

Bridgwater College

Inspection report for further education college

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Inspector	Chris Passmore
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Bridgwater College comprises four separate campuses covering a wide geographical area. The main college is based in Bridgwater with small satellites in Yeovil and Paignton. Residential accommodation is found at the Cannington site some 15 minutes drive from Bridgwater. This site is the main centre for land based courses, small animal care and heritage gardens.

Residential accommodation for students under 18 years of age at Cannington is based around five separate mixed sex lodges. At the time of inspection there were 47 students under 18 being accommodated, out of a possible maximum of 50. The college also arranges host families for motor vehicle students who are under 18 and on block release, as well as accommodation for land based students on farm duties for one week at a time.

Each Lodge accommodates 10 students. Each student has a single bedroom with full en suite facilities. There is a main common room for students to access with a variety of recreational facilities. Each lodge also has a small communal lounge with galley kitchen facility. Students under 18 are accommodated from Sunday to Friday each week and are required to return home each weekend and college break.

The Student Liaison Team together with a night security guard and lodge leaders provide 24 hour support to the students. The Cannington site is an integral part of the village of Cannington and the college enjoys good relations with the local parishioners and councillors.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 87 of the Children Act 1989. The inspection was announced and covered the key national minimum standards in the Every Child Matters outcome areas plus an assessment of the management of the organisation of residential welfare.

The college has outstanding systems for promoting the health and welfare of all learners and provides excellent support for learners while they are living in residence. Arrangements for safeguarding is judged as outstanding reflecting the college priorities for the safety of learners. The arrangements for personal support through an extended curriculum is outstanding with a focus on individual development of learners, academically, vocationally and as members of the community. The living environment is well managed making it a safe place to live and learn. Learners and parents receive detailed information about what opportunities are open to them in a variety of formats linked to their respective individual needs. Learners are

encouraged to share their views for the development of the college. These are listened to, their views acted upon and they are valued, thus strengthening learners' affiliation to the college.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were three recommendations for good practice made at the last inspection. All related to the recording of complaints and the college has taken action to fully address these.

The college has been continuously improving its facilities and functions since the last inspection. There have been significant changes of post-holders in key positions within the college, including student services. While by no means an exhaustive list, significant improvements have been mentioned throughout the inspection report. Of key note are the introduction of lodge leaders. More focus groups and increased frequencies of meetings have promoted the learners' voice within the college and include a bar committee, a food committee and residential focus group. There is now a wireless internet connection throughout the residential accommodation and around the campus. Significant gains have been realised through an effective review of the college catering arrangements for residential learners. The increased value of meal cards has enabled residential learners to have a wider choice of meals and be able to gain experience of budget control throughout the week. In response to learners' requests the college has started a system of recycling household materials and is now embarking on expanding the original programme to become more effective and wide-ranging. The college approach to learners' health is excellent with improvements in the control of smoking on college property through the provision of smoking shelters. Sexual health awareness has been strengthened through the introduction of C Cards and health testing kits available openly across the campus. The college has a clear and honest appraisal of its achievements since the last inspection, its aspirations for the future and those barriers to progress that it has to overcome or work around.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Overall the college makes excellent provision for learners' health which is actively promoted by a range of competent and professional staff. There are many health related benefits that learners gain because of the way in which services are organised and delivered. Residential assessments are carried out prior to entry to the college to ensure learners' overall needs, including health, can be met.

As residential learners under 18 years of age are required to return home every weekend and college holiday, the majority remain registered with their family doctor. General health issues are therefore usually dealt with through these routes. Residential learners do have access to emergency appointments at the local health centre, and a drop-in, no appointments service at the main college site in Bridgwater. The college works closely with the local health centre to maintain these positive links

in order to benefit learners health needs.

Learners gain valuable information through their induction into college life. This informs about a wide range of available health services as well as advice on how to stay fit and healthy. This good start is reinforced and consolidated by a range of ongoing educational activities that encourage a greater awareness of how to prevent illness and poor health. For instance during the inspection the college healthcare co-ordinator was arranging a display and information drive about drink awareness across the college campuses. Smoking around the campus is extremely well monitored and controlled. The health benefits of not smoking are promoted but the college recognises personal choice and so has provided smoking shelters around the site. This enables learners who wish to smoke to do so without leaving the campus or incurring any sanction for breaching the college policy on smoking.

