

Heart of Worcestershire College

General Further Education College

Inspection dates

30 January – 2 February 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Senior leaders and governors have successfully tackled the most significant areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders have established strong links with employers and key strategic partners to develop a curriculum that contributes fully to the region's employment skills needs, enabling learners and apprentices to develop good vocational and work-related skills.
- Subcontracting arrangements for the delivery of adult learning programmes and apprenticeships are well managed, and outcomes are high.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good; teachers and assessors use their subject knowledge and industry expertise well to ensure that learners and apprentices develop their practical, technical and academic skills well.
- Learners benefit from good resources and facilities, teachers make effective use of information learning technology (ILT) to engage and motivate learners.
- Learners and apprentices are courteous, well behaved and respectful of one another; they benefit from and actively contribute to a positive and inclusive culture evident across the college.
- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners who successfully gain their qualifications has improved; the majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications in the planned timescale.
- A high proportion of learners on level 3 programmes go on to higher education.
- Learners for whom the college receives high-needs funding and those in, or leaving, care receive high-quality support that enables them to achieve very well.
- The targets set for learners studying at level 3 and the feedback that they receive from teachers are not always precise enough to ensure that they know how to improve or achieve in line with their identified potential.
- Learners' attendance is not yet consistently good across all parts of the college.
- Many more learners now achieve a better standard of English and mathematics as a result of their studies; however, too few learners achieve their functional skills in English and mathematics at level 2, or achieve high grades in GCSE mathematics.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Heart of Worcestershire College was formed in August 2014 as a result of a merger between Worcester College of Technology and North East Worcestershire College. It is a very large general further education college providing vocational education from entry level to level 5 across four main campuses and a number of smaller centres across Worcestershire.
- The proportion of pupils in Worcestershire who leave school and achieve GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics at grade 4 or above is above that reported across England. The proportion of residents living in Worcestershire who state their heritage as black or minority ethnic is significantly lower than the national and regional averages. The proportion of learners attending the college from minority ethnic groups reflects that of the local population.
- Unemployment rates in Worcestershire are lower than those reported across the West Midlands and nationally. The number of local residents qualified at level 3 and above is high when compared to the rest of the West Midlands. However, the proportion of the local population who state they have no qualifications is similar to the national rate. Key local industries within the locality include retail, health, manufacturing and education. These sectors collectively employ around 53% of residents of working age.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners on level 3 programmes:
 - routinely receive insightful and informative feedback from teachers so that they understand clearly how to improve their work, accelerate their learning and achieve high grades
 - have precise targets to guide their development and progress.
- Improve learners' attendance at lessons so that it is good in all curriculum areas and across the college by following up methodically on non-attendance, rigorously applying the college's existing attendance strategy and evolving a zero-tolerance culture towards unauthorised absences.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in functional skills English and mathematics at level 2 and in GCSE mathematics by:
 - developing the skills of teachers to ensure that they support learners to develop and apply their English and mathematics skills well in their vocational and academic work
 - ensuring that teachers of English and mathematics use the findings of regular assessment to identify learners' skills gaps and ensure that these learners are supported well to quickly gain the required techniques and approaches essential for good progress in their learning
 - ensuring that managers provide training and development to support improvement in the teaching of mathematics and English essential skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the merger in 2014, senior leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that learners' experiences are consistently good. They have established a strong college identity covering all campuses. In the short space of time since the previous inspection, senior leaders have successfully communicated to staff the need for change and have been proactive in establishing an organisation-wide culture of respect and aspiration for learners and staff alike.
- The principal and governors are ambitious for the success of the college. They set high expectations across the organisation through a set of key performance indicators that emphasise the skills development of learners and the college's contribution to supporting the economic growth of the local area. As a result of their determination, nearly all the previous year's performance targets were achieved. Those set for the current year and in the new strategic plan are suitably ambitious in underpinning an organisational focus to improve performance further. Financial management of the college is robust.
- Senior leaders have focused their work very effectively on tackling the areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection. Managers have rightly focused on those aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that have the most impact on learners' successful completion of their qualifications. As a result, teaching and learning have much improved, and outcomes for learners show a trend of improvement.
- Leaders' strong representation on two local enterprise partnership groups and close working with Jobcentre Plus, employers, the local community and the local authority ensure that the college is well placed to respond swiftly to changes in local demands and priorities. For example, leaders have been particularly successful in developing suitable programmes which prioritise and meet the needs of learners with high needs, those at risk of not continuing in employment, education or training, and those groups in society who have difficulty in gaining sustained employment. As a result, a high proportion of learners in these priority groups advance on to a range of positive destinations, including further learning, supported internships and employment.
- Leaders have strengthened the arrangements for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, and for developing teachers' skills. Managers and college observers now routinely monitor teachers' performance through an extensive range of lesson observations and themed learning walks. Advanced-quality practitioners skilfully use the findings provided by college observers to design focused professional development activities. In most cases, these result in improvement in teachers' skills and in their classroom practice.
- Performance management of staff at all levels of the college is tenacious and supportive. Staff benefit from regular feedback and evaluation of their performance against agreed targets through annual appraisals and mid-year reviews. Managers place greater emphasis on the sharing of good practice through a range of development events tailored around both individual and college areas for improvement. On the rare occasion that staff do not meet the high expectations set for them or fail to make expected improvements, managers take appropriate action.
- The self-assessment process is now more rigorous and accurately informs the quality improvement plan. This provides leaders and governors with an accurate view of the

