

Plumpton College

Specialist further education college

Inspection dates	10–13 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Recent improvements in leadership and management of provision have yet to show sustained impact in improving teaching, learning and assessment in study programmes and apprenticeship provision.
- Achievement rates on a significant minority of vocational programmes require improvement.
- Too many theory classes fail to provide most-able learners with sufficient challenge to achieve their best.
- Achievement rates for English and mathematics GCSE remain too low, despite some in-year improvements in attendance and retention.
- Some teachers in vocational theory classes lack the confidence and skills to develop fully learners' English and mathematics abilities.

The provider has the following strengths

- The new principal and senior leaders have worked rapidly to identify the college's strengths and weaknesses and set challenging goals for improvement. Recent improvement measures have significantly improved learner retention.
- Learners rapidly develop very high levels of maturity, confidence and vocational skill because of high-quality practical teaching.
- Outstanding work experience arrangements and extensive enrichment activities give learners personal resilience and extend their career horizons.
- Very high numbers of learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and groups under-represented in land-based industries, gain sustained employment in the sector of their choice.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Plumpton College is a small specialist further education college in East Sussex, providing courses chiefly for those working in, or intending to work in, land-based industries. The main college campus occupies a large rural estate a few miles from the county town of Lewes and 10 miles from the City of Brighton and Hove. Full- and part-time courses are also provided at centres at Flimwell, Netherfield and Robertsbridge in East Sussex, at Stanmer Park in Brighton and Snowdonia in North Wales.
- The college provides full-time study programmes for 16- to 19-year-old learners and a significant range of full- and part-time courses for adult learners from entry level to level 3 in land-based and related industries, together with foundation degree and degree programmes run in partnership with the University of Brighton. The college has around 200 apprentices and a substantial programme for school pupils aged 14 to 16 involves around 50 schools. Learners are recruited from a wide area across East and West Sussex, the wider south east and nationally.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, managers and staff must ensure that qualification achievement rates for all courses rise rapidly to exceed national rates. Recently improved measures to monitor learners' progress should be used to identify and provide immediate support to any learners in danger of not achieving their main qualification.
- Leaders and managers should focus recently enhanced quality improvement measures on study programmes and apprenticeship provision, to ensure sustained improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in these areas.
- Managers should make use of the effective practice in the teaching of English and mathematics that exists in a number of areas, to develop fully all teachers' confidence and skills in these subjects. Spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors on written work must be identified so that learners understand how and where they need to improve.
- Managers must support teachers to plan more effectively to meet the needs of all learners during theory classes, particularly the most able. The range and suitability of classroom activities should be improved so that all learners are involved in and challenged by each element of a lesson.
- Teachers should be supported to develop further the range of tutorial and review materials that generate discussion of British values and the ways learners can recognise and avoid radicalisation from any source.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders during 2014/15 recognised and began acting to deal with a downward trend in overall qualification success rates. Analysis showed that learners who stayed at the college generally passed their courses, so actions focused on improving retention and learner progress monitoring. Though outcomes for learners and teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because of low qualification success rates in 2014/15, the new leadership team has been successful in swiftly improving retention, governance and many aspects of teaching, learning and assessment during the current year. In addition, a highly effective and rapid restructure of the college management led by the college's new principal, provides greater focus and emphasis on quality improvement, learner support, progress monitoring and curriculum management. Managers have prioritised improvements in GCSE mathematics and English, and retention in these subjects is significantly improved, as are in-year pass rates for functional skills qualifications and GCSE re-sits. However, the number of learners achieving A* to C grades at GCSE was too low in 2014/15.
- Senior leaders' strategic planning provides robust strategic aims and quantifiable success measures. The curriculum is well planned, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the land-based sector, including those partners identified in conjunction with two neighbouring local enterprise partnerships. Leaders have made very effective use of the findings of an area-based review to inform strategic planning, develop relationships with feeder schools and sixth-form colleges and enrich the vocational curriculum, including through new employer-led apprenticeship frameworks in horticulture. Learners on study programmes, apprentices, adult learners and learners in receipt of high-needs funding follow pathways that are very well designed to meet their career aspirations.
- Leaders, managers and governors work hard to maintain the college's high reputation within the land-based sector and rural communities. They have undertaken much successful work to professionalise the college and raise expectations, such as updating the dress code policy and developing staff awareness of brand identity. Revised job descriptions now tenaciously align accountabilities for strategy, curriculum planning and quality. Learners are actively engaged in the selection process of teaching staff and provide valuable feedback on both the teaching experience and the professionalism of the candidates. Staff recognise the benefits of the changes achieved through inspirational leadership that has resulted in raised expectations, standards and accountability.
- Management of resources through partnership activities with manufacturers and land-based partners is highly effective and provides excellent value for money, ensuring that learners have access to high-quality, industry standard equipment and tools. For example, in forestry, learners benefit from using the most up-to-date debarking and log-splitting equipment loaned to the college by the manufacturer.
- Partnerships with external stakeholders such as East Sussex County Council, Landex, FE Sussex and the University of Brighton are highly productive and, as a result, the college caters well for its learners and employers across all subject areas. These links enable the college to expand and improve its range of apprenticeships, which meet local and regional priorities well. Successful partnerships with universities have significantly increased the number of applications for higher education courses. For example, the development of a higher education awareness fair for all level 3 learners has raised their aspirations.
- Managers have been very successful in developing an extensive range of high-quality courses for 14- to 16-year-old learners, particularly those who may not otherwise succeed in school or remain in education. Progression to college courses is very good from the 14 to 16 provision, and this close partnership working with schools makes a significant contribution to reducing numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training. Managers also make highly effective use of discretionary bursaries, including subsidised accommodation and travel, to help learners who face hardship or may otherwise not engage in learning.
- Teachers and managers have ready access to comprehensive information about their learners and now use this information well to set challenging goals and motivate learners. They are constantly looking for ways to improve and, as a result, current learners are achieving well, making good progress and frequently exceeding their targets.
- Observations of teaching and learning and resulting continuous professional development activities are beginning to demonstrate impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning during the current year. Teachers know how to improve and receive timely help and support from their managers that enables them to develop their teaching practice. Managers make very effective use of a broad range of mechanisms to gather learners' views and validate judgements about the quality of teaching and learning.
- Continuous improvement of health and safety practice is a key priority for a college preparing young people to work in a sector with a historically high injury and accident rate. Managers have put in place a

