

Fairfield Opportunity Farm

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Fairfield Opportunity Farm
Type of college:	Independent specialist college
Director:	
Principal:	Janet Kenward
Address of college:	Dilton Marsh Westbury Wiltshire BA13 4DL
Telephone number:	01373 823028
Fax number:	01373 859032
Chair of governors:	Mr B A K Hester
Reference number*:	273924
Name of reporting inspector:	Kathleen Smith HMI
Dates of inspection:	1-5 November 2004

**charity or registered business number of the company running the college*

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

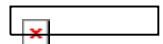
Fairfield Opportunity Farm is an independent specialist college for young people with learning disabilities. It offers residential and day provision for students aged 16 to 25. The college forms the major part of Fairfield Opportunity Farm (Dilton) Ltd, which is a limited company with charitable status. The charity was founded in 1975 and became a college in 1994. The charity also runs a farm shop and owns a nursery, which is currently leased to a small independent trader. The college consists of a 25-acre farm site and five houses located in close proximity of the farm. The college site is in the middle of the village, Dilton Marsh, and students make use of the local amenities.

Currently there are 29 residential students and no day students. There are 20 male and 9 female students; 18 are aged 16 to 18, and 11 are aged 19 or over. One male student is from a minority ethnic background. All students are funded by the Learning Skills Council (LSC), and two also receive funding from Social Services. Students have a range of learning disabilities, medical conditions and genetic disorders. There are 16 with severe, and 13 with moderate learning difficulties. Of the 29 students, 15 also have an additional communication difficulty, which includes those students with autistic spectrum disorders. None of the students has severe physical disabilities

or severe challenging behaviours.

The college aims to provide students with opportunities to learn new skills to prepare them for adult life in the community. All students follow the same curriculum programme, which is adapted to meet their individual needs. The curriculum is based around practical activities, which include farming, horse studies, horticulture, engineering, house maintenance skills, and catering. Also, students develop daily living, literacy, numeracy and communication skills within all curriculum activities. Some students undertake discrete lessons in literacy, numeracy and communications. The college uses its own internally developed vocational and independence training awards, to accredit students' achievements in practical skills.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the overall quality of provision to be inadequate. The college provides a well-resourced and supportive learning environment to develop pre-vocational and work-related skills. However, provision for literacy, numeracy and communications, and social and life skills is unsatisfactory. Leadership and management were unsatisfactory.

Key strengths

- good development of work-related skills
- good resources to support practical skills
- effective use of realistic contexts for learning
- safe and supportive learning environment.

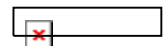
What should be improved?

- quality of teaching and planning for learning
- staff expertise and training
- the rigour of assessment, recording and monitoring of students' achievement

- assessment of students' specialist support needs
- strategic planning
- the management structure
- quality assurance arrangements
- promotion of equal opportunities and diversity.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Social and life skills	Unsatisfactory: In most lessons, there is insufficient planning for learning and poor development of students' social and life skills in the residential accommodation. There is effective development of health and safety awareness. Baseline assessment is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient strategic focus.
Pre-vocational studies	Satisfactory: Good use is made of practical activities to promote learning, and there is effective development of work-related skills. Resources to develop vocational skills are good. There is insufficient rigour in the assessment and monitoring of progress, and the curriculum offers limited opportunities for progression.
Literacy, numeracy and communications	Unsatisfactory: Planning is insufficiently matched to students' needs in lessons and specialist support for students with complex needs and specific learning disabilities is inadequate. Literacy and numeracy are integrated effectively into practical activities, and good use is made of a supportive environment to develop students' communication skills. Strategic management is unsatisfactory.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Managers place strong emphasis on the safety and well-being of students and provide them with a supportive environment where they feel respected and valued. Staff expertise, training and appraisal are unsatisfactory, and the college provides insufficient specialist support for students. Strategic planning is unsatisfactory and quality assurance arrangements are inadequate. Staff are actively involved in self-assessment, which correctly identified areas for improvement. Senior managers are aware of most weaknesses identified at inspection, but lack the support of a middle management team. Directors take an increasingly active role in the life of the college and are currently taking appropriate steps to improve weaknesses in governance. The college does not fully comply with legislation relating to child protection, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA), and Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. Financial management is satisfactory in meeting financial targets but senior managers are not sufficiently involved in decisions about the deployment of resources. Resources are not sufficiently deployed to provide good value for money to meet students' needs.

To what extent is the provision of the college educationally and socially inclusive?