strengths and weaknesses of the college. The views of all stakeholder groups are routinely collected to ensure that leaders use their feedback to inform their judgements regarding all aspects of the college's performance.

- Managers use accurate data well to ensure thorough monitoring of learners' performance at all levels, tackling underperformance vigorously in most subjects by setting specific targets to improve the provision. This has led to discernible improvements in curriculum management and outcomes for learners in areas such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, business and information technology. Managers closely monitor the achievement of different groups of learners, enabling them to take effective actions to reduce any significant differences. Leaders monitor the performance of subcontracted provision effectively, contributing to its good quality.
- Following the last inspection, leaders instigated a revised strategy to improve the development of learners' skills in English and mathematics. They provided teachers with access to professional development support to enhance their skills and confidence in embedding these essential skills in lessons. However, while many more learners now achieve a better standard of English and mathematics as a result of their studies, too few learners successfully achieve high grades in GCSE mathematics, and learners' achievement of functional skills in English and mathematics at intermediate levels is not yet good.
- Leaders have embedded equality of opportunity extremely well throughout the college. Learners benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities that extend their understanding of differences in the communities in which they study and live. Managers ensure that the college provides a harmonious and inclusive environment for the college's diverse community, including for the large number of vulnerable learners and those who are looked after.

The governance of the provider

- Governors are well qualified and use their considerable experience and expertise to good effect in setting the strategic direction of the college. Learners and employers are represented well on the governing body; their views are sought regularly to inform leaders' planning.
- Governors have a good understanding of the college's provision and have established a clear set of targets to monitor performance. They receive good and accurate information regarding most aspects of the college and use this well to challenge the principal and senior management team with a sharp focus on accountability, quality improvement, teaching and learning, and learners' achievements.
- Governors have enhanced their level of oversight regarding all aspects of the college. They routinely participate in observation walk-throughs with the college observation team and closely scrutinise college-wide self-assessment activities. As a result, they develop a good understanding of the college's strengths and its areas for improvement.
- Governors ensure that financial management is prudent. They take their financial responsibilities seriously and ensure that the college's financial sustainability is maintained. Since the previous inspection they have intensified their scrutiny of the college's large volume of subcontracted provision and leaders have scaled back the number of strategic partners with which the college works.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The college has appropriate safeguarding procedures that are routinely updated to reflect current practice and expectations, and this includes the 'Prevent' duty action plan. Managers ensure that all staff and governors are suitably trained, and that teachers and support staff ensure that learners and apprentices are supported well in developing a good understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- A strong culture of safeguarding permeates through the college. The leaders and managers responsible for safeguarding carry out their roles well and keep learners and apprentices safe. Clear and appropriate measures are in place to ensure that leaders check the suitability of staff including volunteers, subcontractors and governors.
- Managers have developed effective partnerships with key local agencies to support and safeguard learners both at college and in the community. For example, staff liaise with social workers to ensure that learners at risk have appropriate plans that support them inside and outside of college. Learners benefit from high-quality welfare support – particularly in relation to mental health issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have appropriately high expectations of learners and apprentices, who develop their vocational skills well. The large majority of apprentices and adult learners make good progress because their teachers and trainers challenge them to produce work of a high standard. On study programmes the majority of learners make secure progress in their studies from their initial starting points and achieve their qualifications. Most learners enthusiastically participate in learning; as their confidence improves, this enables them to tackle increasingly complex learning tasks.
- Initial assessment has improved and is now rigorous. Most staff use the results of tests carried out as part of initial assessment along with details of individual learners' strengths and barriers to learning, to develop detailed class profiles. A small minority of teachers do not use the information contained in class profiles to plan suitable learning activities and tasks that provide appropriate challenge for all learners. Consequently, a small minority of learners on study programmes and a very small number of adult learners and apprentices do not consistently make expected rates of progress towards the completion of their qualifications.
- Teachers and assessors are highly qualified and have good vocational knowledge and industrial experience in the subjects they teach. They use questioning techniques effectively to probe, check and further extend learners' and apprentices' understanding. Learners and apprentices value the skills and subject expertise of their teachers and trainers, who skilfully link theory to practice.
- Teachers make use of a good range of teaching and learning activities to develop and inspire learners and apprentices. For example, on study programmes a teacher in a first-year bricklaying class helped learners to develop confidently their construction skills, to mix mortar to the right consistency so that brick joints were neat and had a clean finish.

