

# Plumpton College

Specialist further education college

**Inspection dates** 20–23 February 2018

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good	Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Req	uires improvement

# **Summary of key findings**

#### This is a good provider

- Leaders, managers and governors have worked energetically to improve teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for learners, successfully.
- The college is a welcoming, inclusive and respectful community where most learners thrive.
- As a result of very good-quality practical teaching, learners develop good skills and produce work of a high standard. Most learners achieve their qualifications.
- Learners are excited about their subjects and the wider opportunities that staff provide. They are keen to learn and supportive of others.
- Excellent arrangements for relevant work experience placements and enrichment activities develop learners' skills, knowledge and confidence well.
- Large numbers of learners gain work related to the course they studied, and many with their work experience provider.

- Apprentices develop good skills and relevant behaviours to make positive contributions to their employers' businesses.
- Resources are well-managed, very high-quality and reflect those found in the land-based sector so that learners develop their vocational skills well.
- Senior leaders have exceptional partnerships with local and regional employers, schools and community leaders which benefit learners and the local community.
- Learners do not have access to broad and impartial careers advice beyond the area of their study.
- In a small minority of theory lessons, teachers do not ensure that learners make the progress they should.
- Not all learners with high needs make the progress of which they are capable and managers do not monitor this well enough.



# **Full report**

#### Information about the provider

- Plumpton College is a small specialist further education college in East Sussex. It provides courses in land-based subjects and adventure education. The main campus is on a large rural estate near Lewes, 10 miles from Brighton and Hove. There are also courses provided at small centres across East Sussex and at Stanmer Park in Brighton.
- The college provides full-time study programmes for around 1,000 learners aged 16 to 19 and full- and part-time courses for 350 adults. Around 140 learners with high-needs funding are on study programmes or courses designed specifically for them. There are approximately 270 apprentices. The college also provides courses for school pupils aged 14 to 16 for around 50 local schools, and offers foundation degree and degree courses in partnership with the University of Brighton. Learners attend the college from across East and West Sussex, and from Kent and Surrey.

#### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate plans to introduce independent careers guidance. Ensure that all learners have access to impartial information, advice and guidance at all stages of their course so that they can plan their next steps better informed about all options.
- Make theory lessons in a small minority of areas more interesting and informative so learners gain new knowledge and understanding more rapidly and make the progress of which they are capable.
- Improve the management of learners with high needs by:
  - ensuring that teachers use the good information available on learners to provide learning which will help each learner make better progress
  - helping learners improve their work further to reach their full potential
  - monitoring the progress of learners against their planned outcomes.



# **Inspection judgements**

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The recently restructured leadership and management team have realistic, high ambitions and clear plans for further improvement. They communicate these well to college staff through the well-considered strategic plan, newsletters and regular management meetings.
- Leaders and governors have dealt effectively with the large majority of areas recommended for improvement at the previous inspection. For example, there is now a greater emphasis on the importance of English and mathematics for work and career progression and a new team of specialist staff and managers in this area. Consequently, learners' attendance at English and mathematics lessons and the achievement of high grades at GCSE have improved.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college and have identified the areas that require further improvement. Leaders have introduced greater accountability and responsibility for senior and middle managers. Managers have implemented new quality assurance and performance processes which focus on improving the progress and achievement of learners. As a result, there has been an improvement in learners' achievements in each of the past three years and increased attendance this year. Managers have mostly reduced differences in achievement between groups of learners.
- Managers recently discovered historical errors in the numbers of learners who had been enrolled on courses which completed in 2016/17. These affected study programme learners and adults. Although these errors have been corrected internally, and performance management action taken, it is expected they will have a negative impact on any externally published data.
- Managers have improved staff training and development directly linked to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, vocational staff who need to improve their English and mathematics teaching are helped to develop strategies and ideas on how to improve. Learners are developing their skills more rapidly as a result.
- Managers provide a large choice of subjects for learners which reflect well the regional priorities and those of the land-based sector. Staff work very closely with employers to make sure learners are working at current industry standards and developing the skills they need to find work. Large numbers of employers regularly attend curriculum advisory panels so the curriculum is developed appropriately and new courses meet their needs. For example, new butchery apprenticeships were introduced in 2015/16 for which the college has been a national lead.
- The observation of teaching, learning and assessment processes focuses effectively on the progress learners are making and what they are learning. Managers use this well to help teachers improve their teaching so that learners make better progress in lessons and workshops.
- Senior managers have developed an effective performance management system. Using this, they consider the reports following teachers' lesson observations and identify actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Arrangements for managing staff



performance are effective. Staff whose skills are not at the required standard benefit from extensive support or choose to leave the college.

