



Fairfield Farm College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published December 2006	Provider reference 131875
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Fairfield Farm College
Type of college:	Independent, specialist, residential
Principal:	Janet Kenward
Address of college:	Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 4DL
Telephone number:	01373 823028
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Chair of governors:	Alison Irving
Unique reference number:	131875
Name of lead inspector:	Charlie Henry, HMI
Dates of inspection:	9-12 October 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Fairfield Farm College is an independent specialist college providing further education for students interested in land-based studies and independent life skills. It is based in the West Wiltshire village of Dilton Marsh, close to the small market town of Westbury. On the 25 acre site, there is the main college building as well as facilities for horticulture and the care of a range of farm animals. There is also a farm shop. The college was formerly known as Fairfield Opportunity Farm.
2. The college aims to increase its students' independence skills, confidence, self-esteem and ability to live in the community, while learning pre-vocational skills in the areas of catering, engineering, farming, horse studies, horticulture and house maintenance.
3. The college offers a three-year programme for students aged 16-25 who have moderate or severe learning difficulties. Many students have additional medical conditions and about half have communication disorders, including autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). There are both day and residential students. Residential students live in five houses in the village, close to the main college site. There are currently 30 students: two thirds are male and very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Almost all of the students are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). They attend from across the country, although most are from the region around the college.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and students' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: grade 3
Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

5. Fairfield Farm College is a satisfactory and improving specialist college. Significant improvements have been made since the last inspection, particularly over the last two college terms, although not all of these have yet shown their effects in the progress that students make.
6. Students make satisfactory progress across a wide range of pre-vocational skills and personal development as they move towards more independent living, studying and work arrangements when they leave the college. Progress is satisfactory in literacy and numeracy, although the development of communication skills is slower for those students who have significant difficulties in this aspect of their learning. Students make an outstanding contribution to the community, particularly through the student council, decisions taken in their houses and the broader contact with the local area.
7. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The use of target setting has improved and focuses lessons on the most important areas to be learned. Teachers plan interesting lessons using the high quality practical resources for learning about farming and horticulture. They encourage students to become more independent, although occasionally they are too directive or do not give sufficient time for students to do things for themselves. Assessment and recording of progress have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. However, the college has not been able to provide enough specialist speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy assessments.
8. The range of pre-vocational programmes meets students' needs well. The college's own award scheme provides opportunity for skills development at different levels. The daily living skills curriculum is satisfactory, although the college has correctly identified that more needs to be done on developing students' management of their own money. The range of enrichment activities undertaken in the evenings and at weekends is outstanding and contributes very well indeed to students' personal development.
9. The quality of care, support and guidance is good. The tutorial programme is effective and covers important aspects of personal, social and health education. Arrangements for planning for when students move on from the college are good. Social and educational inclusion are also good. The college focuses well on ensuring that it meets each student's needs.
10. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The principal and other managers provide strong leadership towards improving the quality of the college and how well students achieve. There is not sufficient rigour in monitoring key aspects of the provision and in using information about how well students are learning to improve quality further and raise achievements. Appropriate procedures for

safeguarding students are in place. Financial management is effective. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: grade 3

11. The college's capacity to improve is satisfactory. The staff's commitment to further improvement is high and the clear leadership from the principal and other senior staff ensures that the focus is firmly on improving quality and raising achievements. The self-assessment report is satisfactory, showing a broad review of the college's work. However, insufficient rigour in some aspects of quality monitoring reduces the value of the report as a basis for planning improvement. Development plans are realistic and sufficiently detailed. Significant changes in management have made decision making and communication more effective, although as these changes are relatively recent they have not yet fully demonstrated their effect on how well students learn. The trustees provide good support for the college's improvement and are increasingly informed about its performance.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

12. The college has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Improvements have been made to leadership and strategic planning, the quality of teaching and learning, and to the level of staff expertise. Procedures for assessing students' needs, as well as monitoring and recording their achievements, have also improved, but more is still required to ensure there is consistent good practice. The college now complies with statutory requirements relating to equality and diversity. The provision for specialist therapy assessment and support needs remains inadequate despite substantial efforts by the college to meet these needs.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- students' outstanding contribution to the community
- rigorous planning for transition
- high quality learning resources and accommodation for practical studies
- the excellent range of enrichment activities.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the provision of specialist therapy assessment and support
- the rigour of monitoring of assessment, target setting, planning and recording
- the use of information about students' progress across the college to raise achievements further.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Satisfactory: grade 3