In a hairdressing lesson at level 2, learners confidently worked to commercial salon standards in completing a range of hairstyling tasks. On a level 3 information technology course, learners confidently developed their ability to reflect on and critically evaluate their own performance, to achieve high grades. On adult learning programmes, teachers skilfully plan lessons to meet the diverse needs of learners, some of whom have been away from learning for some considerable time.

- The assessment and planning for learners who need additional help with their studies are good. Transition arrangements for learners with high-level and complex needs are carefully planned with a range of other professionals, parents and carers. Information contained within learners' education health and care plans is used well to help assess their essential support needs and to inform the planning of their learning, so that they are able to settle into college life quickly. Learners and apprentices who need extra help with their studies receive timely additional support from learning support assistants, who help them to work independently and achieve in line with their peers.
- Most teachers skilfully use a broad range of resources and ILT, both to enliven learning in the classroom and to enable learners and apprentices to access learning resources when undertaking independent study at home or at work. Teachers encourage learners successfully to develop their knowledge, research and critical analysis skills. For example, learners studying on level 3 games development use questionnaires they have developed through 'Google Drive' and mobile telephone technology to collaborate with their peers and to inform research tasks for assignments.
- Following the last inspection, managers have worked well with staff to improve their skills in the teaching of English and mathematics. In classroom-based lessons and in the workplace, learners and apprentices make assured progress. They have become more confident in their application and use of subject-specific terminology and the importance of accuracy in spelling and grammar in relation to their work. This is reflected in the much-improved and high proportion of learners who successfully achieve high grades in GCSE English or successfully pass their functional skills tests at the first attempt. However, teachers and assessors are less proficient and skilled at extending learners' and apprentices' skills in mathematics. They do not take account sufficiently of learners' and apprentices' prior achievements, or the gaps in their knowledge, when planning learning in these essential skills.
- The large majority of teachers' and assessors' written and oral feedback is detailed and accurate and provides learners and apprentices with the necessary information on what to do to improve their work. However, a small minority of teachers' written feedback does not provide sufficient challenge to the most able learners, particularly those aiming to achieve higher grades. On apprenticeships, the quality of target-setting and assessment feedback in construction and engineering is weak, with little indication of the steps that apprentices need to take to support their progress. This hinders their understanding of what they need to do to achieve within the planned time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Staff set high standards of behaviour in classroom sessions and in the workplace, which contribute to an inclusive and harmonious atmosphere throughout the college. Learners' and apprentices' behaviour and conduct around the college campuses and in learning

areas are good. They take pride in their achievements and are respectful of their peers and the staff that support them. Learners work collaboratively, take part in discussions and peer assessments, and listen sensitively to each other's views and opinions. Apprentices demonstrate professional behaviour in the workplace and communicate effectively with employers and customers.