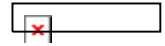
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory overall. Students feel respected and valued at the college. They are supported to develop respect for other people, and to use skills they have learned at college in order to help newer students with similar tasks and to contribute to village life. Students' involvement in the local community is good and the college has developed many links in local towns and villages to facilitate this. Through decision-making processes at the college, and by contributing to charity events, students are encouraged to consider the needs of others. Equal opportunities and personal development are not promoted adequately through the curriculum. The college's equal opportunities policy has been updated to take account of recent legislation on religion and sexuality but there is not yet a written equal opportunities strategy to assist the implementation of policies. Staff have received insufficient training in equal opportunities, diversity, child protection, and in meeting students' specific needs. The college has made adaptations to college buildings but does not fully comply with equal opportunities legislation such as SENDA and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. The college does not offer key skills for students. The college's provision for literacy, numeracy and communications is unsatisfactory.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

The college provides a satisfactory level of support and guidance for its students. Management and staff provide a supportive and safe environment that contributes to students' learning and well-being. Pastoral support is good and students can speak to their personal tutor or a key worker when they have a concern. Professional counselling is provided as needed. Arrangements at pre-entry and induction assist students' transition into the college and help them to settle quickly. The tutorial programme is satisfactory and supports the learning process. Careers education and guidance is

arrangements for students leaving college are good. Staff help students to find an appropriate placement and provide ongoing contact whilst they adapt to their new life. The support needs of students with complex and/or specific difficulties are not assessed in a timely and adequate way. The college does not provide sufficient specialist support, teaching or technology to meet students' needs.

Students' view of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below.

What students like about the college

- going to church
- having friends and going out
- working with horses
- evening activities
- being in the countryside
- working outdoors
- work experience
- the food
- making things to use.

What they feel could be improved

- not enough activities to do in the evening
- having to go to bed early
- working with horses
- too noisy at lunchtime.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole

Achievement and standards

1. Students develop appropriate work-related skills effectively. During practical curriculum activities, students demonstrated good awareness of health and safety issues, organised their tasks well, and effectively used tools and machinery. Students are made aware of the importance of punctuality and attendance and take responsibility for this by obtaining signatures and written comments from teaching staff on daily record sheets. For a few students, appropriate work placements are found to prepare them for the next stage in their lives and to develop their social and personal skills. When they leave the college, students progress into relevant work experience or supported employment, and undertake vocational courses in general further education (FE) colleges. However, the college provides insufficient opportunities for those students who would benefit, to undertake off-site work experience and accredited programmes.

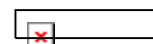
2. Although students develop good health and safety awareness, social and life skills achievements are unsatisfactory. Social and life skills development is ineffective within the residences; insufficient attention is paid to building on skills they have already learned. Students learn appropriate social skills whilst using community facilities and participating in village life. They perform to a high standard in local events such as horse and agricultural shows and attend ploughing competitions.

3. Standards of work in literacy and numeracy skills are inadequate. Although there are good examples of integrating literacy and numeracy across curriculum areas this is at an early stage of development and students' achievements are not yet sufficiently recognised or recorded. Students' communication skills are effectively developed where practised in social situations, such as when communicating with staff and peers, initiating conversations or communicating effectively in shops.

4. Students' achievements over time are difficult to identify due to inadequate baseline assessments of students' skills and attainment on joining the college. In some curriculum activities, appropriate attention is paid to the priorities identified within individual learning plans and teachers record useful information about students' progress towards these objectives. In other lessons, the focus is on completing tasks as specified within the internally developed vocational and independence training award. Where this occurs, students' achievements in relation to individual learning plan priorities are not sufficiently recorded. The vocational and independence training award is still at an early stage of development and standards relating to the three levels of attainment have not been formalised. Some students, especially those in their second and third years, repeat tasks needlessly that they have already achieved.

5. Retention rates for 2003/04 are 87% which compares unfavourably with rates of 95% or more within specialist colleges. During inspection, attendance and punctuality was satisfactory.

Quality of education and training



6. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in literacy, numeracy and communications, and social and life skills. Teaching is most effective in pre-vocational and practical skills. The staff use their knowledge of students to promote learning effectively. In practical lessons, students are engaged and motivated. In the best teaching, practical activities are well planned to develop appropriate work-related skills. Teaching is less effective in literacy, numeracy, and social and life skills. In many lessons, tasks are insufficiently matched to students' needs. In some cases, students undertake inappropriate tasks such as writing over the teacher's handwriting to list evening activities on their timetable or reading books which are too difficult for some to read or understand. In students' houses, support workers are overly directive and provide students with too few opportunities to reflect back on the task they have undertaken, or to learn from making mistakes.

7. In many lessons, students were not involved satisfactorily in reviewing the learning that had taken place. Insufficient attention is paid to identifying the learning objectives for students to achieve during lessons. There was little evidence that students were being assisted in developing skills of self-evaluation and independent thinking.