13. Students' achievements are satisfactory. The college accurately identifies that its students make satisfactory progress in a wide variety of practical skills in real life contexts. They learn to handle and care for animals and to maintain property and machines. They develop the skills to work in gardens, on the farm and in the nursery. They improve their ability to care for themselves and their homes. They learn to cross roads safely, to shop and cook for themselves. They develop confidence and social skills and act as advocates for the college at public events. Students achieve Vocational and Independence Training Awards (VITAs) at three levels, up to entry level 1. This is a college-devised and externally moderated system to recognise and reward students' progress and achievement. However, not having an accurate assessment of what students can do when they join the college has created difficulties in assessing the progress of second and third year students. The levels of VITAs in relation to the national qualification framework are not sufficiently clear. Progress in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. A few students make slower progress in developing their communications skills. Annual certificates of achievement and other awards are also used and act as incentives. Students make an outstanding contribution to the community. They play a substantial part in decisions made in their residences and, through the students' council, broadly in the college. They contribute to the planning and running of dog and horse shows held at the college, and successfully compete at local horticultural and horse shows.
14. Progression from Fairfield Farm College is satisfactory. In 2004/05, three quarters of leavers progressed to full- or part-time courses at other colleges or into employment. In 2005/06, all leavers enrolled on college courses including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in catering, horse studies, horticulture and skills for life provision. Most students successfully move into supported residential accommodation on leaving; a minority return to their parental homes. Retention was a weakness at the last inspection but is now satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

15. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. This has improved significantly since the last inspection. The college has made good use of external consultancy to support and advise staff. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's most recent overall judgement on the quality of lessons. Students' targets and strategies are shared with all teaching and support staff. Teachers ensure that they remind students of their targets at the start of lessons. They use frequent questions to develop students' ability to think for themselves, to predict consequences and to understand the reasons behind

procedures. Students are lively and interested in their lessons and stimulated by the practical curriculum. However, occasionally staff still undertake aspects of tasks which students are capable of managing by themselves. Similarly, there are times when staff are over directive. Opportunities to teach health and safety issues are sometimes missed. The embedding of literacy and numeracy development within the curriculum is in its early stages.

16. Assessment and recording of students' progress are satisfactory. They were a weakness at the last inspection but greatly improved procedures are now in place, although completion of documentation is inconsistent. A pre-entry week's residential assesses the college's suitability to cater for applicants' needs. Results from the baseline assessment conducted over the first six weeks in college are recorded as the starting points from which to measure students' increasing skills. Tasks are broken down into small stages and progress against these is recorded, together with the degree of physical or verbal support provided. A final assessment, carried out twice with a minimum gap of two weeks, allows secure judgements to be made about students' competence. Necessary specialist assessments by speech and language therapists and occupational therapists have not all been completed.
17. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. There is a good range of practical pre-vocational programmes that meets the needs of students who have an interest in land-based subjects. The programmes enable students to develop a wide range of transferable skills which they use in their work experience in the second and third years. Students have the opportunity to work towards nationally recognised qualifications. There are nine students attending Wiltshire colleges taking qualifications in literacy, numeracy, catering and horse care.
18. The provision for, and delivery of, the daily living skills curriculum is satisfactory. It covers all the essential areas required for independent living. The college uses its own VITAs for each area in the curriculum and students progress between the levels from one to three. There is close liaison between the co-ordinator and the care staff to ensure effective delivery and monitoring of the curriculum. The students have sufficient opportunities to develop most skills for independent life such as shopping, independent travel and filling in forms through the 'home alone' programme. Currently, students do not have experience of budgeting or managing their own finances and bank account but the college is working with parents to develop this area.
19. There is an excellent and extensive range of activities available to all students during evenings and weekends, which effectively extends opportunities and forges very good links with the community. Activities include attendance at, and competing in, horse shows throughout the summer, dance and guitar classes and involvement in the village pantomime. There is a walking group which caters for different levels of walkers; the experienced ones walking ten miles every other Sunday.

