

Inspection of Woodpecker Court

Inspection dates:

6 to 8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Provision for students with high needs

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Woodpecker Court is an independent specialist college in Eythorne, Dover. It provides training for young people aged 16 to 24 who may have been out of education for a period of time or who are unable to access mainstream education due to their special educational needs (SEN). Woodpecker Court is set in a rural location where students take their learning from the classroom into practical outdoor activities. At the time of the inspection, there were 52 students studying qualifications at level 1 and 2 in English, mathematics, preparation for adulthood and vocational subjects, such as land-based industries, animal care and catering. Forty-one students were aged 16 to 18, and 11 students were over the age of 19 years. All students are in receipt of high needs funding. Leaders do not work with any subcontractors. Woodpecker Court has not previously been inspected.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students enjoy their learning at Woodpecker Court. They greatly appreciate the calm, orderly environment which focuses on supporting them to develop the essential employability and vocational skills they need for their futures. Students value the highly supportive culture where they work positively with staff.

Students benefit from expert tutors who adapt teaching methods and materials to meet individual students' needs and help them understand important concepts well. For example, tutors provide students with individual prompt sheets to help them remember and use technical terminology correctly. As a result, all students are able to participate in learning successfully.

Students enthusiastically participate in the wide range of interesting and relevant outdoor and practical learning activities that staff provide for them. For instance, students learn to care for animals such as chickens and pigs. Students often extend and consolidate this learning by linking it to activities in the classroom. As a result, students understand the application of theoretical concepts in real-life situations and work hard in their lessons. For example, students use data that they collect while working outside when learning how to analyse data in spreadsheets.

Most students gain substantial new knowledge and skills relevant to the programmes they are studying. For example, animal care students know how to keep themselves safe when caring for poultry by wearing appropriate personal protective equipment such as overalls and gloves. They are aware of the importance of following safe working practices such as sanitising welly boots when entering and leaving the chicken run to minimise the risk of infection. As a result, a very high proportion of students, including those with SEN or who face disadvantage, complete their programme and pass their qualifications well.

Students benefit from a rich and wide range of real-life experiences such as interacting with and supporting the local community, or through lessons such as preparing for adulthood. This means students learn how to become responsible and active citizens and contribute positively to society.

Students feel safe and they know how to report concerns about their safety should they have them. Students value highly the support they receive with any personal concerns. They benefit from frequent well-planned sessions that highlight how to stay safe online, at college and in their personal lives. For example, they confidently explain the need to change their passwords regularly to ensure they can bank and use social media safely. Consequently, students develop resilience and know how to keep themselves safe.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders understand well the challenges that many of their students have often faced in their education previously. They offer an ambitious curriculum that extends students' knowledge and skills beyond the technical content required for the qualifications they study. Leaders carefully select programmes that students find interesting and engaging and that enable students to demonstrate Woodpecker Court's three core values of relationships, resilience and respect successfully.

Leaders provide a curriculum that gives opportunities for students to develop essential employability and vocational skills, plus additional knowledge and qualifications in areas such as appreciating the importance of positive mental health and understanding the risks from substance misuse. As a result, students become skilful and confident young people, ready to play a full and active part in society.

Most students are supported to prepare for their next steps in learning or work well. They acquire helpful employability skills such as communication and teamwork, and vocational knowledge, as well as wider attitudes and behaviours such as confidence and resilience that are valued by the workplace. As a result, most move on to further learning or work successfully.

Tutors work very effectively with support staff to enable students to participate in learning successfully. For example, learning assistants support students who struggle in class to de-escalate and self-advocate on how to best manage their feelings. Accordingly, students remain focused on their learning.

Tutors adapt teaching methods and materials to meet individual students' needs and help them understand important concepts well. For example, tutors provide students with individual prompt sheets to help them remember and use technical terminology correctly. As a result, all students make good progress.

Tutors plan lessons carefully to consider how practical learning can be integrated into classroom teaching to aid students' understanding. For instance, tutors use outside spaces, such as the chicken run, to help students understand different shapes and calculate area.

Staff ensure specialist therapeutic support and plans are coordinated effectively to ensure students receive the tailored support they need. Education, health and care plans are utilized effectively to ensure that therapeutic interventions are met and evolve as learners' needs require.

Tutors use a comprehensive range of approaches that help students retain key learning and commit it to their long-term memory. For example, tutors in functional skills English use acronyms such as PEE (point, evidence and explain) to help students remember how to structure their answers to maximise their marks in examinations. In level 2 animal care, tutors use games to help students recall and apply previous learning successfully. For instance, students can recall the signs of

animal ill-health and which diseases can be transmitted between humans and animals. As a result, most students can recall their previous learning well and apply it in other situations confidently.

Tutors provide students with detailed feedback that identifies and celebrates what they do well and gives them clear guidance on what they need to do to improve the standard of their future work. Consequently, students learn from their mistakes and are proud of their achievements, and the standard of their work improves over time.

Leaders use the high-needs funding they receive effectively to ensure that students' needs are met extremely well. Students participate in a range of courses that suit their individual interests and needs. Through these courses, they develop independence skills through real-life experiences, such as community events and work-related learning and external work placements. As a result, students develop the skills needed to prepare them for adulthood and their next steps.

Staff consistently discuss with students their interests and talents and future learning and working opportunities. Students are supported to further explore their next steps through internal and external work experience opportunities that staff provide. As a result, students are aware of the range of options available to them.

Leaders ensure that new staff benefit from a comprehensive and effective induction. This helps them quickly become familiar with the college's ethos and ensures they are able to fulfil their job role effectively. Staff benefit from useful training to support them to develop the skills they need to work with the complex needs of their young people. Almost all staff feel they receive sufficient professional development, which, as a result, makes them more effective in their work. For example, they learned from a colleague to 'teach like a pirate', which encourages teachers to be courageous, take opportunities where they arise and not be constrained by conventional approaches. This is particularly relevant with the students who staff work with at Woodpecker Court, for whom traditional approaches to education have often not previously been successful.

Leaders monitor the quality of provision carefully and make necessary changes to improve students' learning. They understand the strengths and weaknesses of the provision well. They act quickly and effectively to improve any weaknesses. For example, when the quality of students' work fell below the required standard, leaders quickly put training and support for staff in place. As a result, the quality of students' work has improved over time.

Leaders and managers are considerate of staff's workload and support staff well. Leaders are acutely aware of the challenges staff may face when working with their young people, and staff well-being is a priority. For example, staff benefit from very regular supervision sessions and weekly debriefs. As a result, staff feel very well supported, are motivated and take pride in their work.

Members of the advisory board meet frequently and use their extensive expertise and knowledge to support and challenge leaders effectively. They understand well

the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and support staff effectively to improve the provision. For example, board members supported staff to observe teachers in their school to share good practice for an area of development for teaching English and mathematics. As a result, staff feel more confident to use a variety of activities to support their students to develop their skills.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	147958
Address	Woodpecker Court, 45 Wigmore Lane Eythorne Dover Kent CT15 4BF
Contact number	01304 830958
Website	www.woodpeckercourt.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Dominic Meehan
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Jo-Ann Henderson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Josie Grainger	Ofsted Inspector
Roland White	His Majesty's Inspector

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