The college is very well supported through established links with the local health centre, dental surgeries and opticians locally. Through the health co-ordinator and college counselling service there are links to outside agencies and health professionals covering a wide range of health related areas.

Initial learner application forms and residential interviews are opportunities to identify any particular needs such as medical conditions, allergies and treatments. Such personal information is discussed with parents of under 18 learners, strategies agreed and information securely retained and kept confidential. Care plans are set up for any learners who are identified as giving cause for concerns and there is a discrete method of identifying these students through the college student database using a traffic light system of colour coding. Pastoral staff are therefore able to identify and monitor learners in a sensitive manner. Medication is always stored and self-administered by learners though the college may check learners medication from time to time to assess compliance. The college makes secure provision for medication available to every under 18 learner. They have a lockable bedroom with additional lockable storage and a fridge in their room for the storage of medication, if required.

If ill, learners are supported according to their wishes. The college has limited sick bay facilities and no registered nursing staff. For minor ailments most learners opt to remain in their rooms with regular support from the student liaison team staff. Parents are informed and asked to collect learners for home care in cases of more prolonged illness. Learners said they felt very well supported when unwell and are checked on regularly by housekeepers as well as student liaison team members.

Learners' day-to-day health and well-being is effectively promoted through extensive internal and external support mechanisms to help support their physical, sexual, emotional and social well-being. The student liaison team, Senior tutors, health coordinator and college counselling services communicate regularly and effectively to manage learners welfare. Jointly they have access to resources and referral systems to aid individual learner's well-being. College staff are well equipped to respond to accidents and unforeseen medical needs because they have been trained in the use of first aid. The college takes a firm stance regarding the use of substances, alcohol

and under age drinking. Learners are quite clear that the college takes a firm line to enforce these rules. It is to their credit that learners respect these restrictions both because of their legal status and their desire to maintain their community cohesion.

Catering at the college is run completely 'in-house' and has been extensively overhauled since the last inspection. Learners reported that this provision now functions much better than previously. They have a choice of hot meals served three times each day during the week. This includes a nutritious, but cheaper meal deal each day and a vegetarian option. There is an extensively stocked salad bar as part of every lunchtime and evening meal as well as sandwiches and a grab bar available for those not wishing to have a full cooked meal. Plenty of fresh fruit is available through the day and learners have ready access to drinking water and snacks at all times.

There is good awareness of individual learners amongst the catering staff and extremely good communication with tutors. The catering staff acknowledge that most of the learners require a lot of fuel to carry out the physical aspects of their chosen course work. Senior catering staff are therefore nutrition trained and this training is being extended to cover more of the catering staff. There is a joint awareness between staff that students do not always give due weight to the balance of their calorific needs in relation to the activities of the day. Many days are spent using high levels of physical energy while others are more class based learning days. The input needs are therefore different and catering and tutorial staff strive to increase learners' thinking about this relationship in order to maintain a healthy, balanced intake of food.

The 'learners' voice' on catering issues is actively sought through the comments card system and committee memberships. Catering at Cannington is managed on site by the restaurant manager and the overall catering arrangements across the college are managed by the catering director. As well as the restaurant the campus shop is open on a daily basis and sells hot and cold snack foods as well as non-perishable foodstuff and essential provisions. There are also several vending machines sited around the college and in the common room. These sell the less healthy food but also require more money to fund their purchases.

