

Stephenson College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130747

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Type of provider: General Further Education College
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Information about Stephenson College

1. Stephenson College is a large general further education college with a main campus in Coalville in North West Leicestershire and a small campus in Nottingham. The college offers animal and equine studies courses using a land-based centre near Mansfield. The majority of learners are from Leicestershire; other groups of learners are from Derbyshire and, particularly adults, from Leicester and Nottingham.
2. College-based provision is offered in twelve of fifteen sector subject areas, although numbers of learners are small in several. Employment-based provision is offered in six subject areas and includes several large national contracts. The largest subject areas are construction and engineering. Provision in the arts and for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is no longer offered. The large majority of the college's work is government funded.
3. The percentage of learners in the college from a minority ethnic background is higher than the percentage within the county population. Unemployment rates in Leicestershire are lower than average. Based on socio-economic performance indicators, relatively few learners are from areas of high social and economic deprivation.
4. In the county of Leicestershire, the percentage of pupils gaining more than five GCSE grades at A* to C including English and mathematics is higher than the England average. The college sponsored the opening of the Stephenson Studio School for pupils aged 14 to 19 in September 2011. The college hosted the World Skills selection trials in the summer of 2011. It has a specialist centre for environmental technologies.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - CITB (construction)
 - School Link
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Apex Leicester Project
 - Coates HGV Services (motor vehicle)
 - Training Support (UK) Ltd (security services)
 - Safe Ltd (security services)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to16 Further education (16 to18) Foundation learning	269 part-time learners 1,168 full-time learners 166 part-time learners 393 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	311 full-time learners 1,544 part-time learners
Employer provision: Apprenticeships Train to Gain	1,535 apprentices 1,597 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Health, public services and care	2
Engineering	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Literacy and numeracy	3

Overall effectiveness

7. Stephenson College is a satisfactory college. Its purpose built campus is impressive and successful in creating a professional, business-style setting in which learners enjoy studying safely. Managers' work with a wide range of partners, including a substantial numbers of employers, alongside a range of initiatives, such as hosting World Skills events, provides many opportunities for learners and is fundamental to the college's mission to raise aspirations. Learners' contribution to college and community life is outstanding.
8. Learners' results are satisfactory having improved in 2010/11 after a period of some decline. Pass rates are high; however, not enough learners stay on to the end of the courses. Because of managers' recent focus and a number of actions for improvement, a much higher proportion of current learners are likely to remain on their courses. Employment-based apprentices' results are satisfactory; learners on adult workplace skills courses have high success rates. Learners gain valuable skills to support their economic well-being; many

improve their English and skills in mathematics and information and communication technology, but not always at a high enough level.

9. Teaching is satisfactory; in several subjects, it is good. Teachers' expectations are not always high enough and too many lessons lack structure, pace and challenge. Assessment supports learning well but feedback provided to learners is not consistently helpful. For employment-based learners, assessment is regular and meets qualification requirements. The self-assessment of the quality of teaching is inaccurate.
10. The range of provision developed matches learners' and employers' needs well. Support for learners is satisfactory. Improvements to the support offered include intervening sooner to support learners at risk of underperformance and revisions to pre-course advice and guidance to help place learners on the right course. Target setting is often over-general and unchallenging.
11. The principal, governors and managers are beginning to focus to a much greater extent than previously on making sure that learners complete their courses successfully. Improvement actions informed by better use of data and supported by increasing the accountability of all managers are in place. Managers' evaluation of the college's performance is insufficiently rigorous and is over generous. These factors contribute to the college's satisfactory capacity to improve. While differences between the achievement of various groups of learners have mostly been reduced, not enough promotion of equality and diversity takes place in learning activities.

Main findings

- Learners' success rates are average having increased in 2010/11. Younger learners' success rates at intermediate level are high but below average at advanced level. Adult learners' success rates are below average. Pass rates are high but the number of learners who complete their courses is below average. Success rates on short courses are high.
- Employment-based learners' success rates are average. Apprentices' success rates increased markedly in 2010/11 from a low base and the extent to which they complete their qualifications within the time allocated improved. Achievements of adults on workplace skills courses recently increased; they now gain high success rates within the time allocated for their study.
- Learners develop a broad range of skills, which prepare them well for employment. They gain good experience of industry standards and have many opportunities to develop vocational skills. Their standards of work and skill development are at least satisfactory and, in a few subjects, good.
- Learners' attendance is satisfactory. They feel safe, mostly work hard and enjoy their studies. Learners' personal and social development is good and they make a considerable contribution to college and community life. Learners'

development of functional skills in mathematics and English at foundation and intermediate level is high, although relatively few study at the higher level.