- Learners with identified needs are well supported. In-class support assistants work well with them to ensure that their progress is at least equal to that of other learners. Learners in receipt of high-needs funding make excellent progress. They develop to a good level skills to promote their independent living and their prospects for employment. The few learners on internships quickly grow in confidence, self-esteem and develop strong communication skills as a result of the support that they receive.
- Most learners are highly motivated to learn and know what they need to do to achieve. They have frequent one-to-one support and tutorial reviews where tutors monitor the progress they are making towards achieving their target grades and qualifications. Tutors' reviews of learners' progress is improving, but in a small minority of instances the learning targets that are set are not specific enough, particularly in challenging most able learners to reach their full potential.
- Learners aged 16 to 19 successfully develop their personal and social skills, and the skills that they need for work and employment. They have good access to work-related learning activities, which include in-college and external placements, visiting speakers, trips and visits. Following the last inspection, managers ensured that a much larger proportion of study programme learners participate in relevant work experience as part of their course. Adults seeking employment are supported well to develop employability skills that are well matched to local and regional needs.
- Apprentices develop good vocational skills matched well to their level and technical ability. Trainers, assessors and employers work together to plan apprentices' skills development and to identify any gaps, so that they can arrange specific additional training where required. Apprentices improve the personal skills and confidence that they need in their job roles, and to progress successfully into roles with higher levels of responsibility. Employers speak positively about how the skills and confidence of their apprentices have improved.
- Teachers and tutors are very adept at ensuring that learners and apprentices develop a good understanding of the principles that underpin equality, diversity and life in modern Britain. They successfully extend learners' and apprentices' knowledge and understanding of differences in cultures and community life, both through the cross-college tutorial programmes and in their individual teaching and learning practice. Topics include sexual orientation, healthy personal relationships and mental health.
- Learners and apprentices know how to keep themselves safe; they feel safe at college and in their workplace or work placements. They value the effective arrangements for site security, develop a good knowledge of how to work safely online both at work and in their personal lives and know how to report any concerns that they may have, including about bullying and harassment. Learners with high needs have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a wide range of situations. When learners raise concerns, managers investigate and deal with them appropriately and sensitively.
- Tutors provide a broad range of advice and guidance that helps learners to evaluate their

future options, both for employment or further study. The vast majority of learners progress on to a range of positive educational and employment destinations. As learners with high needs near the end of their course, personal tutors and support workers liaise closely with them and parents and carers, providing information to ensure a smooth transition to the next stage of learning or employment. However, few learners on the study programme and apprentices are aware of the availability of specialist careers advice across the college.

- Learners' attendance at lessons has improved since the last inspection, but it is not consistently high across all areas of the college. A small minority of staff do not address non-attendance adequately through enforcing the sanctions set out in the college's recently updated 'students' standards'.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners who complete their courses and achieve their qualifications has improved. Learners aged 16 to 19 and adults now achieve in line with their peers nationally. Learners in receipt of high needs funding achieve well and make strong progress against the targets set out in their education, health and care plans. Achievement rates for apprentices who complete within the planned timescale are good and above those of other providers; their overall achievement rates have also improved over time and are now around the national rate.
- Success rates for the significant minority of classroom-based learners aged 16 to 19 studying at level 1 are high; at level 2 and 3 they achieve at least in line with their peers nationally.
- Outcomes for the majority of adult learners who study at level 1 have improved over time and are high, whereas achievement for the small minority of adults who study at level 2 is around the national rate. However, for the few adult learners studying at level 3 outcomes are low and performance is declining.
- Outcomes for the minority of apprentices on advanced-level programmes are high, and around the national rate for the majority of apprentices studying at level 2. However, outcomes for the few apprentices on higher-level apprenticeships are low. Apprentices achieve well in health, public services and care; information and communication technology; and retail and commercial enterprise. Outcomes are low in construction. College staff have identified the reasons for the decline and implemented appropriate improvement strategies, but it is too early to judge their effectiveness.
- For learners aged 16 to 19, pass rates at grades 4 to 9 in GCSE English have improved over time and are above those of other providers. However, the equivalent proportion in GCSE mathematics remains too low and requires improvement. On adult learning programmes, the proportion who successfully achieve high grades at GCSE in English is much improved and is now high. Achievement rates for adult learners at GCSE mathematics are similar to that reported nationally. On classroom-based programmes, the proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 and adults who successfully achieve their functional skills qualifications in both English and mathematics is improving over time. However, overall pass rates declined in 2016/17 in both English and mathematics at level 2 for adults and in mathematics for learners aged 16 to 19, and so requires improvement.

