

SMB Group

Stephenson College, Thornborough Road, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 3TN

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

SMB Group formed in 2020 from the merger of Stephenson, Melton and Brooksby colleges. The residential accommodation is situated at the Brooksby Campus. This is a land-based further education campus that is situated in a mainly agricultural area close to the market town of Melton Mowbray. The college offers a wide range of vocational and academic courses. Accommodation is also provided at the Stephenson campus, which is situated close to the nearby town of Coalville and provides lodgings with host families (homestay) only. This is used solely for young people who are undertaking apprenticeships.

Inspection dates: 31 October to 2 November 2023

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking into account	good
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How well young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The college provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 8 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: good

Young people who stay in the residential provision at the college are making good progress and are happy and settled. They benefit from good relationships with wardens, managers and leaders in the residential provision. Young people say they feel able to turn to the wardens for support and guidance and can confide in them. This helps them to settle into college life, make new friends and start making progress on their chosen course.

Following the last full inspection, at which several recommendations were made to ensure compliance with the national minimum standards, leaders and managers have taken action to improve the residential provision. They quickly implemented an improvement plan. One important area in the improvement plan was the residential accommodation. This has gone through a programme of redecoration and upgrade. For example, the common room has been improved, and this is now a better area for young people to socialise and relax. A new kitchen has been installed in one area of the residential provision. Additionally, work has started to replace the heating systems to improve temperatures and ventilation in the residential areas.

Young people now enjoy an improved range of activities that are organised by the wardens. They enjoy quiz nights, themed events, cooking and craft evenings and access to the college gym. Young people enjoy organised trips to local towns for meals and to socialise. The enhanced activity programme has led to improvements in young people's behaviour as they have more to do in the evenings.

Some young people undertaking apprenticeships stay with host families. The homestay provision is a real strength of the college. New host families receive a very good induction with opportunities for training and development. The manager who oversees the host family programme maintains good communication with families and regularly seeks their views about how to improve the provision. The employers of young people are complimentary about the support young people receive. This helps them to make progress on their respective apprenticeship schemes.

The communication between parents and the residential managers has improved through using a social media platform. Parents can post questions and communications, which are answered quickly by managers. This has helped to ensure that parents receive a timely response and prevents any miscommunications.

Young people who may be experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties receive support from staff and managers. This support is largely through making referrals to the appropriate agencies as there is not an identified mental health practitioner. Leaders and managers are considering how this provision could be enhanced so that timely responses to young people struggling in these areas can be accessed at the college.

How well young people are helped and protected: good

Young people residing in the college residential provision are safe. There is a strong operational and strategic management structure that oversees safeguarding. The college safeguarding policy is reviewed annually and amended, if required, with any changes to safeguarding practice. Any changes to policy and practice are communicated to wardens and managers. Additional training is provided to staff, if required. Safeguarding arrangements are overseen by designated safeguarding leads, who are very experienced, knowledgeable and have undertaken the correct training for this role. Additionally, reports on safeguarding in the residential provision are completed by the manager and designated safeguarding leads and reviewed by the board of governors. This ensures that there is rigorous oversight at all levels of leadership.

For some young people who may be vulnerable, leaders and managers make sure that good care and support are available. Leaders work well with external professionals, such as social workers and the local authority designated officer. They attend important multi-agency meetings and contribute to plans designed to promote the safety and welfare of young people.

The recruitment of new staff to the residential provision is undertaken in line with safer recruitment policy and procedures. This area has been strengthened since the last full inspection. Prospective candidates now have their work history reviewed with any gaps in employment history accounted for. Prospective new staff also undergo internet and social media vetting to ensure that there are no concerns regarding their suitability to work in the residential provision.

The residential manager and leaders ensure that the environment remains safe for young people. The required compliance with health and safety legislation is maintained and risk assessments for the residential accommodation are carried out. Security staff provide additional safeguards for young people in monitoring the grounds and local areas. The wardens are vigilant and continually monitor young people's whereabouts to maintain their safety.

Young people's behaviour is very good. They are polite, courteous and considerate of others. Staff who work in the residential provision and staff in the wider college promote good behaviour and implement effective behavioural boundaries. The young people know what is expected of them, which means that incidents of poor behaviour are rare. Young people maintain good relationships with each other, and bullying is not a concern. If the behaviour of young people falls below expectations, college staff take effective action.

Following an allegation made against a member of staff, leaders took correct and immediate action. They referred the matter to the police and the local authority designated officer. The safety of young people remains of paramount importance to leaders and managers. This matter remains ongoing.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There have been changes in the leadership and management of the residential provision since the last full inspection. There is a new vice principal who has responsibility for the residential provision. Additionally, a new manager was appointed in April 2023. She is committed to her role and helping young people to make the most of their experiences of college life. The manager is well supported by a strong and knowledgeable leadership team that extends to the college principal and governors.

Governance is strong. There are link governors for the residential provision and safeguarding. This is overseen by the chair of governors, who is committed to ongoing strategic development aimed at improving the experiences of young people who stay in residence. The responsible governor for the residential provision visits the accommodation regularly and speaks to young people and staff. This role could be further enhanced through improved feedback from the governor following their visit. However, governors provide college leaders with support and challenge and understand the strengths of the college and areas they wish to improve.

College leaders have developed good systems to evaluate the quality of care and support to young people in the residential provision. They recently completed a review of the residential provision, which identified areas for ongoing development. This was complemented by a report commissioned from an outside agency to review the residential provision. These comprehensive reviews focused on what worked well, what matters most to the young people and what can be improved. The college leaders are continuing to review and strengthen some key policy documents to ensure that the information is accurate and fully up to date.

Staff morale is very good. Residential wardens enjoy their jobs and spending time with young people. Several wardens have worked in the residential provision for a number of years. They describe it as being 'like a family atmosphere'. They feel supported by the manager and leaders and able to speak to them. Residential wardens have regular appraisals to ensure that they are on track with training and development. Although wardens have individual meetings with the manager to discuss their boarding practice, this could be more reflective to support the development of their practice.

Since the last inspection of the residential accommodation, leaders and managers have implemented changes that have benefited young people. For example, the residential provision has improved food choice and quality. The activities on offer have improved, as has consultation with young people. Young people complete questionnaires about the residential provision. Their views are also obtained by staff and the link governor for the residential provision. These views are listened to by leaders and acted on wherever possible.

Points for improvement

- College leaders and the manager of the residential provision should support wardens and staff working in the residential provision to actively promote young people's particular needs with regards to mental health, taking into consideration the changing needs of young people. ('Further education residential accommodation: linked to national minimum standards', 13.05)
- College leaders should consider ways to ensure that the reviews of the staff and wardens' boarding practice contain reflective discussions about their practice. ('Further education residential accommodation: linked to national minimum standards', 15.1)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people, using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Further education college with residential accommodation details

Social care unique reference number: 2630852

Principal/CEO: Dawn Whitemore

Inspectors

Phillip Morris, Social Care Regulatory Inspection Manager (lead inspector)
Sarah Orriss, Social Care Inspector

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