- The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but varies across subjects. The most effective lessons motivate and engage learners and enable them to make good progress. However, in too many lessons teachers fail to challenge learners sufficiently, the pace of learning is too slow and teaching does not meet all individual learners' needs or abilities.
- Learning resources are of high quality. Workshops and practical areas are well equipped. Information and learning technology satisfactorily enhances learning but its full potential is underdeveloped in some areas. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory although opportunities are missed to develop learners' knowledge and understanding further.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning are underdeveloped. The lesson observation process does not provide an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning across the college. Individual teacher's identified development needs are not always met.
- The curriculum meets the needs and interests of learners well. Valuable additional qualifications are available in several subjects. The apprenticeship programme meets employers' needs. Progression routes through levels of study are available including to a wide range of college-based higher education programmes.
- Partnership work is of high quality and beneficial. Strong partnerships with feeder schools, employers and a wide range of stakeholders produce many benefits for learners and the wider college community. Employers engage effectively in the design, review and evaluation of courses. Stakeholders' feedback on partnership work is very positive.
- Learners receive satisfactory guidance and support; support for employment-based learners has improved and is good. The new recruitment, induction and on-course support procedures are more effective as shown by improving retention rates. Additional learning support for identified learners' needs is well organised and very effective.
- Senior managers set ambitious targets through risk-assessed and equality impact-assessed objectives. Their skills in partnership work, responding to employers' needs and developing a professional, industry-linked learning environment have brought benefits for learners. Their emphasis on improving educational outcomes and ensuring high quality provision has been less successful, but managers recognise the need to refocus their work.
- Governors are skilled; they recognise the need to increase their challenge to managers. Governors and managers are proactive in supporting community cohesion and raising aspirations. More effective use of data has reduced the differences in the performance of different groups of learners. Middle managers are becoming more accountable but quality assurance procedures have not worked well to increase consistency in quality across subjects.

- Managers use learners' and staff's views to inform the self-assessment report, but the views of external stakeholders are less well utilised. The self-assessed judgements are optimistic and mostly inaccurate. The report gives insufficient emphasis to areas for improvement, does not contain robust evidence to support many judgements or evaluate the impact on improving learners' outcomes sufficiently.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Accommodation and resources are very good and provide an ideal learning environment. Managers give a high priority to the management of finances, accommodation and physical resources, but do not always utilise staff to optimum effect. They promote environmental sustainability very thoroughly.

What does Stephenson College need to do to improve further?

- Monitor learners' retention rates closely and frequently at all levels of management. Make sure that support arrangements are fully implemented promptly where learners are at risk of withdrawal to ensure that learners' retention rates increase.
- Ensure that learners work towards functional skill levels that build on their prior attainment and provide challenge. Provide opportunities for advanced learners to extend their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills further to support them to move into further or higher education or employment.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons by making sure that activities, including those used in computer-based lessons, are well structured, motivating, engaging and designed to provide an appropriate level of challenge relative to learners' abilities.
- Support teachers in providing informative and constructive feedback to learners on assignment work. Use quality assurance procedures to check on the consistency in quality of feedback.
- Substantially strengthen lesson observation arrangements to ensure the process provides an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning. Use the information collected to inform staff development activities and ensure that individual teachers' development needs are met and the impact monitored.
- Ensure that the setting and monitoring of targets for learners is consistently rigorous and provides challenge to make sure that learners meet or exceed expectations.
- Embed equality and diversity principles more thoroughly in assessment reviews and lessons, so that all learners have a heightened awareness of best practice in their training and educational environments.
- Increase the rigour of the self-assessment process, by ensuring that all managers make a self-critical and objective analysis of the provision, well supported by robust evidence and measured by the impact on learners'

outcomes. Increase governors' scrutiny of the impact of quality assurance procedures and the rigour of self-assessment.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the modern, clean and pleasant learning environment
- developing new skills
- high quality resources
- practical teaching
- friendly and supportive staff
- opportunities to progress from one level to the next
- the help provided by friendly staff.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the unreliable shuttle bus service
- the clarity of target setting in some areas
- the effectiveness of teaching in 'cluster' areas
- teachers' feedback in some subjects
- work experience opportunities.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the flexibility of staff
- the responsiveness of the college
- assessors with good subject knowledge
- good working relationships
- the good development of apprentices' skills and knowledge
- the comprehensive arrangements to monitor progress.

