within the various sectors they study. They appreciate the resilience needed to achieve their ambitions.

Employers value the extensive knowledge and expert skills that apprentices learn while at college. Apprentices studying level 3 viticulture develop useful scientific knowledge that they use at work to help employers treat their vineyards. Apprentices studying bakery understand the ethics of sourcing sustainable ingredients. They produce high-quality baked products, which often exceed the required standard. As a result, apprentices make excellent progress. They become more confident and make a very positive contribution to their workplaces.

Teachers engage students and apprentices effectively in well-taught theory and practical lessons. Teachers use effective strategies such as demonstration followed by opportunities for further practise. Teachers also make use of effective questioning techniques to extend the depth of learners' knowledge. For example, GCSE English teachers encourage students to justify their evaluations of texts so they can rehearse responses and participate more effectively in group debate. As a result of effective teaching, students and apprentices have a good recall of what they are taught over time.

Teachers consistently model appropriate technical and professional language in workshops and classroom sessions. Animal management students describe how to calculate doses of vaccines based on the weight of an animal. As a result, students and apprentices quickly become competent and confident in using professional terminology.

Leaders and managers provide a well-developed careers programme. Students and apprentices are effectively prepared for the next stage through positive interactions with employers and beneficial advice, guidance and support from highly skilled and experienced staff. The vast majority of students have a clear plan for their future progression.

Students benefit from an outstanding personal development curriculum. Leaders and staff provide students with a wide range of activities and opportunities that develop their interests and talents. Students benefit from enrichment activities and additional qualifications that are of exceptional quality. For example, British Sign Language and carbon literacy qualifications, also safer driving and drugs awareness programmes. Students actively participate in charitable activities, where they raise funds for a school in Kenya. As a result, students value a broader social life at college and develop new skills.

Expert governors strengthen leadership and make valuable contributions to the strategic direction of the college. For example, governors were deeply involved in the discussion, planning and approval for the new AgriFood Centre, confirming for

themselves the educational benefits to students. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and support and challenge leaders to continuously improve quality.

The feedback that teachers provide young students on their work does not help them to understand what steps they need to take in order to improve the standard of their work. Staff in these areas rightly recognise the need to strengthen the quality of the feedback they provide to students.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Make sure that a higher proportion of young students attend lessons.
- Improve the quality of feedback on young students' work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130667
Address	Ditchling Road Plumpton Lewes East Sussex BN7 3AE
Contact number	01273890454
Website	www.plumpton.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jeremy Kerswell
Provider type	Specialist further education college
Date of previous inspection	20 to 23 February 2018

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Richard Kirkham, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Mark Hillman	His Majesty's Inspector
Nicki Adams	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Suki Dhesi	Ofsted Inspector
Julia Gray	Ofsted Inspector
Joanne Keatley	Ofsted Inspector
Mel Coleman-Clements	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Monaghan	His Majesty's Inspector
Alison Muggridge	Ofsted Inspector
Viki Faulkner	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024