- Senior leaders have created a highly productive partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council, alongside industry experts and a top landscape designer, to develop a project at nearby Stanmer Park that has secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This will enable the restoration of an historic walled garden and the provision of a large commercial tourist attraction with teaching facilities to benefit learners and local communities.
- Leaders and managers have worked effectively with all stakeholders to ensure that the college estate is managed to the highest standards possible for the benefit of the environment as well as learners and other estate users. The farm has been developed to offer a highly realistic work environment for learners.
- Managers do not have a systematic approach to the collation and analysis of the destinations of learners who leave the college, or of the progression of apprentices to higher levels. As a result, senior managers do not have a full understanding of the impact of their courses for learners.

### The governance of the provider

- The governing body has a wide range of expertise, skills and local knowledge that it uses very well to support and challenge college leaders. Governors know and understand the college well and are frequent visitors. They can identify the strengths and weaknesses of the college as a result of the detailed reports that the principal shares with them. Governors have recently introduced new systems to improve further their awareness of financial and academic progress.
- Governors have high aspirations for the college. They are involved regularly in quality review meetings, learning walks and curriculum advisory panels. As a consequence, they recognise the improvements made for learners.
- Governors and senior leaders have worked well to ensure the financial sustainability of the college. Income has improved, and the recent growth in learner numbers on apprenticeships and study programmes contrasts with the current national trend of decline.

#### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers place a strong emphasis on learners' safety and security and learners feel safe as a result. Staff receive regular safeguarding and 'Prevent' training. Learners can explain how extremist activities may affect them in the work they plan to move into. Staff maintain comprehensive records of safeguarding incidents and monitor these well; learners are referred to relevant external agencies if required.
- Leaders have implemented effective e-safety processes to control and monitor learners' access to inappropriate online material.



### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders' and managers' well-considered actions have resulted in improvements in teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection. Most learners and apprentices gain valuable technical and practical skills and are making good progress towards employment or further training in a range of land-based and adventure education areas.
- Tutors and assessors use their current industry knowledge and teaching skills very effectively to motivate learners well. Learners respond enthusiastically, work hard and produce written and practical work of a good standard.
- Teachers use very well-managed resources to enhance learners' practical experiences and help them gain valuable vocational and employment skills. Learners use practical environments well to relate newly learned theory to practice. For example, learners on countryside management courses applied the theory of Hooper's Law well to estimate the age of an ancient, protected hedgerow.
- Staff prepare learners well for future employment through appropriate activities in college, on work experience and in the workplace for apprentices. Practical activities are highly relevant and learners work well individually and in teams. Learners apply their knowledge, organisation and communication skills well during daily husbandry routines in the farm, animal houses or stables.
- Learners work productively individually or in groups to refine and practise their skills and support each other well. Learners assess themselves and each other during practical activities, and provide sensible feedback to each other on how to improve. For example, learners conducting dressage manoeuvres during riding lessons grade their progress against set criteria.
- Staff use appropriate technology well to enhance learning in practical and theory lessons. Learners gain a good understanding of relevant technology and how it is used commercially in their sector. For example, agricultural learners use virtual reality technology to practise reversing large and expensive farm machinery and to attach additional implements and trailers safely. Learners on jewellery courses use specialist applications to upload images of their work onto public websites.
- The large majority of learners make good progress in the development of their English and mathematics skills. Teachers use the information they have on learners' starting points well to place learners on appropriate English and mathematics courses. Learners speak confidently. Teachers develop learners' technical language, specialist vocabulary and their numeracy for practical tasks well.
- In addition to their main qualifications, many learners and apprentices gain additional vocational qualifications which enhance their future employment opportunities. Adventure education activity learners gain instructors' certificates, forestry learners gain awards in tree-climbing and rescue, and agriculture and game-keeping learners gain tractor driving certificates.
- The large number of learners with additional needs are very well supported. A team of learning support assistants and specialist therapists provide effective individual support so



that learners remain on their courses irrespective of difficulties and/or disabilities they may have or challenges they may encounter. However, teachers and managers do not use all available information about learners with high needs to set work or activities which take into account their difficulties and/or disabilities and help them to make the progress they should.