What employers would like to see improved:

- aspects of communication with the college
- their involvement in reviewing learners' progress.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

12. The college's record in improving outcomes for learners is not strong. Success rates across college-based and employment-based provision have only recently increased sufficiently. The self-assessment report covers all aspects of the college's work, but it is mostly inaccurate and contains insufficient objective evaluation of the quality of provision and learners' outcomes. Although managers' skills are clearly evident in other broader aspects of the college's work and their actions have brought about improvements in short course success rates and pass rates, managers have not made sustained improvements in success rates for college-based or employment-based learners.
13. Quality assurance procedures are not yet rigorous or comprehensive, as the college recognises. Since the last inspection, managers have improved learners' participation in enrichment and have removed the provision for learners studying ESOL courses. Retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses are still a major cause for concern as is the challenge for more able learners in lessons. The college has appropriate staffing and significant financial and physical resources to improve outcomes for learners. Governors are committed to encouraging managers to improve the effectiveness of provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

14. Learners enjoy their studies and work diligently, gaining a broad range of useful skills including those that promote their employability. The college's focus on skill development, including encouraging learners to take part in national skills competitions, supports learners' development of vocational skills and awareness of industry standards. The quality of learners' work varies across subjects but is satisfactory overall and good in several large subjects. Most learners show a high awareness of health and safety and take appropriate actions to protect themselves and others. Participation in sport is increasing. Most learners feel safe and instances of bullying or harassment are rare. Learners' contribution to college and community life is very high; the student council is lively, active and influential. Learners' views have been important in bringing about various changes, for example, to the functional skills curriculum. Learners are involved in a number of committees, such as the equality and diversity committee and contribute to decision making.
15. Learners' success rates on long courses increased in 2010/11, reversing the previously declining trend. Overall, long course success rates are average. Pass rates were considerably higher than in the previous three years but the number of learners who withdrew before completion of their courses was greater than

average, as has been the case for the previous two years. Younger learners' success rates are just above average but there is a wide gap between these and adults' success rates, which are below average at all levels except for entry level. Younger learners' success rates are high at intermediate level but low at advanced level where the number of learners who leave before the end of the course is much too high. Early indicators of staying-on rates in the current academic year suggest that more learners are likely to complete their courses than previously. Fewer than average learners achieve high grades in their results. Success rates on short courses are high. In 2010/11, learners achieved well in three large subjects, including marked improvement from a low base in construction, achievement in two smaller subjects including business declined notably.

16. Learners from different groups achieve equally well in most cases. Where differences are identified, actions are in place to reduce these. Learners who receive additional learning support achieve considerably better results than their peers; the college recognises the need to ensure the benefits of this extra support are more equitably distributed. Learners' progress compared to their prior attainment is satisfactory; few achieve beyond expectations and there is a tendency by both learners and, in a few cases, teachers to focus on achieving a pass in their qualifications, rather than aiming higher. Attendance is satisfactory. Learners' achievement of functional skills is mostly high although the levels at which they study are not always sufficiently challenging compared to their prior attainment.
17. Apprentices' achievement is satisfactory and their success rates are improving again after a dip in 2009/10. Achievement varies across subjects and levels. Learners on advanced apprenticeships achieve at a higher rate than those on apprenticeships. In 2010/11, learners on Train to Gain courses achieved well above average within the time allocated.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

18. The quality of lessons varies across the college; almost all are at least satisfactory and, in several large subjects, the majority are good. The best lessons are well planned with clear learning aims and involve learners completing challenging, memorable and enjoyable activities that are motivating and engaging. Teaching in workshops and in practical settings is usually more effective than classroom-based teaching. In less effective lessons, learners, particularly the more able, are insufficiently challenged and do not always make the progress that they are capable of. In too many lessons, particularly when computer-based with a focus on self-directed study, the pace of learning is either too slow or the work set is not well suited to learners' individual ability levels.
19. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge and, in many cases, use their skills and experience to relate theoretical concepts or simulated practical

learning activities to real life situations. While teachers' promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall, opportunities are missed in lessons, and in reviews for work-based learners, to develop learners' knowledge and understanding further.