health and safety team including the recent appointment of a health and safety manager responsible for management of risk assessments and preparation of reports for governors. Staff actively promote health and safety practice and use of protective equipment to ensure that all learners adopt and consistently adhere to good practice, an approach that has resulted in a reduction of reported accidents over the past two years.

- Self-assessment has been improved, so that current processes and documents are inclusive, comprehensive and accurate. Managers know the provision and its strengths and weaknesses very well. Data is accurate and managers are able to analyse the performance of groups of learners quickly and accurately. The clarity of current self-assessment processes reflects a substantially improved college-wide awareness of standards and performance.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance is good. Since the appointment of the new principal, governors' involvement in college activities and their oversight of standards have been significantly improved. For example, governors now undertake key roles such as chairing the farm committee and carrying out observation 'walk-throughs' with the college observation team.
 - Governors bring to their work a good range of useful life and work experiences and ensure good focus on strategy, targets and performance. Governors carefully monitor their own range of skills and experiences to inform succession planning.
 - Governors know what the college needs to improve and they work closely with the principal and senior managers to implement the new staffing structure, which is focused on accountability, quality improvement and consistently good or better teaching and learning. Governors now receive detailed reports that provide improved understanding of the college's performance and which they use well to challenge managers.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.**
 - Safeguarding arrangements are well established and effective. Managers keep detailed records and monitor these thoroughly. Learners are particularly well supported through any personal difficulties and referrals and communications with specialist agencies are managed well.
 - Managers carry out comprehensive recruitment checks on staff and maintain detailed and up-to-date records. In addition, managers carry out systematic checks for all volunteers, residents and bus drivers.
 - Leaders and managers have taken their responsibility to respond to the 'Prevent' duty seriously and training for all staff and governors has been effective in raising awareness. Learners on study programmes, adult learning programmes and 14 to 16 courses have a clear understanding of the risks posed by those who seek to promote extremist views including those associated with animal rights groups. However, promotion to a very small minority of apprentices is still in progress.
 - Learners are safe and feel safe. They know how to keep themselves safe at work because of promotions such as 'sun awareness week'. They demonstrate tolerance and respect and put into practice college values extremely well. However, a small minority of staff lack confidence and resources to instigate discussions that promote learners' understanding of British values.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Although many aspects of teaching, learning and assessment have improved during the current year, there remain crucial areas where further improvement is required, for example in the quality of theory teaching in a minority of lessons, in teachers' strategies to stretch and challenge the most able learners, and in the development of learners' English and mathematics skills in most theory classes.
- In the large majority of lessons and apprentice reviews, teachers and assessors use their skills and recent industry knowledge effectively to motivate learners, who respond enthusiastically, work hard and produce work of a good standard.
- Learners acquire a wide range of strong and relevant practical skills and a good understanding of the industries in which they wish to work, through effective practical lessons and activities. Learners work hard individually and in pairs, well supported by their teachers, refining their skills and supporting each other. Learners use their knowledge well to peer assess one another during practical tasks such as during a forestry machinery session.
- Very well-managed practical teaching activities significantly enhance learners' vocational skills, for example agriculture learners take part in farm routines and assessing animal health with farm staff, and forestry learners carry out log-splitting and debarking tasks on trees they have previously felled and extracted.