8. There are good resources to develop pre-vocational and practical skills. The farm site provides a range of suitable and realistic learning environments and equipment for curriculum activities. The accommodation on site provides a large catering kitchen that provides opportunities for students to practise daily living and catering skills. Student houses have appropriate domestic kitchens, equipment, and living areas to practise independence skills.

9. Staff expertise and training are unsatisfactory. Staff have received training in behavioural management and autistic spectrum disorders, and all teaching staff have or are working towards at least a basic teaching qualification. Staff meetings are held with managers to improve the quality of assessment, the recording of students' progress and individual learning plans. However, staff lack

the expertise and specialist knowledge required to enable them to effectively meet the needs of students with complex and specific learning difficulties. They have had insufficient training in how to plan activities within lessons matched to students' levels of skills. Support staff have had little training in how to effectively plan and develop students' daily living skills.

10. There is insufficient specialist equipment, adaptations or resources for students with specific or additional learning needs. In some cases, the use of colour to enable students with very basic literacy and numeracy skills to match or identify words or objects is effective. However, there are too few adaptations to teaching materials, or specialist computer software or equipment such as large keyboards or magnified screens for students with visual impairments. Although the college has acquired more computers recently, they are not used sufficiently. There is good use of digital cameras to record students' performance of tasks.

11. The arrangements for assessment are satisfactory. Information about students' prior attainment is obtained from previous placements. Prior to entry, students undertake a week-long assessment period to assess their suitability for a placement at the college. Although this provides some useful information upon which to base the students' programmes, this information is insufficiently analysed to identify the specific specialist support needs, or specialist equipment required for individual students when they join the college.

12. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress is unsatisfactory. The baseline assessments for pre-vocational and daily living skills are still in an early stage of development and provide insufficient information to accurately assess students' achievements over time. As the majority of students do not have prior experience of the pre-vocational skills on offer at the college, the initial assessment is collated during the students' first term at the college. The vocational and independence training award is undertaken when students have developed sufficient skills to be assessed for accreditation. Assessment in relation to the awards in both pre-vocational and daily living skills is inconsistently applied and staff are unclear as to how to accurately assess students at the three different levels of attainment. A new baseline assessment for literacy, numeracy and communication is comprehensive and was devised to meet the needs of the current student cohort. It has only recently been introduced and students are currently being screened to develop individual targets for them to achieve. It is too early to assess the impact this has had on the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills.

13. The quality of individual learning plans is unsatisfactory. Although only a few priorities are appropriately devised for students to achieve, they are used inconsistently across curriculum areas to inform lesson planning. Progress made against priorities contained within individual learning plans is recorded by staff both during lessons and within pre-review notes. These comments are used to inform any amendments to priorities listed on individual learning plans and to complete reviews. The majority of comments written on pre-review documents are descriptive and provide little information to inform the summative review. After consultation with the staff to provide more accurate information, these reviews are compiled by the principal and residential care manager, and provide more analytical and detailed information about students' progress. Reviews are held twice during the first year of the students' attendance and once a year thereafter. These are attended by parents and Connexions advisers and provide good opportunities for students to comment on their progress and to request changes to their programme of learning.

14. The college offers a good range of practical pre-vocational programmes that meets the needs of students who have an interest in land-based subjects. The main vocational subjects offered by the college have remained the same since the last inspection, but there is more variety within particular vocational subjects. For example, engineering no longer focuses exclusively on automotive skills. The pre-vocational curriculum offers good opportunities to develop transferable work-related skills such as following instructions and working to a routine. Students who have left have been able to use skills acquired at the college to gain work placements or to commence national vocational qualifications.

15. Although much of the curriculum provides training in relevant skills, students do not have sufficient training to prepare them for their life after college. For example, students in their third year do not have enough external work experience. Where the college arranges work experience, it does

not use what has been learnt to prepare students adequately for the next stage in their lives. Students do not have sufficient training in skills they will need for independent life, such as budgeting, filling in forms and using a bank account. Students do not have the opportunity to work towards nationally recognised qualifications whilst at the college, even though some have the ability to undertake pre-vocational courses. At present none of the students attends a general FE college.

16. Good use is made of opportunities to develop social and life skills through the local community. Art, dance and gymnastics have been introduced into the curriculum. The college provides a wide range of enrichment and supported leisure activities. Students play an active part in choosing weekly activities and longer-term projects such as fund-raising events and charitable activity. The college uses social and leisure activities well to help students develop respect for others and related skills such as turn-taking. Students learn to work co-operatively with their peers, but the curriculum does not provide sufficient training about rights, responsibilities, equal opportunities and appreciation of diversity.