In their questionnaire responses 75% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that the food was good. In their discussion groups they agreed there was plenty of food on offer at each meal, the quality was good and they agreed there has been substantial improvements. From observations and casual conversations it is apparent that learners and catering staff have a good rapport at meal times, the atmosphere in the restaurant is pleasant and relaxed. Mealtimes are not rushed and there are not long queues for meals. The residential learners have made their own seating arrangements in the restaurant so that for each evening meal they sit together on a long table. This enables them to enjoy a very sociable time together, celebrate occasions such as birthdays and maintains a community spirit.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The college places the highest importance on safeguarding and the safety and well-being of learners. Although the college campus at Cannington is spread over a large area, learners live in a safe, contained environment. Their welfare and protection is promoted and effectively monitored by the staff responsible for them. Resident learners are supervised and supported by staff to ensure their whereabouts are known and that they are kept safe when on site. There are clear operational policies and procedures that are communicated effectively to promote the safety and welfare of all learners. The college has a designated team for safeguarding and the strong leadership consistently promotes an environment where safety is important. Learners stated they feel safe, they each know who they could talk to if they had concerns and they likened the residential group to 'a large family'.

The college follows an appropriate policy on protection of learners from abuse, and response to allegations, which is consistent with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. There is an ongoing programme of safeguarding training for all staff including all ancillary staff and lodge leaders. These arrangements ensure that staff are aware of what action to take if they have concern or need to report a safeguarding matter. In conversations with staff across the campus they were clear and consistent about their line of reporting if they had any concerns regarding learners.

Learners' privacy and confidentiality is promoted and respected. There are a number of policies that underpin and guide staff practice in this area. Learners expressed the view that personal information about them is kept safe and that staff work in a way that keeps personal matters confidential. Learners and parents are provided with information in an appropriate format about how to make a complaint. Most learners are clear about how to raise a concern and say that staff listen to them if they have a complaint or are unhappy about anything.

The college follows transparent and well-circulated policies and guidelines relating to behaviour and discipline. Learners are encouraged to behave appropriately through a college ethos promoting respect and consideration for others. The effectiveness of this was evident through observation and involvement with learners through the inspection period. There is very little bullying at the college; bullying in any form is not tolerated. Residential learners did not identify bullying as an issue but were clear in their agreement (83%) that the college acted swiftly and firmly to deal with any incidents. During the inspection the college was running a campaign of bullying awareness as part of the national anti-bullying week. College guidance includes appropriate sections on cyber bullying covering college and personal IT equipment and mobile phones. Staff practice regarding discipline is fair and consistent, which matches the feedback from learners that staff are fair and reasonable. (97% agreed or strongly agreed they were treated fairly by staff.) The staff team have very good communication and information sharing systems to assist with maintaining consistent standards of behaviour throughout the college.

Learners' health and safety are promoted well with a robust and systematic approach to assessing risks and taking actions to ensure the college campuses and residencies are safe. Young people learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they have regular opportunities to practice the evacuation of their residencies at varying times of day or night. These exercises raises their awareness and helps to keep them safe. The college has also engaged with the local fire and rescue service in running a mock-emergency scenario with subsequent evaluation and feedback from all participants. The accommodation is safe and secure and the college demonstrates a vigilant approach to maintaining this for everyone. Learners stated they feel safe on campus; they appreciated the college had responded to their requests to improve lighting in certain areas; they know their residence blocks have monitored electronic latches and specific entry and exit requirements. Learners acknowledged these functions are implemented for their safety and respected them in practice.

Overall, there are robust recruitment, selection and vetting processes in place to make sure learners are protected from contact with inappropriate adults. All staff have enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks prior to commencing employment and references are verified. There was discussion regarding improvements to the clarity of the audit trail by which evidence is provided to support safer recruitment practice. However, this does not detract from the overall effectiveness of the systems in place to safeguard learners. All visitors to the college, including contractors, are asked to sign in and are given a visitors identity badge, which is distinct and different to staff members identification. In their discussions learners stated they felt secure that any stranger to the campus would soon be identified and that staff had effectively challenged individuals in the past. The fact the college campus is close to a village community is not reported as a source of intrusion by unauthorised persons.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Learners receive excellent support from a range of staff throughout the college. These include senior tutors, course tutors, student services staff, student liaison team, health co-ordinator and college counsellors. The progress of each student is carefully monitored by personal tutors and any concerns shared between key staff. Any personal issues are dealt with sensitively and in confidence. Communication between staff in different departments is excellent and there is little chance that a student experiencing difficulties would go unnoticed. Any areas of concern are discussed with the learner and strategies developed to address them. Learners said they had numerous members of staff they could turn to for personal advice and guidance. As a result learners have every opportunity to achieve well, enjoy their residential experience and gain in terms of friendships and life experience.