- In a minority of theory lessons, teachers do not plan activities well enough to ensure that all learners make good progress. Such lessons do not always have sufficient pace or provide sufficient challenge to enable most-able learners to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Not all vocational teachers have sufficient skills to embed relevant English and mathematics concepts effectively in theory lessons and, as a result, too few learners pass their GCSE qualifications in these subjects, though learners do understand the importance of English and mathematics for their future careers. The majority of practical lessons, however, provide good opportunities for learners to practise and develop their mathematics skills.
- Apprentices are very well supported by their employers, who provide high-quality resources and opportunities for them to apply their learning to the workplace. For example, veterinary nurses gain confidence and take on responsibilities for key tasks such as the giving and recording of medical treatments.
- Learners develop very good employability skills both on site and in the community and workplace. Practical sessions are purposeful and learners work very well individually and in teams. The responsibilities they undertake as supervisors during daily husbandry routines in the animal house or horse stables enable them to use their knowledge and to practise their supervision, management and communication skills.
- Learners gain a good range of relevant business skills, which prepare them well for the world of work. Floristry learners liaised with the college as a client to plan, cost and create an event display in the main reception, and metalsmithing learners understand how to design, cost and market their products, which they successfully sell.
- Full-time learners benefit from an outstanding range of work experience and enrichment activities that successfully extend their knowledge and employability skills. All learners on study programmes take part in relevant employment placements that frequently run throughout the year, and from which many learners eventually gain full-time employment. All full-time learners also benefit from challenging residential study visits at the college outward-bound centre in Snowdonia. This experience develops maturity, team working skills and high levels of resilience. In addition to their main qualifications, many learners gain additional vocational qualifications, which enhance their sustained employment opportunities. For example, outdoor activity learners gain instructors certificates, while forestry learners gain awards in tree climbing and rescue and chainsaw maintenance.
- Learners compete across the south of England and nationally, for example through the college open day, numerous horse shows, national tree climbing competitions and other large-scale display events, gaining valuable team-building skills and enhancing their vocational confidence.
- Teachers make good use of target-setting to support the majority of learners to make good progress. Teachers know their learners well and help learners set meaningful targets for both the long term and for individual sessions; these are reviewed frequently, enabling the vast majority of current learners to make good progress.
- The majority of learners receive helpful feedback on written and other work, which enables them to improve their skills and make good progress. Oral feedback during practical sessions and reviews is immediate and clear, enabling learners to make positive adjustments to their activities. Written feedback to learners praises their efforts and confirms that they have met their outcomes. However, such comment does not always give learners helpful strategies to help them improve their English skills or develop their work to achieve a higher grade.
- Teachers support learners with complex and additional needs very well, so that they produce work of a high standard and make good progress. The college is fully inclusive and learners are gaining skills at all levels across many subjects and disciplines, are making good progress in supported internships, and are progressing onto meaningful further learning or work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are good