17. Support for students is satisfactory overall. The college provides a safe and harmonious environment that supports the well-being of students. Teaching and residential support staff develop an effective rapport with students and offer good pastoral support. Students benefit from having personal tutors and key workers that work closely together. Information about students is shared well by staff on a daily basis so that students' emotional needs are met. Students obtain good formal and informal counselling, which is provided as needed. However, at times, support staff offer help with issues for which they are not suitably trained rather than referring the students to qualified counsellors, especially for issues relating to maturation and sexuality.

18. Transition into the college is well-managed for most students. New students are supported well in settling quickly into college life. Prospective students are sent useful information about the curriculum and college life. They gain a realistic introduction to the life of the college through a five-day residential assessment period. An extended induction programme enables new students to try out all subjects for a term and to make more informed choices about their subject options. Support for students leaving the college is good. It arranges for students to progress to their new placements, in order to ease transition into their new life. The college provides strong advocacy on students' behalf to help them move to appropriate accommodation, and maintains contact with students whilst they settle in.

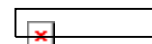
19. A satisfactory programme of personal development is provided for female students. This helps them to discuss feelings and emotions as well as learning about matters such as relationships, sexual health and safety, although it is restricted to a single year of the programme. No equivalent programme is currently provided for male students. Appropriate use is made of local and home Connexions services. However, the college provides insufficient careers education. Students do not receive adequate information and guidance to help them to prepare for their likely future destinations and to gain an awareness of their options.

20. The tutorial programme offers students the chance to review their weekly programme. The system for monitoring punctuality and attendance is good. Students are given responsibilities for collecting evidence of their attendance and comments on their performance, which are discussed at tutorials. The programme of activities for group tutorials lacks sufficient structure and co-ordination, and does not adequately support the development of personal, social, and health education. Individual tutorials are satisfactory and staff respond well to students' requests for individual tutorials at short notice. The college has a complaints procedure and students know what to do if they need to make a complaint. Appropriate action is taken to make students aware that bullying is not tolerated at the college.

21. The college does not make sufficient use of specialist assessments to identify students' support needs. For example, the needs of a student who is visually impaired were not sufficiently evaluated by the college during the pre-entry assessment visit. Although the college has now commissioned a specialist assessment, this is late and the student's curriculum and support needs are not being met. Pre-entry assessments do not sufficiently identify students' needs for assistive technologies to develop literacy and motor skills. Arrangements are not in place to screen and assess for specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia or to identify the current needs of students with previous

assessments of dyspraxia or communication disorders.

Leadership and management



22. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The principal and the care manager work closely with each other and with other staff to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for students. They have taken significant steps since the last inspection to introduce closer links between the college and the residences. Staff are appreciative of the support they receive and of the open management style. Some have worked at the college for many years, providing continuity for students and new staff. Informal communication is good and information about students' goals and welfare is shared well. However, formal communication arrangements are weak. Minutes of staff and senior team meetings are poor. There are few recorded discussions of key aspects of teaching and learning such as curriculum review, quality assurance, teaching strategies, sharing good practice, and equal opportunities. The management structure is weak. The senior management team is small and is too involved in day-to-day operational management. The college does not have any curriculum managers or senior teachers to whom operational tasks could be delegated. This weakness has been recognised and the college is taking steps to appoint a member of staff at middle management level.

23. Strategic planning is unsatisfactory. The college has produced a three-year business plan with a related development plan. Together, these identify relevant areas for improvement, such as increased achievement rates for students' personal learning goals, staff recruitment and training, and upgrading residential accommodation. However, these plans lack detail about how objectives, such as increased work experience, improved transport, and increased staff training in literacy and numeracy will be achieved. An information and learning technology (ILT) strategy, that forms part of the business plan, identifies ways of improving the electronic infrastructure, but does not adequately examine how technology could be used in assistive ways to raise students' achievements. The college has few other written strategies. For example, there are no effective written strategies for literacy and numeracy, quality assurance or equal opportunities. A temporary member of staff has been employed to develop a literacy and numeracy strategy and a useful baseline assessment has been produced.