- There are no significant gaps between the performance of different groups of classroom-based learners and apprentices; most perform in line with their respective peer group nationally. Where there are differences in performance, these are narrowing over time.
- High-quality care and support enable learners and apprentices with additional support needs to achieve well. Learners with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities develop greater independence in their learning, which builds their confidence and prepares them well for their next steps. Learners who are young parents, children looked after or are in receipt of free school meals achieve well. Outcomes for the few learners on supported internship programmes are very high, with almost all progressing to positive education, employment or training destinations.
- The very large majority of learners aged 16 to 19 progress on to a range of positive education, employment or training destinations and around two thirds of learners who were studying at level 3 subsequently progress on to higher education. On adult learning programmes, learners make good progress into further levels of study while an increasing proportion are successful in securing employment. Almost all apprentices gain permanent employment upon completion of their apprenticeship. Outcomes for adult learners and apprentices delivered by strategic partners on behalf of the college are high, however achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 19 on programmes delivered by partners are too low.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The college currently has 2,465 learners on study programmes in a wide range of vocational areas from entry level to advanced level. The largest numbers of learners follow programmes in health, care and public services engineering; construction; service industries; sport and leisure; and creative arts and media.
- Learners' programmes meet fully the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes. All learners have individualised programmes that include a core vocational aim, English and mathematics where needed, and additional elements. The vast majority of learners benefit from well-planned and useful work experience. This helps them to develop an awareness of employer demands, helps them make decisions about their future careers and develop a range of skills and attributes that prepare them well for employment.
- Teachers make increasingly effective use of electronic tracking systems to monitor learners' progress from their starting points. As a result, they are able to intervene in increasingly effective ways to ensure that learners make the progress of which they are capable. The majority of current learners make at least the progress expected of them.
- Learners develop good technical skills within practical lessons. Teachers give clear demonstrations and explanations and make frequent and appropriate connections with the workplace to reinforce the importance of professional standards. For example, in a level 2 professional cookery lesson, the teacher made frequent and well-timed reference to the importance of keeping a watching brief on both the volume of customer requests for prepared meals coming from front of house and the quantities of produce available in the food store, so that as stocks were running low, the maître d' could advise customers of alternative menu choices. This enabled learners to gain an appreciation of the

difference between training in a college kitchen and working to commercial pressures and demands in the workplace.

- The large majority of teachers are adept and skilled at using the college's virtual learning environment to enrich and enliven learning both within lessons, and when learners are working independently to carry out research outside the classroom. Most learners report that they enjoy this style of learning; they feel that, as well as being an effective way to learn, it helps them extend their learning and develop the self-discipline they need to be successful when they progress to the next level of learning, university or employment.
- In most subjects, teachers and assessors provide appropriately detailed feedback on learners' work which helps them to improve their understanding and skills. For example in business studies and GCSE English, teachers mark learners' work very thoroughly and provide very good feedback so that learners know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their grades. Most teachers review the quality of learners' writing and provide helpful guidance to help them develop their technique so as to aid their learning, progress and performance. However, in a small minority of subjects, including media and hairdressing, teachers' feedback on marked work is of a mixed standard and lacks the clarity, precision and detail to help learners make substantial improvements.
- Teachers promote the importance of English in learners' vocational subjects and their everyday lives well. In most sessions, the development of learners' skills in English alongside the main programme is good. Learners benefit from well-considered support and encouragement that enable them to develop and consolidate their knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and listening and speaking, which they understand and apply appropriately. Most learners' written work is neat, well presented and meets the requirements of the qualification. However, the quality of teaching in GCSE and functional skills mathematics lessons is not of a good enough standard. Teachers do not explain mathematical concepts well and do not adequately address misconceptions in learners' understanding. As a result, too many learners remain unable to confidently apply mathematical techniques, limiting their employment and life chances.
- Learners receive good advice on progression opportunities. Teachers encourage them to look at wider career possibilities within their chosen career aims and assist them to evaluate carefully their future options, both for employment or further study.
- Learners are positive about their experiences and the support and guidance which are readily available to them. As a result, almost all learners who complete their courses go on to a range of positive destinations, including employment and higher education.
- Teachers and assessors skilfully introduce learners to a range of safeguarding themes, such as online safety, abuse, neglect, radicalisation and extremism. Learners know how to keep themselves safe. They confidently develop their understanding of British values.
- In a small minority of lessons teachers do not plan learning activities well enough or set suitably challenging short-term personal targets for learners. Activities lack sufficient structure and pace; more accomplished learners tend to lose focus while they wait for other class members to complete learning tasks. In these lessons, teachers rely too much on whole-class activities and on the use of oral questioning to check how well learners have understood theoretical subjects, and too often they do not do this well. They often ask closed questions that do not challenge learners to think hard about what they have learned. Teachers are too accepting of superficial answers provided by learners and do

not make good use of other opportunities to confirm the security of their knowledge and understanding.