The college provides an open and inclusive environment that both recognises and celebrates diversity. The overall population of Bridgwater College comprises a diverse mix of cultures, race and academic ability. These differences are celebrated within the college and enhances the experience of learners. Catering outlets include food

from different cultures in their menus and serve halal poultry. Anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities are embedded in all aspects of college life and staff aim to meet the needs of students regardless of gender, race, religion, disabilities or sexual orientation. All staff receive equality and diversity training and learner tutorials are frequently used to raise awareness of cultural differences. As many learners come from overseas, specialist linguists are employed to overcome communication difficulties. The college has excellent support systems for learners who need support with complex learning and/or physical difficulties.

The college offers an enrichment programme that provides learners access to a wide range of extra-curricula social and recreational activities. This programme adds an important dimension to the life of learners and provides opportunities to sample other aspects of life. During their college life learners are encouraged to participate in sporting and recreational activities and many are active members of college teams. The college has an extremely active student union that organises social events both on campus and in the local area.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The college actively seeks the views and opinions of learners. Everyone plays their part in learner involvement and the culture of the college is one of partnership with learners. The college promotes the 'learner's voice' in everything it does and this approach is embedded into college life. Learners benefit from the college having a variety of ways in which they can express their views and influence the way in which the college operates. These include a residential focus group, student union, various forums, house meetings and comments cards. In practice learners confirm that there are formal and informal mechanisms that they know of that really do effect change. The college has adopted a feedback to learners in poster form called 'You said; We did'. These are posted at appropriate points across the campus and list the issues raised by learners and the college response. In the majority of instances there has been a positive response to learners' wishes with other issues being suitably explained or proposals clarified. Learners confirm that most day-to-day issues can be addressed simply and directly by talking with support staff.

They are also fully involved in raising the profile of the college in the community. Learners take part in charity work, environmental awareness projects and in developing nations projects. The college hosts a walled garden and tea rooms facility which learners across the campus run or support. This is a tourist feature of the local area.

The college enables learners to contact their parents and families in private through email or the use of pay phones sited around the campus. As all learners under 18 years old return home at weekends and the majority have personal mobiles contact arrangements are not an issue. Parents are pleased with the overall communication between the college and themselves. Parents responses to questionnaires indicated that communication with the college is good.

Learners benefit from guidance and support from a range of staff both on arrival and in preparation for leaving the college. The college has a comprehensive and up-to-date website. There are several booklets that welcome learners to the college and provide information about life in college and in the local area. Each learner is given an individual 'i-card' that replicates the most important pieces of information, contact numbers and services available to them. These are credit card sized, easy to carry and provide a quick reference to sources of help. Learners said they enjoyed their induction and 'freshers' activities and reflected that friendships made as residential learners are likely to be lasting ones. The college has good links with local and national industry, land based employers and the agricultural industry. Careers advice is available and part of the curriculum and each learners' destination on leaving the college is known.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The college provides outstanding accommodation for its learners. All learners under 18 years are accommodated at the Cannington campus in five separate mixed gender lodges, each accommodating up to 10 learners. Each learner has an individual en suite bedroom, suitable storage, study area and a fridge. This provision ensures that learners have privacy and can meet start times without pressure. Learners confirmed they liked their rooms, they were warm, comfortable and that they were able to personalise them if they wished. There are extra long beds available for students who may need them.

Each lodge has a communal lounge area with television and electrical games equipment. In addition there is a small galley kitchen for snacks and hot drinks preparation. There are domestic teams who ensure the standard of cleanliness is well maintained, that rooms reach an acceptable level of tidiness and those staff members also act as gentle carers, monitoring the well-being of learners. Lodges have a lodge leader appointed who are returning students but still under 18 at the start of the academic year. These leaders have a mentoring role and are often the first point of contact for new residential learners. They regularly meet with full staff members, have been trained in basic child protection awareness but do not have any sanctioning or disciplinary powers over their peers. They have been well accepted by residential learners and are themselves responsible and interested individuals, keen to maintain the standards and privileges of communal life.