24. Staff expertise, training and appraisal are unsatisfactory. All teaching staff have, or are working towards, at least a basic teaching qualification. Residential staff have achieved, or are currently working towards, qualifications at level 3. Few staff have sufficient specialist training in teaching students with learning difficulties: a weakness identified at the previous inspection. Although two staff have level 4 qualifications in Makaton, too few staff are trained to support the development of students' skills in literacy, numeracy, communication and information technology (IT). The college lacks expertise in identifying and meeting the needs of students with complex needs and specific difficulties such as dyslexia. Staff are not provided with sufficient training on college policies and procedures, such as peer assessment, equal opportunities and child protection. The updated staff handbook provides a satisfactory general overview of college processes. An induction process used for residential staff is being extended to teaching staff, but some staff who joined the college several months ago have not yet had an induction. The appraisal system is new. Staff are encouraged to provide self-evaluations against their job descriptions in preparation for their appraisal but corresponding evaluations of their performance are not subsequently provided by their line managers. Records of appraisal discussions do not refer to training needs identified by staff nor set specific objectives for performance management at future appraisals.

25. Arrangements for quality assurance are inadequate. The college does not have a formal framework for quality assurance. Neither the staff handbook nor other procedures provide sufficient detail about key teaching and assessment processes such as devising schemes of work, lesson plans, assessment, individual learning plans, writing reviews or formulating behaviour plans. Senior managers provide an element of quality assurance by overseeing individual learning plans, writing

reviews and pursuing evidence of recorded achievements. However, arrangements for verifying assessments are at an early stage of development and do not cover all areas of the curriculum. Some important aspects of recording-keeping are not adequately audited, and poor practice is not identified and rectified sufficiently early in the assessment process. An outline quality cycle has been devised but is not yet established. Insufficient use is made of data to analyse trends in performance for the college overall, and by specific groups. The college does not have a management information system but has recently introduced a new infrastructure for IT with a specific aim to improve record-keeping and staff access to student information. Arrangements to collect feedback from students are new and have not been evaluated. The college obtains feedback from parents and carers in the form of a questionnaire. The information has not yet been analysed and has insufficient detail about the students' experiences in terms of learning and personal development.

26. Procedures for observing teaching, learning and assessment are unsatisfactory. The former system of lesson observations has recently been replaced by a system of peer observation, which provides staff new to teaching with opportunities to learn from others. However, whilst some staff give constructive feedback to help improve teaching, the quality of observations is variable, and does not match the observations made by inspectors.

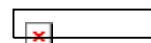
27. The self-assessment process is not fully developed. Staff are actively involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical overall. It covers all key questions of the common inspection framework, and identifies some areas for improvement. In many areas, it is descriptive rather than evaluative, and does not sufficiently analyse the college's performance or the effectiveness of its policies, processes, and procedures. The college has been slow to respond to weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, significant changes have been initiated to many aspects of the provision, some changes being a response to the previous year's self-assessment. Although these changes look promising, they are not fully developed or established, and it is too early to assess their impact.

28. There is insufficient promotion of equal opportunities. The college does not fully comply with legislation relating to child protection, the SENDA, and Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. The college's equal opportunities policy has been updated to take into account issues relating to religion and sexuality but it has not yet written an equal opportunities strategy to assist the implementation of policies. Staff have received insufficient training in equal opportunities, diversity, child protection, and in meeting students' specific needs. The college has made adaptations to college buildings but there is no policy statement as to how other aspects of the provision can be improved. Equal opportunities and personal development are not promoted adequately through the curriculum.

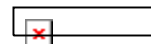
29. Governance of the college is satisfactory overall. Fairfield has a long-established Board of Directors that meets six times a year as a board, and once a year with college staff. The college has recently taken appropriate steps to improve governance and succession planning. One of the executive team has taken on a useful role in liaising with staff and attending staff meetings. Directors are aware of further action they need to take, such as arranging for the appraisal for senior managers, improving monitoring arrangements, and evaluating the performance of the board. There are no representatives of parents, carers or staff on the board or on the new executive. Directors consider changes to policies, procedures and the estate, and are informed about the college's financial position. Directors do not have sufficient information about students' achievements and progression. .

30. Financial management is satisfactory in meeting financial targets. The college has been solvent for several years and is working towards achieving the reserves required by the charity commission. However, senior managers are not sufficiently involved in financial planning and in making decisions about the deployment of resources. The deployment of resources does not provide good value for money in promoting learning, and meeting the needs of students.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Social and life skills



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**.

Strengths

- good development of health and safety awareness
- good facilities to develop students' social and life skills.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory development of students' social and life skills
- insufficient planning for learning
- unsatisfactory baseline assessment
- insufficient strategic focus.

Scope of provision

31. The social and life skills provision aims to enable students to learn through practical experiences in domestic settings and the college campus. The curriculum covers all aspects of daily living such as shopping, cooking, household tasks, laundry, personal care, social skills and personal relationships. Extra-curricular and social activities are chosen by the students and provide opportunities to develop leisure and independence skills. The college uses the internally devised vocational and independence training awards to validate students' achievements.