- Learners' attendance has improved since the last inspection, but managers' actions have not yet yielded consistently high attendance – which is still below the college's own target. Teachers challenge lateness appropriately and learners are reminded of the effect this could have on their learning. However, a small minority of learners do not always prioritise their learning, and their low attendance hinders their achievement.

Adult learning programmes

Good

- There are 1,986 adult learners, of which 1,626 are part-time and 360 are full-time adults enrolled on a range of courses including access to higher education, employment programmes, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes, vocational courses, and a range of provision in the local communities. Most learners follow programmes at entry level and levels 1 and 2, with a small minority on level 3 programmes.
- The majority of teachers maintain a brisk and purposeful pace in their lessons. They use a wide range of well-considered teaching, learning and assessment activities to engage and motivate learners well in meeting their differing needs. These activities enable learners to consolidate their learning and make good progress. Teachers encourage learners to explore ideas in depth, assess each learner's progress carefully and set high expectations for the standard of their work. The large majority of teachers check and assess learning carefully, helping learners to analyse their work, build self-confidence, extend their subject knowledge and improve their skills. However, in a small minority of weaker lessons teachers do not probe learners' responses to questioning sufficiently and are too often accepting of perfunctory responses that fail to check or extend their understanding; as a result, they are not able to apply underpinning theoretical concepts and principles fully.
- Learners value the skills and the professional and vocational expertise of their teachers, who use their good experience and industry expertise very effectively to enrich lessons and make learning interesting and challenging. The majority of teachers skilfully link theory to practice, bringing lessons to life for learners. Learners respond positively to this approach. They demonstrate good attitudes to learning, gain good levels of confidence and independence. For example, teachers on access to higher education courses share their knowledge and experience of working in a range of different occupational settings – including health and care, and financial and professional services – that provide learners with a clear understanding of what it is like to work in these settings.
- The majority of learners make good progress, improve their knowledge and develop a broad range of personal and social skills needed for future career and employment aspirations. For example, learners on academic courses make good progress with their skills for learning such as research and referencing, while learners on vocational courses develop professional and industry-standard skills that enable them to accomplish tasks of increasing complexity. Learners on employment programmes develop a good awareness of their skills when applying for jobs and preparing for interview.
- Learners on vocational and academic programmes quickly develop a good understanding of the importance of improving their English and mathematics skills to aid their learning

and progression. Vocational teachers promote literacy and numeracy well in their lessons. In lessons, teachers reinforce the correct use of subject-specific terminology. They ensure that learners receive plentiful and detailed feedback that helps them to improve their written and speaking skills. The majority of adult learners confidently develop their mathematical skills – for example in calculating ratios and predicting earnings for self-employment – and which they apply effectively within their personal and vocational context. Adult learners on vocational courses such as hairdressing, can accurately calculate the correct ratio of chemicals to mix when applying colouring treatments and can confidently work out the angles required for a gradient cut. However, within discrete adult mathematics courses, teachers do not always check learners’ understanding sufficiently, while most-able learners do not receive the challenge necessary for them to make progress to their capabilities.

- The adult curriculum is well aligned to meeting the specific needs of the localities from which the college recruits. Leaders and managers work well with a variety of local partners and agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, the local authority, health service trusts, employers and local employment partnerships to provide a comprehensive range of vocational and academic courses for adults that address skills gaps, re-engagement and social inclusion. For example, since the previous inspection the access to higher education programme has been further expanded to include a new pathway in law in response to growth in local demand. Staff design programmes well with clear progression routes, incorporating English and mathematics options. As a result, learners are able to build up their confidence and skills to move on to further study or work. The college provides effective information and guidance services that learners use and appreciate.
- Learners benefit from access to a good range of learning materials on the college’s virtual learning environment that they routinely use to aid their studies and to undertake independent learning activities. For example, learners on ESOL and access courses benefit from teachers uploading copies of course notes and revision materials that can be accessed and reviewed ahead of their next scheduled class.
- Learners who require additional support receive a good level of individualised assistance and support in order to achieve. Learners with dyslexia and dyspraxia speak highly of their teachers’ encouragement and extra support that help them improve their academic and vocational skills.
- Learners benefit from an inclusive learning environment that fosters mutual respect and pride in their work. Learners behave well and respect one another, they are enthusiastic in their approach to learning and actively identify strategies to develop and support others through the sharing of their transferable skills. For example, in an access lesson, learners complete a range of activities and then share their results with their peers via ‘group chat’. Learners confidently used this technology and had good understanding of how to stay safe while online and using social media.