- Learning programmes engage learners very well and enable them to develop skills, resilience and attributes that equip them for employment, higher education and for productive participation in modern Britain. Learners are happy and enjoy the challenge of learning in the college and work environment, developing their motivation and confidence. Learners speak appreciatively of learning something new every day they attend college, and feel that teachers and support staff guide them well through their learning.
- Learners on all programmes can describe the progress they make, and what they need to do to complete and to achieve ambitious targets. Teachers employ successful strategies to identify and support those at

risk of falling behind or not succeeding. Very many learners are now making rapid progress from their starting points, developing high levels of resilience, self-confidence and maturity, often with little or no experience of the land-based sector.

- The constant focus of senior managers on teaching and learning quality leads to high levels of motivation and commitment by learners and their teachers. Learners attend lessons punctually and are also highly responsible in meeting the many outside-hours commitments involved in farm and land-based activities.
- In lessons and around the college sites, learners are courteous, responsible and self-managing in their behaviours. During preparations for the college open day, learners worked very well in teams, usually taking turns to lead on tasks. They behaved collaboratively and constructively, considering one another's needs and thinking carefully of the needs of the members of the public who would attend the various shows.
- Learners are highly enthusiastic about their practical activities and rise to meet the challenge of the considerable responsibilities posed by handling complex and potentially dangerous machinery, managing large animals, or caring for small vulnerable creatures in their care. The very wide range of shows, competitions and external events that learners take part in help to develop very good practical and employability skills.
- Teachers and support staff thoroughly and purposefully review the skills that learners develop during extensive work experience placements. Reflections on, and statements of, skills developed provide valuable material for each learner's personal statement of skills and attributes. Employers recognise very enthusiastically the skills and benefits that learners and apprentices bring to their businesses.
- Learners on provision for 14- to 16-year-olds and learners in receipt of high-needs funding make very good progress at the college and develop a very good range of learning, personal and social skills. Learners on programmes for 14- to 16-year-olds, who have often experienced difficulties with schooling, enjoy their learning and become fully engaged with college life. A very good proportion of these learners progress onto full-time courses at the college, and experience success at higher levels of study. Learners in receipt of high-needs funding significantly increase their independence and self-confidence because of high-quality supported internships, and a good proportion progress to further study at the college or go into employment.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Outcomes for learners require improvement because action has only been taken during the past 18 months to deal with declining overall qualification success rates during the previous three years, and overall success rates remain too low. A key cause of poor success rates has been low retention, and managers have now put in place measures that have improved retention considerably during the current year. Retention rates have risen by between five and seven percentage points on all courses as a result, but still require improvement for learners on apprenticeships.
- Managers' close analysis of previous years' retention data shows that many learners left college early because they were gaining jobs, often because of the range of additional qualifications they achieved during their main vocational courses. A concerted and successful effort has been made to improve learners' understanding of the need to complete their main qualification, and where possible progress to the next level of learning. In the current year, a good proportion of learners intend to return for further learning at the college.
- English and mathematics GCSE A* to C grade success rates require improvement. Too few learners gain their qualifications at their first attempt, though pass rates for functional skills tests have improved from a very low base in the current year. Leaders and managers recognise the need for improvement and have put in place measures to increase achievement rates this year. The small numbers of learners taking tests, mock examinations and part-awards show improvement trends over previous years.
- Learners at all levels and across all courses develop very high levels of employability and an impressive range of valuable personal skills during their time at the college. Employers value very highly the skills learners bring to the workplace, and a very high proportion of learners gain jobs as a result of taking part in work experience placements. At the time of the inspection, around three quarters of learners who will be leaving the college already had job offers for the coming year.