Achievements and standards

32. Social and life skills development is unsatisfactory overall. The development of social and life skills within the houses is inadequate. Students are not encouraged to transfer skills and knowledge from previous situations and experiences into current learning activities. The recording of the learning outcomes is variable and measuring skill achievement is difficult as small incremental steps of learning are not identified in the majority of cases. The standard of daily living skills developed as

a result of working in the catering kitchen and the food serving area of the student common room are good. Students learn effectively by preparing lunch for the college community during weekdays. The more able students offer valuable support to the younger less able students to ensure that tasks are completed on time and to an acceptable standard. For example, a third-year student supported a first-year student whilst draining vegetables and increased their health and safety awareness. The younger student was encouraged to shout 'hot liquid' whilst crossing the kitchen.

Quality of education and training

33. Although many lessons were satisfactory or better, a significant number of lessons were unsatisfactory. In the more effective lessons, good use is made of practical activities to develop students' social and life skills. In the stables, the teacher has high expectations of the students and successfully used the task of bedding the stables down to reinforce skills associated with good practice in the care of animals, such as the importance of adherence to time schedules, good organisation of tasks, and effective team work. Good practice in health and safety is routinely promoted in practical classes and residential accommodation. The use of the vocational and independence training award performance criteria as the basis for lesson planning is insufficient. There is inadequate planning to meet the different needs of students. In a significant number of lessons, there was poor time management with activities commencing late or finishing well before the scheduled end. Teachers and support assistants do not allow students to benefit by learning from their mistakes. Teaching activities are not always appropriate for the student group. Teachers and support assistants do not always routinely share learning goals with students. There are missed opportunities to link current learning experiences to students' future lives as adults in the wider community. Within catering and daily living skills, cultural menus and dishes are identified in relation to different countries to help promote awareness of national dishes. However, the promotion of equal opportunities and cultural diversity is unsatisfactory.

34. Facilities to develop social and life skills within residences are good. . The range of practical environments enables students to develop social and life skills within realistic settings. Risk assessments are in place and identify the major hazards and controls required to reduce risk in various key situations. Support staff are not sufficiently trained to carry out their responsibilities unsupervised in developing the students' daily living skills.

35. Systems to identify, monitor, and track students' individual learning achievements in relation to social and life skills are in the early stages of development. Baseline assessments are limited. Constructive steps have recently been taken to analyse students' personal care skills prior to the students being enrolled at the college. Parents and carers undertake part of this analysis and this is then matched to the skills analysis carried out by support staff during the assessment week. This gives a consistent overview of individual students' needs on entry to the college. As a result of this analysis, a daily living skills induction programme is devised for the first term. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this new initiative.

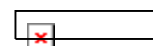
36. There is a strong commitment to build a curriculum framework for social and life skills. The new tutor is devising a range of daily living skills modules, which identify activities and methods to develop social and life skills. However, the existing programmes are not always effective in building on students' prior attainment and experiences. The knowledge and skills students have developed in previous placements or in formal timetabled activities are not adequately linked to skills development in the residential accommodation.

37. The college forms a supportive community. Much of this support relies on the commitment of staff to the students' welfare and good informal exchange of information between staff teams and managers. Staff know the students well, and incidents involving positive and inappropriate behaviours are routinely recorded. However, behavioural plans that identify the events and circumstances which may bring about unacceptable behaviours are not in place. There is little formal documented guidance given to staff on how these unacceptable behaviours should be managed. Tutorials are unsatisfactory. There is no tutorial policy to guide the direction, content and structure of tutorials. The majority of students, who are male, have little support for personal development.

Leadership and management

38. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There is no overall manager who is responsible for the strategic direction and day-to-day co-ordination of the team responsible for delivering social and life skills in formal classes, residencies, and the local community. The formal appraisal system is inadequate and in the early stages of development. The review of the outcome of appraisal does not inform target setting. The supervision of care support staff is inconsistent. Staff have not been trained in issues relating to child protection. Equality and diversity are not routinely promoted within organised social and life skills activities. Staff value the training opportunities that are available. The self-assessment report recognises that the college is working to improve its baseline assessment and tutorial policy. However, the self-assessment report is insufficiently critical and does not identify many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors.

Pre-vocational studies



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**.

Strengths

- effective development of work-related skills
- good use of practical activities to promote learning
- good resources to develop vocational skills.

Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in the assessment and monitoring of progress
- limited opportunities for progression.