Apprenticeships

Good

- The college currently has 2,106 apprentices. Apprentices follow programmes in a range of occupations across 10 subject areas. The largest numbers are in business administration, health, social care and early years, engineering and construction. A small number of apprentices are working towards the new apprenticeship standards in electro-technical

work, hairdressing and hospitality. The large majority of apprentices are adults. Just over half of all apprentices at the college are on level 2 courses, with a minority studying at level 3. A very small minority of apprentices are studying at higher apprenticeship level.

- Staff are highly qualified, skilled and experienced in their vocational subjects, most have teaching and assessor qualifications. Staff use their subject-specific vocational and employment experience well to develop apprentices' trade-specific skills and in encouraging them to take pride in their work.
- On- and off-the-job training is well planned. In classroom and practical sessions, apprentices make good use of industry-standard resources available across the college. For example, in hospitality and catering tutors routinely challenge catering apprentices to produce high-quality dishes and serve these to local employers, to demonstrate their culinary skills. These include being able to produce high-quality meals in a commercial kitchen. In the workplace, apprentices quickly develop their skills and knowledge through expert guidance and support provided by their employers, who share their up-to-date knowledge and industrial skills. Teachers' verbal and written feedback on apprentices' work is thorough and helpful, particularly on assignments. Apprentices are highly motivated. They talk confidently about what they have learned and are keen to improve their skills and contribute to their employers' business. As a result, the large majority of apprentices make good progress. They extend their vocational knowledge and hone their practical and technical skills.
- Assessment and support in the workplace are good. Assessors plan workplace visits well in conjunction with employers. During workplace reviews assessors develop and extend apprentices' knowledge and awareness of a wide range of themes. These include equality and diversity, health and safety, the importance of democracy, tolerance, respect and healthy lifestyles. They use questioning techniques adeptly that encourage apprentices to think deeply and reflect on tasks completed and how they might improve further.
- Most assessors set clear targets for apprentices to help them plan their learning and gather evidence. However, in a small minority of instances, the targets set by a few workplace trainers and assessors – particularly in construction, electro-technical work and engineering – are insufficiently specific or challenging. Consequently, apprentices in these trade areas make slow progress towards completion of their qualifications.
- The standard of apprentices' work is high. In construction trades, apprentices quickly mirror the technical competencies of their workplace mentors. For example, apprentices in plumbing competently demonstrate how to fit hot water boilers, bathrooms and underfloor heating in accordance with manufacturers' instruction and regulatory standards.
- The small minority of apprentices who need to achieve an English and mathematics functional skills qualification as a requirement of their programme do so successfully. Most teachers and assessors are accomplished at helping apprentices to improve their mathematics skills. However, the development of apprentices' written skills is less consistent. A small minority of trainers and assessors place too little emphasis on correcting inaccuracies in apprentices' spelling, grammar and their use of subject-specific terminology.
- Apprentices contribute well to their employers' businesses. They benefit from regular opportunities in the workplace to apply their skills, which helps them develop their knowledge about wider aspects of their company. Employers speak positively as to the

quality of their employees' work. Apprentices understand their employers' business well and talk knowledgeably about their job roles. For example, a customer service apprentice employed in an educational setting provided clear information and guidance to external visitors. In business administration, a level 3 apprentice competently planned his company's presence at the annual regional show. This planning included commissioning marketing materials, coordinating staff and updating the organisation's website.

- Managers have established beneficial and productive links with a wide range of employers, including local health service trusts, heritage railways, conservation parks and local authorities – and other stakeholders such as local enterprise partnerships. They use these effectively to develop apprenticeship programmes that meet local employers' needs and fulfil identified regional skills priorities.
- Most teachers and assessors have high expectations of their apprentices and expect them to do well. The large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications and a high proportion do so within their agreed timescales. Almost all apprentices stay in employment following their training. Inspectors saw many excellent case studies of apprentices achieving high positions, gaining higher level skills and progressing in their job roles. The provision of initial advice and guidance is good, and as a result apprentices make the correct choice of course and level; however, few apprentices are aware of the range of specialist advice and guidance available across the college as they near the end of their studies. In addition, managers do not collect data on the other aspects of progression of apprentices such as their progression to next level of study, pay rises and promotions.
- Teachers and assessors do not routinely provide sufficient guidance and challenge for apprentices on the new apprenticeship standards regarding what they need to do in order to achieve merits or distinction grades on the technical components of their qualifications.