- Though learners often have little or no experience of land-based industries, they make rapid skills gains, and develop a very good understanding of the sectors in which they wish to work. Learners at all levels of study develop considerable self-confidence and maturity that teachers help them direct towards their careers.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- Study programmes provision for learners aged 16 to 19 requires improvement because, despite improvements in retention and progress monitoring, too few learners achieve their qualifications. Though learners' progress and skills development are strong in the current year, overall success rates remain below national rates for similar providers. In addition, recent improvements in teaching, learning and assessment have yet to eradicate weaknesses in theory teaching and in development of learners' English and mathematics skills.
- Learners develop good employability and vocational skills, particularly in agriculture and metalwork. Very well-managed, industry-standard resources significantly enhance the learning experience. Learners in agriculture take part in farm routines, milking cows and assessing health risks; these activities build team working, vocational and personal skills. Metalwork learners at all levels create highly technical and creative pieces for this point in their course.
- The quality of practical teaching and learning on 16 to 19 study programmes is good, particularly in agriculture, equine, metalsmithing and machinery, where standards are very high. Attendance is good in most lessons. Learners develop good self-reliance, vocational and employability skills because of well-planned learning activities. For example, level 1 learners in agriculture used their skills very well to peer teach one another to drive a new tractor and plough. In a minority of theory lessons teachers do not always ensure that the most able learners are challenged to achieve their potential.
- The majority of teachers set clear, specific targets for learners and, as a result, learners are able to understand and articulate the progress they have made. Teachers monitor learners' progress towards their targets rigorously through frequent review meetings. This means that learners are aware of what they have already achieved and what they still need to do to reach their targets and achieve their qualifications. Learners are making good progress during the current year.
- The quality of written feedback on assessed work is good. Teachers provide clear and constructive feedback that confirms learners' achievement of outcomes. However, feedback on a minority of assessments does not always indicate clearly how learners can further improve for future assessments. Teachers in such cases do not routinely identify spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors in learners' written work to improve their English skills.
- All learners benefit from highly relevant and purposeful external work placements that improve their vocational skills and their understanding of the demands of employment in the land-based sector. Learners also participate in a wide range of additional on-site 'duties' such as early morning and afternoon milking or animal husbandry, or taking an active role in the large-scale county-show-style college open day, to develop their vocational and employability skills. Because of these many opportunities to work together, learners have very good team-working skills.
- Teaching of GCSE and functional skills English requires improvement. Teachers do not always establish high levels of expectation or use resources innovatively. A small minority of learners do not attend their English lessons regularly. Learners are passive and some lessons are dull. Activities do not always provide challenge and resources are not used thoughtfully to help learners to check their spelling and master other key skills. For example, level 1 learners in one lesson could not make use of a dictionary and did not have access to a glossary of important terms.
- Teaching of mathematics requires improvement in theory lessons. Though increasing numbers of learners now pass their tests, they do not always develop a good knowledge of mathematical methods and concepts. For example, learners in functional skills sit online tests, which they repeat until they achieve the correct answers, rather than developing a sound knowledge of methods to ensure success. In more innovative GCSE lessons, learners confidently identify different mathematical methods and use them effectively.
- Teachers and support staff work successfully together to provide extensive and effective support for learners who need extra help. As a result, learners receiving this additional support overcome barriers to their learning and make at least the same progress as their peers. The majority of learners have a good awareness of Prevent and can describe how they would report any concerns.
- Learners demonstrate very good levels of respect and behaviour towards each other and their teachers. Learners develop high levels of confidence and are able to describe how they have developed personally over time. This is further enhanced for learners from all sites and levels, who take part in a residential visit to the Snowdon Educational Centre in Wales, which they value highly and enjoy, significantly further developing their confidence and team-working skills.
- In the majority of cases, staff provide good, impartial careers advice and guidance. Learners at every

level are well prepared to progress. They all produce a personal statement that enables them to identify and promote their skills and develop clear and realistic plans for progression. As a result, the vast majority of learners progress to the next level of study or into employment or to an apprenticeship.