20. Assessment, marking and feedback are satisfactory. A minority of teachers provide good verbal and written feedback that helps learners but in too many instances, the feedback provided to learners does not detail sufficiently what learners need to do to improve further. An unnecessarily large amount of time is allocated to completing assignment work in some schemes of work. Assessment in the workplace is well planned and flexible to meet employers' and learners' needs. Internal verification is thorough and appropriately upholds standards.
21. High quality resources support teaching and learning well. Workshops and practical areas are very well equipped with good access to information and learning technology (ILT) in most classrooms. While ILT is used effectively to enhance learners' enjoyment of lessons, in many cases it is not used to its full potential to improve the rate of learning.
22. Arrangements for observing and improving the quality of teaching and learning are insufficient. There are too few observers and the coverage of teaching and learning activities is not comprehensive. Too few observations are completed of practicals and of computer-based lessons. The grades awarded to lessons by inspectors rarely matched those awarded through the college's process and were mostly lower, although inspectors found closer correlation during a few joint observations with observers. Individual teachers' areas for improvement are identified through the process but these are not routinely or systematically linked to appropriate development activities.
23. The curriculum meets the needs and interests of most learners well. Provision for part-time adults has reduced as funding has been withdrawn but the college trains large numbers of apprentices, responding to many employers' needs effectively. Employers praise the responsiveness and flexible provision. Vocational courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels are offered in most areas and useful additional qualifications are available in several.
24. Joint work with external agencies and schools to reduce the number of disengaged young people is effective. Provision is available for learners with mild to moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners are involved in shaping and evaluating the curriculum through a range of fora, including the student council and focus groups. The college responds constructively to such contributions. Learners can progress to a wide range of college-based higher education programmes.
25. The range of enrichment provision for full-time learners is good, including sports, cultural activities and a wide and interesting range of visits. Work experience is in place for some vocational courses but work placements are not available equally for all learners. The common group tutorial programme meets

many learners' personal development needs. The curriculum covers employability skills, financial literacy, health issues, anti-bullying and cultural diversity well. However, on-line tutorial modules, while helpful, are unchallenging for many learners.

26. The college works well with partners to benefit learners. Partnerships with feeder schools support learners' smooth transition into college. Employers' involvement in the design, review and evaluation of courses has helped develop a responsive curriculum.
27. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory overall and improved and good for apprentices and adults on employment-based provision. Revisions to recruitment, interview and induction procedures have been made to ensure that learners are placed on the right course relative to their needs and abilities and understand the commitment and demands of study. More consistent implementation of these revisions is evident in the current year with early signs of increased retention rates.
28. Revised and more comprehensive arrangements are in place for monitoring learners' progress including prompt identification of learners at risk. Target setting and monitoring of progress through the new tutoring system are good in some areas, but insufficiently rigorous in others. Retention officers work well with apprentices to resolve concerns and help them to complete their courses within the time allocated.
29. Additional learning support is well organised and often of high quality. Learners in receipt of support acknowledge its value in helping them to succeed. The college rightly measures the extent to which these learners increase their independence. The team of learning support staff is skilled, well qualified and valued by teachers; it includes specialist advisers on dyslexia, behaviour and autism.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

30. The principal and senior managers, ably supported by governors, set ambitious targets, which focus on local, regional and national priorities. They manage the college's corporate affairs and business interests rigorously and use World Skills events and job fairs to raise the aspirations of their local communities. Managers' focus on improving the quality of provision and raising learners' outcomes has been less successful until relatively recently. Curriculum management is improving and is mostly good. The management of employment-based provision, enhanced by the use of retention officers, is good. The recent staff survey indicates that staff are pleased with many aspects of college work, but a small minority are less satisfied with aspects of communication and management style.