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

- The college currently has 201 learners receiving high-needs funding from a range of local authorities including Worcestershire, Coventry, and Warwickshire. Around 45% of learners are on 16 to 19 study programmes covering a wide range of academic and vocational areas, with a similar proportion on discrete learning programmes at pre-entry and entry level. A further 11% of learners are on supported internship programmes linked to preparation for life and work.
- Managers use funding well to improve and extend the college's provision and provide effective support that meets particularly well the needs of learners with a range of specialist needs. This ensures that learners can participate fully in college activities, increasing their independence and preparing them well for adult life. Resources for learners with high needs are outstanding. The college has invested well in providing particularly well-equipped sensory rooms at the Worcester and Redditch campuses, so that learners on entry-level programmes with complex needs can more effectively engage in learning. Learners also benefit from access to purpose-built training flats that are used well to support the development of independent living skills.
- Managers have appropriately high expectations for learners. Well-targeted support helps learners on vocational courses achieve qualifications relevant to their future career goals. Most learners achieve at least as well as, or better than, their peers in the college.

Learners on entry-level programmes become more confident in using their communication skills in a much wider variety of situations and develop practical skills for everyday living. The majority of learners progress to further education, training or employment.

- Learners receive very comprehensive information, advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about their future learning programmes for positive transition into college. They benefit from in-depth interviews with college staff, involving parents and carers, where their essential support needs and aspirations are identified. Learners are confident that essential support will be in place from the outset of their studies; as a result, they settle into college life quickly.
- The college has developed a highly effective supported internship programme which enables learners from entry-level courses to progress into work. They choose work placements that match their skills and preferences and can change if they find their roles to be not as they expected. They are very well supported and guided. The majority make very good progress and gain sustained employment.
- The college coordinates well the good support available from a range of specialist agencies such as speech and language therapists, hearing specialists and occupational health therapists. Learners benefit from specialist support in developing strategies which help them make good progress in improving their existing skills. Specialists provide training, clear reports and suggest strategies which enable teachers to adapt their teaching approaches. As a result, they meet learners' key learning needs more effectively.
- Experienced support staff provide very effective support in lessons, so learners become more comfortable in participating in lessons and taking steps towards greater independence. Staff are well trained and benefit from ongoing professional development. Learners on vocational courses are well integrated into lessons and work alongside their peers as a matter of course.
- The majority of learners on entry-level courses make good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills through a variety of practical activities which occur naturally in lessons. They identify simple shapes, colours and reinforce their social sight vocabulary.
- All learners are safe and feel safe, learn about online safety and the majority can explain simply the meanings of British values in their own lives and behaviours. Health and safety and risk assessment processes for supported internships and work-experience activities are thorough. Learners generally behave well and become increasingly confident in interacting in a busy college environment.
- Learners have good access to a range of adaptive technologies, including sensory rooms, as well as adapted equipment specific to their course. Learners are able to participate in learning more independently. However, on entry-level courses teachers do not routinely make sure that learners have access to these so they can participate meaningfully in all planned activities.
- On entry-level courses, lessons are not sufficiently challenging for all learners. Too often, the teachers plan whole-group lesson activities which do not take enough account of individual learners' starting points. Most-able learners are not set sufficiently challenging tasks from the outset and finish tasks quickly. Objectives are often set against course aims rather than planning pertinent tasks which will enable individuals to build on their existing skills and make the progress of which they are capable. Directed questioning with

the whole group does not sufficiently provide learners with enough opportunities to practise their verbal communication skills.

- On vocational courses, the majority of learners do not routinely have specific targets which challenge them to make their best progress in addressing their behavioural, emotional, physical and wider study skills development alongside their course targets.
- Entry-level learners receive positive written feedback on their portfolio work. However, a significant minority of this work does not identify clearly or simply enough what learners need to do to improve. As a result, learners do not develop the underpinning study skills necessary for greater independence.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130713
Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	10,873
Principal/CEO	Stuart Laverick
Telephone number	08448 802500
Website	www.howcollege.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	413	926	1,049	868	1,002	187	1	5
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	311	826	203	700	7	127		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
		–		–		–		
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of learners for whom the provider receives high-needs funding	201							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	KYP Know Your Potential Consultancy Limited Eagles Consultancy Limited LMPQ Limited Eventcover Education Limited Nick Chamberlain							

Information about this inspection

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

Inspection team

Victor Reid, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Deane	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Dill-Russell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector
Russ Henry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Thompson	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Barker	Ofsted Inspector
Barbara Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
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