- Staff provide learners with well-considered and immediate oral feedback on their work, which helps them to make necessary adjustments to their technical and practical techniques. Written feedback does not always help learners know how to improve their work. Teachers correct learners' written English within assignments but do not help learners develop strategies to avoid similar errors in future work.
- A small minority of teachers do not ensure that learners make sufficient progress during their theory lessons. These lessons are often too slow or dull, or the work set for learners is too easy or repetitive. Teaching in motor vehicle and land-based engineering is often weak and as a result learners are not making the progress they should.
- Staff ensure that the vast majority of learners understand safe working practices and know how to keep themselves and others safe in very complex and often high-risk environments. In a few practical lessons, tutors do not always promote best industry standards, such as ensuring that learners wear gloves when working with chickens, or maintaining tidy work areas in engineering and floristry. Learners understand the 'Prevent' duty and how it applies to their vocation, for example veterinary nurses have a good understanding of animal rights activism.

### Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners are proud of the high standards of work they produce. They feel safe, happy and respected and show high levels of respect to others.
- Learners' attendance has improved over the past three years, including for English and mathematics, and is particularly high for adults and learners with high needs. Learners are enthusiastic and ready to learn. They attend lessons, workshops and work placements regularly and punctually and are well behaved.
- Staff provide a wide range of well-planned, high-quality work experience or work-related activities that learners and employers value highly. Learners gain valuable employment skills such as teamwork and communication, and improve their confidence. They develop effective and relevant practical skills linked to their area of study and are very well-prepared for work. As a direct result of their work placements, a large number of learners are offered full- or part-time work by their work experience employers. However, staff on light motor vehicle courses have limited work experience plans for their learners.
- College staff provide useful information and guidance to potential learners before they make the decision to start their courses. These are provided at taster days, open days and in careers sessions. The number of learners applying to the college has increased. Learners without the relevant entry qualifications for their initial course choice are signposted to alternative courses at the college. Most learners are on the right course and level, and the few learners who want to change courses are well supported to do so.
- Curriculum staff provide very relevant guidance to learners on career possibilities within their industries. They use their extensive employer networks to expose learners to



different employment options through guest speakers and external visits. Learners gain additional qualifications, such as using chainsaws, dog grooming and sports coaching, which help them gain work. There is limited impartial, structured careers advice for learners who may wish to follow alternative careers to those offered at the college, or for part-time adult learners or learners with high needs.

- Learners' representatives meet frequently with senior managers to share their views and opinions. These are well-regarded by managers and staff, and appropriate actions are taken as a result. For example, as a result of requests, learners were provided with funds to refurbish their common room. The Student Union was recently re-established at learners' request and is an important central hub for activities and support, such as Zumba classes, film nights and themed social events. Learners access these frequently to develop their social skills, physical fitness and general well-being.
- Learners benefit from an abundance of enrichment activities. These develop their understanding of working in their chosen subject and of life in Britain. For example, learners visit farms in the Channel Islands, zoos and national museums in London. Butchery apprentices showcase events in game, sausage-making and hog-roasting. Learners enjoy numerous sporting and outdoor adventure clubs.
- Learners on adventure education courses benefit from a good range of activities which improve their skills and enhance their job options. For example, at the nearby sailing academy, learners sail different types of dinghy and learn to paddleboard. They use the college indoor climbing wall to perfect belaying techniques before climbing outdoors. Learners visit the outdoor centre in Snowdonia to kayak, mountain bike and navigate in the mountains.
- Managers ensure that tutorial programmes cover a range of important subjects effectively. As a consequence, learners have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe from online risks such as grooming, bullying and extremism. Learners know to whom they should report concerns, and are confident that these will be dealt with effectively.

#### **Outcomes for learners**

Good

- Current learners develop very good practical and vocational skills and produce work of a high standard.
- Most learners achieve their qualifications and the proportion who do so has increased over the past three years. The number of learners who remain on their courses has also increased and is now high.
- In 2016/17, over two thirds of learners studied diplomas and the proportion who achieved these was high. The proportion of learners achieving level 2 and level 3 qualifications was also high.
- The proportion of learners of all ages on foundation learning programmes who achieved their qualifications in 2016/17 was low.
- Learners on study programmes in animal management, engineering, forestry and adventure education did well in 2016/17. The proportion of learners on agriculture and motor vehicle who achieved their qualifications was too low. Adult learners on agriculture



and animal management courses did well but those on engineering courses did not.