31. Governors use their very wide range of skills to advise and guide senior managers, particularly on corporate matters, well. They have supported a successful range of initiatives and very effective partnership work that are important to the college's future. Governors are aware of the key areas for improvement regarding learners' success rates, but have not previously held managers sufficiently to account for the lack of improvement. They are increasingly providing much stronger challenge to managers to address matters of concern. Matters pertaining to teaching and learning, learners' outcomes and curriculum are covered by the finance and general purposes committee, but few of the governors on this committee have expertise in these areas limiting their ability to provide challenge.
32. Managers give health and safety and safeguarding a high profile. Safeguarding legislative requirements are met. The number of reported accidents has decreased during the last three years and careful analysis of accidents and incidents is used to reduce risks. Managers put appropriate safeguards in place for learners in residential accommodation and placements. Health and safety measures are reinforced strongly across vocational areas.
33. Managers monitor equality and diversity aspects closely. The single equality scheme's action plan contains specific aims arising from a wide variety of sources, including learners' views and complaints. Managers have narrowed the achievement gaps between certain groups of learners and the promotion of equality and diversity in tutorials is mostly good; however, not enough promotion takes place through the curriculum. In particular, apprentices' progress reviews do not contain sufficient promotion, reinforcement and recording of equality and diversity matters. Staff undertake relevant equalities training. Managers give a high priority to assessing policies for equality impact measures. The proportions of governors and managers from minority ethnic backgrounds and of female governors and managers are low. Managers are proactive in promoting community cohesion, including support for a credit union, a food cooperative and the inclusion of people from the travelling communities.
34. Managers use effective and diverse ways to obtain learners' views. Vocational areas have strong employer representation through their steering groups. Most courses have learner representatives, many of whom attend regular student council meetings, along with senior managers and the chair of governors. The principal's 'learn net' and learners' 'word on the street' inform learners of relevant issues effectively. Some important cross-college committees include learner representatives. Student governors and student ambassadors represent learners' views very well.
35. The self-assessment process includes the views of staff and managers at all levels. Managers obtain the views of a minority of external stakeholders through working parties and consultation meetings, but they do not have a rigorous process to elicit their opinions systematically. Several actions for improvement identified through self-assessment have been successful, for

example, a project to increase the sharing of good practice and use of resources amongst staff. Performance management is effective. The quality and effectiveness of subject self-assessment varies. Generally, the process is insufficiently self-critical and over states the effectiveness of the provision.

36. The college did not reach its funding allocation targets in 2010/11 because of external factors, but it managed the contraction in funding effectively to provide a small surplus and provides good value for money. The standard of accommodation at the Coalville campus is very high; it provides a very good environment which is conducive to learning and teaching. The quality of accommodation at the Nottingham site is good and practical facilities are satisfactory. Managers have a strong and successful focus on environmental sustainability. They aim for the college to become carbon neutral and paperless and are well advanced in their energy reduction and best value procurement practices. Most teachers and trainers are appropriately qualified or are working towards teaching qualifications. The majority of literacy and numeracy staff are qualified to the appropriate levels. Staff utilisation is low in parts of the college.

Subject areas

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Context

37. The college offers full-time provision in health, social care and public services at intermediate and advanced level and in childcare from foundation to advanced level. Some 317 learners, the large majority aged 16 to 18, are enrolled on these courses. Most learners on health, social care and childcare courses are women but the large majority of learners on public services courses are men. Of 626 employment-based learners, 424 are on apprenticeships or adult workplace skills courses in health and social care or childcare and 202 adults are on a 'providing security services' course offered through franchised provision. A range of short courses are offered including in dementia care and safe handling of medicines.