Adult learning programmes

are good

- The college currently has over 660 adult learners on a wide range of full-time land-based programmes with the greatest numbers in horticulture, agricultural machinery and metalsmithing, dog grooming, animal care, forestry and arboriculture and agriculture.
- Teaching, learning and assessment for adult learners are good. The vast majority of teachers plan interesting lessons drawing on useful examples and on the experiences of learners to ensure the context is familiar to support learning. Good classroom management promotes high expectations and good conduct by learners in theory sessions. Teachers use assessments well to maintain engagement and establish what learners know and can do before building on concepts, subjects or practical activities. Learners can describe the best ways for them to learn and relate these to the teaching approaches used.
- Teachers' planning of a small minority of classroom teaching sessions does not challenge or engage all individuals. Teachers' use of generic high-level targets does not clearly identify what learners need to achieve in class, or how a learner needs to extend their learning.
- Learners benefit from the recent improvements in teaching and learning following the focus by managers on quality improvement of teaching. Teachers have high expectations of learners and are developing innovative strategies to improve learning further. For example, one horticulture tutor is developing a set of shapes with clues that when assembled by the learners would form the plant being described. Many teachers are developing interesting approaches to routine assessment to check learners' understanding at the start of each session.
- Retention of adult learners has improved significantly from the same period last year. This improvement partly results from actions teachers have taken to adjust courses to better meet learners' needs, and from the provision of additional stepping-stone qualifications between learning levels. In addition, teachers now monitor progress more closely to ensure that learners make the progress of which they are capable. Staff deploy additional learning and financial support very effectively for those learners who were identified as at risk of not completing successfully. The current retention rate for adult learners this year is very high.
- Learners' skills development is very good. Learners develop very high standards of vocational, independent learning and employability skills recognised by employers to be of industry standards. Learners can explain the progress they make, identify new skills they develop and describe how they can now confidently undertake new tasks. For example, one learner described measuring, cutting and laying 40 square metres of paving stones; another tackled complex gardening tasks and projects with confidence and accuracy. Floristry learners on a level 3 programme identified skills they developed and could recognise and describe where they needed further development; they set their own targets for a large installation display, seeking out support when needed and scheduling work according to the life-span of the flowers and foliage. This ensured that the display was at peak condition four days later for an event and that wastage was kept to a minimum.
- Adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and with additional learning needs achieve at the same rate as their peers. An extensive range of learning, physical and financial support is available to enhance progress especially for those least able. In one rapid-paced horticultural session with 10 learners, six of whom were learners with high needs or multiple learning needs, the tutor expertly developed a learning environment, rapport and culture that ensured all learners were appropriately challenged and supported.
- Adult learners on supported internship programmes describe their provision and the support they receive enthusiastically. They understand their short-term goals and can describe how their learning and work experience contributes to developing their confidence, motivation and employability skills. Clear progression routes are in place for these learners to further studies and employment. They enjoy their learning, feel safe and readily discuss personal and study concerns with their teachers. The college has an exceptionally high success rate in gaining sustained paid employment for learners on the internship programmes. One internship learner recently won the highly prestigious 2016 Young Start-Up Talent Award Gatwick for a bakery he has started with friends who also have additional learning needs. The learner was presented with the trophy at a formal reception, winning £50,000 support and £2,000 start-up cash. The learner said of his achievement 'we were head to head with "mainstream" businesses and ours was the only group with learning difficulties'.
- Teachers' tracking and monitoring of learners' progress are good, but teachers in a minority of areas lack a clear centralised record of support that allows them to see whether other staff are supporting learners

with whom they work. Tutorial and pastoral support are good in developing learners' confidence and motivation; teachers monitor learners' progress closely, direct their learning carefully and negotiate challenging targets.

- Facilities and resources are of industry standard, accessible and well used for skills development. A metalwork learner designed a dining table and chairs and made effective use of the facilities and resources to produce a professional standard product to be displayed in a London show. However, at the Stanmer Park campus much of the classroom accommodation does not promote the high standards and expectations that the staff have of their learners. There are plans in place to improve the facilities over the next two years.
- Learners understand the necessity for English and mathematics skills within their subject areas and their critical importance for employability. Teachers effectively embed English and mathematics into the majority of classroom sessions, and most practical sessions, contributing to learners' high level of skills development. Within marked work, the vast majority of teachers carefully correct and comment on spelling and grammar to reinforce learning.
- All full-time learners undertake work experience relevant to their area of interest, developing vocational and employability skills. Several learners have returned to their work experience placement to work either voluntarily or to take up paid work at the end of their programmes. Job coaches successfully support learners with additional needs into employment and enable them to develop their confidence and employability skills. Most learners were well supported and informed about future options for progression and employment. However, a small minority of learners received insufficient information and guidance about employment opportunities following their courses.
- Learners feel safe within the college and in the surrounding environment. Learners behave exceptionally well, with a high degree of consideration and respect for other learners and staff. Learners are punctual and attend regularly. Learners understand British values and are able to discuss related topics; they can explain the purpose of the 'Prevent' duty and what they should do if they have concerns.