Learners have free access to their lodges but have to enter and exit using their individual electronic wand to activate the latch release on the main door. These activations are monitored and entrances are covered by CCTV cameras. Learners accept these measures are for their protection and are vigilant that no one abuses them. There is a general curfew time by which learners have to be in their lodges. They feel this is reasonable especially as many of them have early starts and heavy physical days after which they are tired. By night there are members of staff and a security guard on waking duty, patrolling the grounds. In the event of needing staff

during the night there are internal phones in each lodge.

Learners also have access to a separate common room adjacent to their lodges. It is a social area with seating, games tables such as pool and table tennis and vending machines. This is the hub of weekday evening activities, the location of the campus shop, the student bar and the student liaison team office. The student bar is not regularly open throughout the week and there are clear expectations and control measures in place to prevent under aged drinking when it is open. Learners said they are consulted about the activities programme and enjoy the community spirit shared through activities. This was borne out through observation as was the mutual consideration and co-operation shown between learners and staff.

Where learners under 18 years old have to be accommodated away from the college, say for field trips, these arrangements are subject to a rigorous risk assessment and planning process in line with general college practice for such events. Throughout the year the college runs a number of week long residential courses for apprentices in the motor industry, some of these may be under 18 years old. These apprentices are accommodated with host families and there is a rigorous system of checks and annual inspections to ensure that suitable, safe venues are provided for these apprentices. There college makes no distinction between the standards required of host families but there are clear contractual requirements made of the host families to protect and safeguard any apprentices placed by the college.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The organisation and management of residential provision within the college are excellent. Arrangements are overseen by an enthusiastic group of senior staff who continually strive for improvement. This ensures good learner welfare and there is an excellent focus on increasing independence for all learners. Staff are experienced and committed to making college life a happy and positive one for all learners. Learners and parents responded by giving 100% agreement to the statement that being resident at college is enjoyable. There are sufficient staff to maintain adequate supervision of learners in their leisure time and there are sufficient on call arrangements to cover sickness or absence. The college follows a clear policy for the safety of learners during the college's organised and arranged journeys, trips and outings. Managers have a clear overview of the residential operation and strive to ensure that learners are supported in a consistent and safe manner.

The statement of college principles and practice is covered by a range of accessible documents and leaflets, also available electronically. Application packs provide good information about the college and its facilities and are readily available for all potential learners and their families. These documents complement the pre-admission meetings and induction days that inform learners and their families what they may expect from the curriculum and facilities. There is a continual striving for improved outcomes for all learners. Staff deliver professional and supportive services through working in partnership with each other and as a team. They are provided

with clear guidance about their roles from competent and supportive managers. Communication across all tiers of staff is good and is reflected at senior management level. Senior managers have a very good insight into how well learners are being supported. The effectiveness of this quality communication is that learners feel safe, valued and are proud of their college.

All staff with particular responsibilities for the supervision of students or the provision of welfare services have job descriptions reflecting those duties. They have the appropriate competence, receive induction training in those responsibilities when newly appointed, and receive regular review of their supervisory and learner welfare practice. There are clear opportunities for them to access continuing training. There is also an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff. The quality assurance of all college systems is impressive. There is a clear and substantial process of self assessment of its residential and learner welfare practice. Parents who contributed to the inspection gave positive feedback through their questionnaire responses contributing statements such as, 'I cannot praise the staff and student liaison team enough. They are extremely vigilant and supportive in their approach to caring for the young adults they look after.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The college respects and values people of different backgrounds and abilities and celebrates the richness this brings to the college. There is a proactive equality and diversity working group with learner and governor representatives. All staff receive training in this area of practice at induction and then have various opportunities throughout the year to further raise awareness. Equal opportunities is incorporated throughout the curriculum and through the extended programme of activities. The college continues to maintain excellent partnership working with to further enhances learners' opportunities.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure there is a clear chronology of checks with dates to evidence compliance with the recommendations for safer recruitment. (NMS 34.1)