Key findings

- Learners' success rates are increasing and high on the majority of college-based courses. In 2010/11, all learners were successful on intermediate level courses in health, social care and public services. At advanced level, success rates have declined, except on childcare courses, because too many learners withdrew before completing. Current learners' staying-on rate has increased. Learners on childcare courses do not always achieve their target grade.
- Apprentices' success rates have increased overall to be average and to above average on advanced apprenticeships. Adult apprentices and apprentices on childcare courses show the most improved success; however, success rates for health and social care apprentices only increased sufficiently in 2010/11. Learners on other workplace skills courses have high success rates and the very large majority complete within the time allocated.
- Full-time learners feel secure and develop confidence well within a safe, supportive learning environment. They make good links between theory and practice. Learners' development of the knowledge, skills and appropriate behaviour needed for employment is good. For example, learners on public services courses adopted an appropriate dress code when taking part in a debate in a mock business meeting.
- Learners on employment-based courses demonstrate increased self-confidence, knowledge and skills and improve their professional practice. Good teamwork, communication skills and learners' ability to reflect constructively on their own practice are evident and valued many employers. Many learners take on additional responsibilities on completion of their courses or progress to higher level study.
- Learners make well-informed choices about their well-being supported by participation in a wide range of health and personal safety activities. They make highly positive contributions to the community through volunteer activities. For

example, learners are involved in a reading scheme at a local special school and have raised significant amounts of money for charities such as Children in Need.

- The large majority of lessons are good. Skilful questions links theory to practice very effectively. In a minority of lessons, teaching is insufficiently challenging and teachers have low expectations. Learners' work is satisfactory. Constructive feedback is helping an increasing number of learners to make improved progress. Promotion of research skills and independent study skills is underdeveloped.
- Training and assessment for employment-based learners is well planned to meet individual learner's needs and employment pattern, for example, by arranging assessments to suit learners on night duties. The effectiveness of individual learning plans is improving and most contain realistic targets for completion within the expected timescale. Learners are clear about assessment requirements and most provide a broad range of evidence.
- A good range of courses benefit from the strong and productive links with a wide range of employers including hospitals, schools, pre-school playgroups, nurseries, the uniformed services and the Red Cross. Employers provide work experience opportunities and visiting speakers; they welcome visits such as to Forest Schools and to participate in Army activities.
- Learners receive good care and effective support through comprehensive coverage of personal and social education topics. Initial advice and guidance, in a small minority of instances, has resulted in learners choosing inappropriate courses. Targets set in tutorials are insufficiently challenging in a minority of cases.
- Additional learning needs and learners at risk of underperforming are identified early, monitored and supported in and out of lessons by approachable teachers and assessors. Good communication between academic and learning support staff, who often have relevant vocational backgrounds, leads to effective in-class support that helps learners to succeed.
- Management is good; managers provide good leadership and are bringing about improvements. Action plans are well informed by data and users' views. Self-assessment, however, overstates a number of strengths and related action points are not always sufficiently detailed or specific. Tutorials promote equality and diversity well; however, this is not consistently replicated in lessons, assessments and reviews.
- Well-qualified, experienced staff and excellent learning resources enhance the curriculum. Teachers update their professional competence in a range of ways, for example, through their involvement with care homes at weekends. Particularly good resources, including access to technology, support practical activities well. Opportunities to share and maximise staff expertise and resources across subjects, however, are underdeveloped.

What does Stephenson College need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that targets set in tutorials, particularly on advanced childcare courses and during reviews of apprentices' progress, are consistently challenging, including using appropriate target grades where relevant. Review progress towards these with learners frequently.
- Support teachers to plan learning activities and assessments to stretch and challenge more able learners appropriately. Promote opportunities across all learning activities to develop learners' research and independent study skills.
- Improve the promotion of equality and diversity by using opportunities within lessons and assessments to check and reinforce learners' awareness and understanding. Review teaching resources to make sure they include relevant equality and diversity themes.
- Improve managers' skills in evaluating evidence and making rigorous and objective judgements as part of self-assessment. Make sure that improvement actions are specific and contain sufficient detail.
- Increase the sharing of teachers' expertise, physical resources and good teaching practice in each subject across the curriculum area to maximise and enhance learning opportunities.

Engineering

Grade 3

Context

38. The college offers full and part-time courses in electrical, electronic, mechanical, welding and motor vehicle engineering from entry to advanced level. Of 236 college-based learners, three-quarters are on full-time courses; around a quarter are adults, very few are female and a few are of minority ethnic heritage. Of the 429 work-based learners, just over two-thirds are apprentices and the remainder are advanced apprentices, about a third are engineering learners, the remainder are motor vehicle learners and 12 learners are on other employment-based courses. Around 100 pupils from 3 local schools attend the college to study motor vehicle and engineering courses.