Scope of provision

39. Pre-vocational skills include catering, engineering, farming, horse studies, horticulture and house maintenance studies. After the first term, all students continue to follow courses in at least four of the pre-vocational areas. Catering is a compulsory component for most students. There is no external accreditation, but students' achievements are recognised through the college's internally designed vocational and independence training awards. Most students have the opportunity to take part in work experience placements in the college and in the local community.

Achievement and standards

40. Students make good gains in the development of work-related skills such as improving timekeeping, arriving for sessions on time, using tools and equipment, and demonstrating awareness of health and safety procedures. One student has successfully maintained a work placement at a busy animal feed warehouse. Others, who have not previously had experience of horses, have developed good horse management and riding skills. College systems for collecting and analysing data about students' achievements are underdeveloped and it is not always easy to measure progress over time, as the starting point is not sufficiently clear.

Quality of education and training

41. Teaching is satisfactory overall and good use is made of practical activities to promote learning. Activities, such as clearing a stable or emptying the barrow, create opportunities for students to work together co-operatively, and also for them to see the consequences of their actions when, for example, overfilling a wheelbarrow or forgetting to shut a gate. In the best lessons, staff know students well, have a good rapport with them and set a clear direction for learning. However, the majority of lesson plans lack detail, and in some cases there is too much emphasis on the completion of tasks rather than skills development. The individual learning plan does not identify in sufficient detail the long-term objectives and aspirations of the students and the quality of practice in reviewing students' progress is variable.

42. There are good resources to develop students' vocational skills and realistic working environments to promote learning. These include a milk parlour and dairy, a stable with yard and arena, engineering workshops that include a range of tools, a well-equipped catering kitchen and a horticultural facility. Students benefit from working with the farm animals. Cattle feed and chemicals are colour coded for those who are unable to read and there are clear health and safety notices. Students value the opportunity to learn to drive a tractor, and some go on to tow and use a range of agricultural equipment for managing permanent pasture. Teaching staff are qualified to teach, but few have specialist qualifications. There is insufficient specialist training for staff to develop relevant literacy and numeracy skills within lessons, or in dealing with behavioural problems.

43. There is no effective baseline of vocational skills against which to measure progress or to use as a basis to plan learning. The links between the outcomes of assessment, the individual learning plan and the students' long-term objectives are not sufficiently clear. The best lesson recording provides some useful information. In many cases, however, the comments are insufficiently evaluative and focus on what the student has done, rather than what has been learnt. This is also the case in the evidence sheets used to support achievements against the vocational and independence training award. In the best lessons, teachers use praise effectively to recognise achievement and involve students in reviewing progress at the end of the session. In some cases, however, students are involved in producing paper-based evidence of what they have done, which has little meaning in relation to their literacy skills, and does not adequately identify the learning that has taken place. Summative records of progress provide some useful information, and progress towards short-term goals is appropriately tracked.

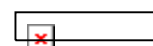
44. Although some learners move onto general FE colleges and/or supported work in their future placements, there are limited opportunities to progress within the college.. Some students who would benefit from work experience do not have sufficient opportunities to do so. Where work experience placements are in place, they are effective and students learn well. The procedure for arranging work experience, in terms of sharing information and identifying the intended outcomes, is not sufficiently clear and the learning that has taken place is not fully identified and built upon. Although learners progress through the levels within the vocational and independence training award, the standards required to for each level are not sufficiently clear. Students for whom it would be appropriate do not have the opportunity to achieve nationally recognised qualifications in vocational skills, either on site or by attending local general FE colleges. Links with Connexions are satisfactory. Senior managers work effectively to liaise with outside agencies to plan and support students' transition.

45. Support for students is satisfactory overall. Staff know the students well and provide sensitive and appropriate informal guidance to students who feel valued and respected. There is little provision for personal development for male students and there is no careers education guidance.

Leadership and management

46. The operational management of pre-vocational studies is satisfactory. There are daily meetings and effective informal communication. The senior managers have established an effective 'open door' policy, which is valued by staff. However, strategic management is ineffective. There is no one person responsible for the development of the curriculum area and there is no curriculum statement. The self-assessment and quality assurance processes are insufficiently rigorous. The college can provide anecdotal evidence about students' achievements, but this is not collated and analysed over time. In addition, the college has not yet implemented effective internal verification to validate the vocational and independence training award. Senior managers have been effective in establishing an ethos of calm and respect, and students feel valued and supported. There is insufficient attention paid to equal opportunities, and important documents such as the code of conduct do not make clear the college's expectation and standards in respect of bullying and harassment, sexual orientation and gender discrimination.

Literacy, numeracy and communications



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**.

Strengths

- effective use of realistic practical curriculum activities
- good use of a supportive environment to develop students' communication skills.

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning for lessons
- insufficient staff expertise and training
- inadequate specialist support
- poor strategic management.