20. The provision for work experience is satisfactory. All second and third year students undertake work experience for at least half a day a week. Work experience is based on students' interests but also on realistic expectations of what they are likely to achieve in terms of gaining employment. The college is now beginning to look at increasing the time spent on work experience as students progress through the third year of their programme.
21. Literacy and numeracy provision was a weakness at the last inspection but is now satisfactory. An experienced and well qualified co-ordinator has been appointed. In addition to carrying out diagnostic assessments, the co-ordinator advises teachers on appropriate targets and strategies for embedding skills in the curriculum. However, these developments are too recent to judge their effectiveness for students.
22. The quality of care, support and guidance is good. There is a clearly structured tutorial programme, which covers all of the important aspects of students' personal development and wellbeing. Group tutorials are well planned and cover a wide range of issues including personal, social and health topics. Individual tutorials take place weekly and students report they find them useful and get good support. The students have access to a college counsellor as and when needed. The college's approach to encouraging students to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle is satisfactory. One male member of staff has been trained in teaching sex and health education and the two care co-ordinators are to undertake the same training this year. Induction has been improved since the last inspection. The first year students now spend the first week on induction activities to familiarise them with the college, the residential houses and the village.
23. Transition arrangements are good. There is a clear, well structured career planning programme which covers all students and helps them to plan effectively for future employment. In the students' final year, they commence the 'Moving On' programme which helps them prepare for leaving Fairfield. The programme is well structured and firmly places the responsibility for researching future options, making choices and action planning with the students.
24. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good. There is a clear focus on enabling students to achieve their potential through the development of an individualised programme for each student. Students are involved in a wide range of community activities and some attend local further education colleges. They have their own student council which is an effective forum for discussing issues, raising concerns and making their own decisions on a wide range of topics. The college fulfils its responsibilities under equality and diversity legislation.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: grade 3

25. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Inspectors agree with the college's own assessment of the improvements made since the last inspection. The principal, supported well by other managers, provides strong leadership towards improving the quality of provision and raising students' achievements. This commitment is shared by all staff and is demonstrated by their enthusiasm for the college's work.
26. There has been significant change to the senior management of the college since the last inspection. This has led to clearer lines of responsibility and more effective decision making: for example, following delegation of financial management to members of staff. Formal communication between staff has improved significantly. As many of these changes are relatively recent, they have not yet had any discernible effect on students' learning.
27. Self-assessment and the monitoring of the college's performance are satisfactory. The college undertakes a broad evaluation of its performance, and has correctly identified that it needs to improve the thoroughness and accuracy of aspects of its own monitoring. For example, while the observation of teaching and learning has improved, it is still too variable in evaluating practice and providing information to improve the quality further. A range of other aspects of the college's work is also evaluated well: for example, through students' and parents' surveys and the follow-up with students after they have left college. However, as at the last inspection, there is too little rigour applied to checking the effectiveness of other key aspects such as assessment, target setting, planning and recording. Furthermore, whilst individual students' achievements are effectively monitored, this information is not pulled together to provide a whole college picture upon which further improvement can be planned.
28. The resources and accommodation for teaching practical aspects of the curriculum are good, including the farm and horticulture facilities and the farm shop. Tutor and support staffing levels and expertise are adequate to meet students' needs.
29. The trustees have increased their understanding of the work of the college and their involvement in supporting improvements. They are aware that they now need more detailed information about how well students are learning in order to monitor the effectiveness of the college.
30. The college has satisfactorily addressed its responsibilities under equality and diversity legislation. It has the required policies and action plans for ensuring racial equality and preventing disability discrimination. There are now plans to build on its awareness raising and monitoring of these aspects to more active promotion across all of its work. The college also meets its responsibilities for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Staff undergo the required training

and there is a central register to demonstrate that statutory recruitment checks are made.

31. Financial management is effective. The college understands that it now needs to make more explicit links between its monitoring of quality and achievements and its spending priorities. The college meets its contractual requirements with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide agreed levels of support for each learner. The college provides satisfactory value for money.