Key findings

- Success rates are increasing and average. Success rates are high on electrical installation courses and on foundation and intermediate motor vehicle courses. Too many withdrawals in 2010/11 resulted in low success rates on some engineering courses. Current learners' staying-on rates have increased significantly. Success rates for apprentices are steadily improving and are now average overall. Success rates of current advanced apprentices are high.
- Learners' vocational skills are satisfactory. Learners particularly enjoy their practical training. College-based learners develop valuable employability skills in welding, the diagnostic testing of electrical circuits and in motor vehicle maintenance and repair. Apprentices' portfolios contain much well illustrated evidence of their industry skills and their understanding of engineering principles.
- Learners feel safe and work safely, paying good attention to the wearing of personal protective equipment and the use of additional safety equipment. In workshops, learners' attention is drawn to the hazards associated with processes effectively, although safety rules are not always sufficiently rigorously applied to visitors. Learners' awareness of safety when using the internet has increased. Apprentices benefit from effective reinforcement of safety awareness.
- Teaching is satisfactory; some practical motor vehicle training at foundation level is good. Knowledgeable teachers use their valuable industrial experience well. In the better theory lessons, teachers have high expectations and use engaging activities very effectively. Well-directed questions encourage participation and check understanding. In less effective lessons, a slow pace and too much talking by teachers often fails to involve learners sufficiently.
- In lessons comprising mostly self-directed computer-based work, a lack of challenging short term targets often results in many learners making slow progress. Learners lose interest in some on-line learning materials quickly. Learners' knowledge and understanding are insufficiently checked. The targets

resulting from some apprentices' progress reviews are ineffective in encouraging good progress with their qualifications.

- Assessment of learners' work is satisfactory, with robust internal verification practice. However, written feedback on work does not always provide learners with a clear understanding of the quality of their work and how to improve. Monitoring of learners' progress is improved through use of a sophisticated computerised system that tracks apprentices' progress comprehensively and makes these data accessible to learners, teachers and employers.
- The curriculum meets the needs of employers and learners very well. The range of engineering provision is good with progression opportunities from entry level to higher education. Learners' progression is good. Major engineering employers influence curriculum design and help teachers maintain their industry skills. Employers speak highly of the provision and provide good opportunities for learners to undertake workplace activities.
- Partnerships are strong. Staff work closely with schools, local and national employers to develop relationships that enhance learners' experience and provide many with their first taste of engineering. The employer steering group meets regularly to participate in the development of engineering provision. Employers contribute a range of industry standard equipment. School pupils benefit from gaining valuable engineering skills and qualifications.
- Support for learners is good. Learners receiving additional learning support on college-based courses have high success rates. The support provided during motor vehicle workshop lessons is particularly good. Retention officers provide good support to work-based learners and handle identified issues sensitively and confidentially.
- Good leadership and management include managers' clear focus on improving learners' outcomes. Success rates have improved steadily. In-year retention has increased significantly for college-based courses. Managers use a particularly effective strategy to involve national and local employers in decision-making and improving the work-based provision. Staff development is encouraged and well supported.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Working relationships between learners and staff show respect and good humour. Staff have undertaken awareness training, but lesson planning does not routinely identify opportunities to promote learners' awareness of equality issues. Apprenticeship progress reviews lack sufficient promotion of equality and diversity in the workplace.
- The self-assessment process is thorough. However, the current draft report fails to identify some key areas for improvement identified during the inspection and presents an overly optimistic view of some aspects of the provision. Engineering resources are good. Most accommodation is of a very high standard, with mostly good standards of housekeeping. Significant recent expenditure has updated some engineering equipment and replaced some tools.

What does Stephenson College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that managers monitor the retention rates of learners closely and regularly and take prompt action to support learners at risk of underperformance to support further increases in success rates.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching by encouraging teachers to use a wide range of strategies to involve and interest learners and make better use of short-term target setting and checks on progress, particularly in computer-based lessons.
- Improve progress reviews for apprentices through better target setting and by promoting equality and diversity more effectively.
- Increase learners' understanding of what they need to do to improve their work by providing constructive and detailed written feedback on all assessed work.
- Support managers to make objective and rigorous judgements in self-assessment.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

39. The college offers full and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies from foundation to advanced level. Some 280 learners attend courses of which about a third are adults. The large majority of learners are on full-time programmes and a majority study hairdressing. Very few learners are men; a few learners are of minority ethnic heritage. Some 39 pupils from local schools are enrolled on courses.