Apprenticeships

require improvement

- The college provides apprenticeships for around 200 learners across nine subject areas. The greatest numbers of enrolments are in veterinary nursing, horticulture and agriculture; these account for 67% of apprentices.
- Apprenticeships provision requires improvement because despite recent improvements in the management of provision, and in progress monitoring and employer liaison, too few apprentices gain their qualifications, and during the past three years the overall trend in most subject areas has been downwards. In the current year, almost all apprentices work hard and enjoy their learning. In theory lessons learners produce good-quality work and can clearly link their knowledge to the workplace, their future studies and progression plans.
- Apprentices receive high levels of support from their assessors to maintain good-quality portfolios that demonstrate consistent skills development over time, and include good examples of wider research. For example, veterinary nurses evaluate the different cultural and religious viewpoints on the subject of euthanasia and relate these topics well to their growing knowledge of the veterinary sector.
- In a minority of theory lessons, teachers do not take sufficient account of apprentices' starting points and do not set out useful individualised learning outcomes that drive progress. As a result, the sessions lack pace and learners are passive and do not have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning.
- The development of mathematical skills in the workplace is good. For example, equine learners are able to apply mathematical skills to accurately measure and record feed quantities and treatment dosages. In a number of cases apprentices' skills have been recognised by employers and they now take on responsibility for feeding and treatment allocations in their yards.
- The development of written English for a significant minority of apprentices is weak. Teachers' marking of learners' work often misses spelling mistakes, including the correct spelling of technical vocational terms, which is an essential skill for career progression and further study.
- Feedback on off-the-job written work and assignments for a minority of apprentices does not always support and set a level of expectation of them to develop their knowledge; in some cases, teachers simply tick and sign work to acknowledge unit completion. However, in most cases teachers give detailed feedback on how learners can improve work, for example by researching industry websites to provide more detailed answers to assignment questions.
- Progress reviews in the workplace are well structured and use employer feedback well. The reviews enable apprentices to evaluate their own progress, both on and off the job, identify their areas for development and discuss thoroughly their routes to higher-level study and employment.

- Work-based assessors record and assess activities carried out in the workplace very thoroughly. Feedback from employers and work-based assessors is supportive and shows that they value the quality of work produced and the progress being made by their employees.
- Teachers and assessors encourage and support apprentices to develop independent learning skills to continue their studies between review meetings and off-the-job training. They use their personal skills log to review their own progress and to set targets, in addition to identifying further training that will support their personal development.
- Employers value highly the contribution apprentices make to their organisations. They report a significant development in the confidence and the abilities of their employees who, as a result of their learning, can deal knowledgeably and sensitively with clients. Apprentices are also quickly able to take responsibility for the treatment of sick and recovering animals. In another workplace, apprentices are now responsible for researching and delivering 'keeper and animal encounter' talks to visitors and have secured permanent employment as a result.
- Apprentices receive good pastoral support from their teachers and assessors. As a result, they feel safe in and out of the college. They look forward to attending the college for their theory classes, and feel a part of the wider college community.
- A very small minority of apprentices have insufficient awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and are uncertain about how they would recognise dangers from radicalisation and extremism. However, trainers and assessors have recognised this as an area for improvement, and training that is more comprehensive was being provided at the time of the inspection.

Provider details

Type of provider	Specialist further education college
Age range of learners	14+/16+/16-18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,930
Principal/CEO	Jeremy Kerswell
Website address	www.plumpton.ac.uk/

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	106	568	326	434	498	199	26	286
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	75	68	14	78	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	4		2		6			
Number of learners aged 14–16								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ N/A 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

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Lindsay Pamphilon	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Smith	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the vice principal, 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.

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