- Learners on level 2 and level 3 applied general and technical qualifications achieved high grades in line with learners nationally in 2016/17, and this has improved from previous years. A large proportion of learners on equine, countryside management, adventure education and fish management level 3 extended diplomas met or exceeded the grades they were predicted based on their previous levels of attainment.
- The overall proportion of apprentices who completed their apprenticeship increased in 2016/17, although it is not high enough. The proportion of advanced apprentices, female apprentices and apprentices over the age of 19 who achieved their apprenticeship was high. The proportion of younger apprentices, and those on intermediate apprenticeships who achieved their apprenticeship, was too low. The number of apprentices who have remained on their apprenticeships this year has improved rapidly and is now high, and these apprentices are making good progress.
- In 2016/17, learners and apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did not achieve as well as other learners.
- The proportion of learners who achieved A\* to C grades in GCSE English and mathematics in 2016/17 improved considerably and was higher than recent national rates. The proportion of learners achieving functional skills English and mathematics qualifications also improved but remained too low, especially at level 2. The proportion of learners who have achieved their functional skills qualifications so far this year is higher than in previous years.
- Most full-time learners and apprentices who leave the college to enter work are employed in the sector they studied. For example, previous learners are employed by the National Trust, local farms, equine competition and livery yards, garden centres and outdoor adventure centres in the UK and abroad. A large proportion of full-time learners, including those with high needs, who return to the college, progress to a higher level in the same or similar subject and around a tenth of level 3 learners move on to higher education.

# Types of provision

# 16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Study programmes are well managed and are designed with extensive employer involvement. Managers make good use of learners' feedback when designing programmes.
- Learners gain a good range of practical skills and most work at professional levels.

  Learners' standards of work are high and work shows good progress over the duration of their courses. For example, game-keepers can work out sustainable stocking densities of deer, and know which breed of deer would thrive best in given situations. Equine learners develop their riding techniques by starting on quieter horses before moving on to riding more challenging horses in competitions.
- Most teachers are skilled at motivating learners and ensuring that they make good progress, which they monitor well. They check learners' understanding effectively, and use a range of appropriate teaching strategies so that learners understand new learning and deepen their knowledge. For example, learners research topics using applications on



their mobile phones, and horticulture learners participate in discussions about types of weed and relevant control methods. Staff support learners with additional needs well so that most make good progress.

- Teachers develop learners' English well in most vocational areas. For example, animal management learners extract information from relevant legislation, which they summarise and evaluate with peers. Learners use technical vocabulary well.
- Teachers set appropriate tasks so that learners develop their mathematical skills well. For example, blacksmiths design intricate products on small-scale diagrams which they enlarge to full size before making the real items in the forge.
- A very large majority of learners benefit from well planned and structured external work experience. Learners gain confidence in dealing with customers, and working as part of a team in the workplace. They also gain subject-specific knowledge, such as coat and paw care in particular dog breeds.

### **Adult learning programmes**

Good

- Almost half of adults are on horticulture courses, and the remainder are mostly on veterinary nursing, floristry and blacksmithing courses. Most courses are at level 2.
- Managers provide a broad range of courses which meet the local needs of employers, including evening classes in horticulture at Stanmer Park. As a result, adult learners are able to start new careers or gain confidence on returning to learning. There is an extensive programme of part-time horticulture courses, which includes a bespoke flourish course. This provides long-term unemployed adults with a useful route into the horticulture industry.
- Adult learners are keen to learn, and participate enthusiastically in lessons and workshops. They make rapid progress in developing their practical skills and industry knowledge because of the high standards of practical teaching, the range of industry-related activities in lessons and the extensive experience of staff. For example, floristry learners research, design and build themed shop displays, and horticulture learners practise propagation of seeds and planting techniques to commercial standards.
- Almost all teachers are skilful in extending and reinforcing learners' technical knowledge during practical activities. As a result, learners develop their understanding beyond the basic steps of task completion. Learners explain with confidence the tasks they are undertaking and why they are completing them, for example animal feeding routines, what foods to use and use of effective storage of animal feed.
- Learners make rapid progress in improving their numeracy skills as teachers set appropriate and challenging tasks for them. For example, blacksmithing learners calculate curves for complex designs to ensure symmetry, estimate the amount of material needed and cost their designs for clients. Teachers develop learners' written English skills less well and learners' development of these is weaker.
- Adults have a good understanding of careers in their chosen industry. Teachers support them well in the qualifications they achieve, the work experience they undertake and the guidance they receive. However, adults do not have access to impartial advice to gain a wider perspective on career options.



Managers do not systematically monitor the progress part-time horticulture learners are making towards their long-term goals beyond those relating directly to mandatory assessments. There is no collection or analysis of employment outcomes, or progression from one level to another. As a result, managers do not know how well these courses are meeting the needs of learners, Jobcentre Plus or local businesses.