Scope of provision

47. All of the students at the college develop literacy, numeracy and communications in small groups

as discrete lessons in their first term at college as well as in most practical curriculum activities. Students, where appropriate, are invited to attend discrete lessons after their first review and are given the choice of opting out of the subject at this stage. Students are screened on entry and given a range of targets for their learning.

Achievement and standards

48. Students' achievements in literacy and numeracy skills are unsatisfactory. The introduction of a literacy, numeracy and communications curriculum is very new and as yet no students have achieved their targets. Individual learning plans identify priorities for communications and numeracy skill development. Teachers record progress against these objectives prior to reviews, and a few students have made progress. For example, one student now pronounces his name more clearly, and another student has learned to refer to himself by saying 'I' rather than 'me' more often. It is difficult to measure students' progress over time as baseline assessments for students have only recently been completed. The college does not offer any external qualifications for literacy, numeracy, and communications to students where appropriate.

49. The supportive environment at the college helps students to develop their communication skills. The staff treat the students in a calm and respectful manner and the students are encouraged to behave similarly towards each other. There is a strong sense of a shared community at the college. The more able students help those who are less able to complete tasks. The students feel valued and able to express their needs to the staff. For example, one student who came to the college with very poor communication skills was able to ask for help with his spelling in a group tutorial lesson. A student with low self-esteem was helped to build his confidence by working with animals. He was encouraged to stroke a horse and was able to do so despite previously having a fear of horses. Students develop their communication skills by such activities as going to shops to buy food for their student house, purchasing personal items and hiring videos.

Quality of education and training

50. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Lesson plans do not take account of planning for individual students' needs. The same session plan is used for different groups of students and in some cases throughout the academic year. Too little account is taken of differing levels of ability within lessons. The more able students are not sufficiently challenged, while those who are less able do not always understand how to complete the objectives of the lesson as it is pitched at an inappropriate level for their ability. Some students were left with nothing to occupy them when they finished a task before the other members of a group. In another lesson, there were no activities planned for the students when the main activity was completed early. The students spent the time engaged in general conversation with no consolidation or reflection on the previously introduced money skills.

51. Staff have insufficient expertise to deal effectively with students' complex needs, specific learning disabilities and sensory impairments. Staff do not have adequate qualifications or professional development for literacy, numeracy, and communication skills development. Although staff are active in researching and obtaining appropriate resources for students to use, there is a shortage of stimulating and relevant teaching materials and specialist equipment such as computer software packages and adaptations. The college has recently increased the availability of computers, but during inspection they were under-utilised in lessons.

52. The recently devised diagnostic assessment for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. It has been designed to identify students' level of ability. Results of the assessment are disseminated to staff together with targets for achievement. Newly devised individual learning plans, are now in place. These are agreed with the students during a tutorial and are shared with academic and care staff. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of these plans. Ongoing assessment and recording of students' achievements against individual learning plan goals are unsatisfactory and provide little analysis and evaluation of students' progress.

53. There is good use of realistic learning environments and practical curriculum activities to

promote learning. For example, students count out the number of scoops of feed needed for the cows at milking time. Use is made of colour coding on the buckets and various other items of equipment and on the cows' tails. The students have learned to give the correct amount of feed to each cow based on this colour-matching exercise. Students use practical measuring skills in engineering lessons in order to make useful items such as a window-box holder made out of used horse shoes and other pieces of metal. In a horticulture lesson, students were asked to count into piles of five the bean poles they were taking down in readiness for winter. The more able students then counted on from five as the piles grew. This activity was fully integrated into a useful and relevant vocational lesson. Students in a catering lesson were asked to complete worksheets relating to basic food hygiene in the kitchen which reinforced their literacy skills as well as providing necessary information regarding best practice in a catering environment. The students respond well to these integrated activities.

54. There is insufficient specialist support available for students. For example, a speech and language therapist only attends the college once every half-term. She has insufficient time to meet the needs of all students who have been identified to need her support. Specialist support is slow to materialise. A student with a visual impairment has not been successful in obtaining a specialist diagnosis several weeks after commencing at the college. Students have limited access to specialist support for their specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia.

Leadership and management

55. Leadership and management of literacy, numeracy and communication are unsatisfactory. Quality assurance processes are inadequate and the self-assessment report is insufficiently analytical and does not identify accurately the necessary improvements for this area of provision. There is no dedicated manager for literacy, numeracy and communication. Some informal staff development has been undertaken. However, there is no structured programme of staff development and no overall strategic plan for the development of literacy, numeracy and communication across the curriculum. Issues of equality of opportunity and diversity are insufficiently promoted.