### **Apprenticeships**

Good

- Around a third of apprentices are on veterinary nursing apprenticeships and the remainder are on agriculture, butchery, engineering, horticulture and green-keeping. Approximately half of apprentices are at advanced level, and over three quarters of apprentices are adults. Around a fifth of current apprentices are on standards apprenticeships.
- The management of most apprenticeship provision is good. Managers are expanding the range of apprenticeships available in direct response to the demands of employers. In 2015/16 they introduced new butchery standards apprenticeships, and this year have started a standards apprenticeship in green-keeping. However, the green-keeping standards apprenticeship is poorly managed for the few apprentices on this course; they are not well taught or assessed and their attendance at college lessons is low.
- Apprentices develop good practical and vocational skills. They apply these well in the workplace to contribute positively to their employers' businesses. For example, following theory sessions on growth rates in new calves, an intermediate agriculture apprentice changed the feeding management regime at her farm, which produced an improvement in calf growth rates. Apprentices are proud of their contributions and are motivated to succeed; most attend college well and have high professional standards and levels of confidence.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices in agriculture and veterinary nursing is very good. Off-the-job practical sessions are designed well to make very good use of time spent in college. As a result, apprentices are motivated to do well. The proportion of those who achieved their qualifications in these subjects in 2016/17 was high.
- Specialist and vocational staff develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills well. Apprentices understand the relevance of these in their vocational careers and achieve their qualifications.
- Managers provide good resources for apprentices. Teachers use industry-standard facilities and equipment for apprentices to develop and practise their vocational skills. Where specialist resources are not available, the college arranges off-site training sessions. For example, engineering apprentices regularly visit well-known farm machinery suppliers where they can learn about developments in hi-tech farm machinery. This helps them to keep up to date with technology in a fast-changing industry.

# **Provision for learners with high needs**

**Requires improvement** 

■ Most learners are following study programmes. Around a third are on an entry-level rural



pathway course and a small number are on supported internships.

- Teachers do not provide learners with high needs funding with learning that will help them reach their full potential and achieve at the highest levels possible. Teachers do not use available information to provide appropriate tasks and activities which take learners' specific needs into account, so learners do not make the progress they should.
- Teachers and support staff provide learners with helpful oral encouragement and feedback, which mostly gives learners confidence to try new tasks. However, they do not always identify precisely enough how learners could improve their work.
- Staff do not monitor learners' progress closely enough. Managers do not have an accurate view of how high-needs learners are progressing and whether they will achieve their targets by the end of their courses.
- An effective supported internship programme for a small number of learners enables them to gain work experience in garden centres, community transport, local supermarkets and an aquatic centre. Learners on internships work well as members of a team, build confidence and enjoy working.
- Learners develop their mathematics skills well. For example, on an intern programme at an aquatics centre, a learner was able to talk confidently about the length of different fish and the tank sizes required to house them appropriately.
- Teachers develop learners' English skills well, in particular learners develop good technical vocabulary. For example, floristry learners explain specific terms such as seasonal and compost, and animal care learners use the correct descriptive words for health checks.
- Staff use comprehensive learning assessments and education, health and care plans effectively to allocate and plan support for learners.
- Staff provide effective care, advice and guidance, which helps learners to achieve a smooth transition into college life. As a result, learners increase their sense of self-worth, and improve their personal and social skills and well-being. However there is insufficient independent advice and guidance available for learners with high needs to make informed choices about their next steps after they complete their courses at the college.
- Staff provide learners with well-coordinated support and encouragement. Staff work very closely with a wide range of external agencies and professionals to provide good standards of learner care. Learners benefit from access to a speech and language therapist, specialist dyslexia tutors and social and emotional mental health specialists who provide them with effective support in college. As a result, learners increase their independence and overcome barriers to learning.



# **Provider details**

Unique reference number 130667

Type of provider Specialist further education college

3,118

Age range of learners 14+

Approximate number of all learners over the previous full

contract year

Principal/CEO Mr Jeremy Kerswell

Telephone number 01273 890454

Website <u>www.plumpton.ac.uk</u>

# Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–1	8 19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	
	196	62	328	274	516	15	0	0	
Number of apprentices by	Intermediate		te	Advanced		Higher			
apprenticeship level and age	16–18	3 19	)+	16–18	19+	16-	-18	19+	
	46	8	0	9	139	0		0	
Number of traineeships	16–19			19+			Total		
				-			-		
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-								
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	141								
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-								



# Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal for quality and curriculum, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

### **Inspection team**

Helen Flint, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kate Hill	Her Majesty's Inspector
Judith Mobbs	Ofsted Inspector
Nicki Adams	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Hunter	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector



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