Key findings

- Success rates are consistently high on most hairdressing courses. Success rates on beauty therapy courses were high in 2010/11, although was more mixed between 2008 and 2010. Learners' skills and knowledge development are good. Learners on a foundation level course produced some outstanding creative work and demonstrated highly confident communication skills.
- Learners from advanced level courses and part-time intermediate hairdressing courses progress well into industry-related employment, some into high profile organisations such as spas. Progression from full-time intermediate level beauty therapy and the NVQ level 2 hairdressing course into industry-related jobs is low. Progression within college from foundation to intermediate level courses is good.
- Learners feel safe and know who to go to for help and support on safeguarding issues. Learners mainly follow safe working practices. Personal protective equipment is widely used. Some lapses in health and safety for the sterilisation of hairdressing and beauty tools occur occasionally. Learners contribute well to a wide range of local and national charitable community projects by raising money.
- Teaching and learning are mostly good, and for foundation learning are outstanding. Teachers plan lessons well, catering for a wide range of learning styles using a range of approaches. Very good examples include using techniques such as mind mapping and developing creative mood boards. In less effective lessons, teachers do not sustain learner's interest. Vocational lessons do not routinely include functional skills development.
- Teachers have appropriate vocational and academic skills. A number maintain their industrial expertise well through working in commercial salons. All staff meet industry requirements for continuous professional development.
- The range of hairdressing courses is wide. The range for beauty therapy is restricted as NVQ and work-based learning programmes are not currently available. Learners do not always fully understand the broader beauty therapy industry requirements for vocational courses when choosing their study route. Progression opportunities between levels of study are available and used well. Employers' involvement led to the development of a barbering course.

- Opportunities for enrichment are good. Visits to national exhibitions and a motivational photographic competition open to all learners are good examples. The winning photographs are displayed throughout the college and were chosen to be showcased at the World Skills selection trials.
- Work experience is underdeveloped. The work placements and college-based learning of intermediate learners are not linked together well. Learners do not have the opportunity to be assessed in commercial hairdressing salons. Partnerships with five local schools are good.
- Target setting for improvement is satisfactory. Learners are aware of their targets but few targets set are sufficiently individualised to specific learners' needs and focused on promoting better than expected progress. Targets which are not met are appropriately followed up with additional support.
- Support for learners is comprehensive and well coordinated. Results of initial assessment lead to the implementation of a wide range of carefully planned and individualised support for personal and academic needs. Effective use is made of learning support assistants in lessons. The outcomes for learners in receipt of additional learning support are good.
- Good leadership and management include the promotion of a positive culture and setting of high standards. Managers work closely with teachers to raise standards. Staff across hairdressing and beauty courses work closely and productively together. Learners often benefit from effective team teaching. Managers respond well to national and local priorities by developing the curriculum to meet the needs of employers.
- Hairdressing learners have insufficient exposure to the pressure of commercial practices. There are too few clients for assessment. The functions of the reception management system are not fully utilised. Management reports are not used to confirm the viability of the commercial business. The promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum is satisfactory.
- Managers use the views of learners and staff in self-assessment. The draft report identifies some of the strengths found during the inspection, but none of the areas for improvement. All the proposed grades in the self-assessment report are higher than those given at the inspection.

What does Stephenson College need to do to improve further?

- Develop the range of courses in beauty therapy to match industry requirements more comprehensively. Make sure that learners who want to study beauty therapy understand the qualifications available and the requirements for entry to the industry.
- Reinforce learners' functional skills development in vocational lessons. Use opportunities that occur naturally in lessons to encourage learners to use language and numeracy skills wherever possible.
- Link work experience closely with college-based learning programmes. Work more effectively in partnership with employers to make the best use of industry

placements and develop further assessment opportunities in commercial hairdressing salons.

- Increase the exposure to commercial business practices in particular for hairdressing learners on NVQ courses but also for all learners. Utilise the reception management system fully to provide management information about the success of the commercial aspects of the college salon and to help attract more clients for learners to work on.
- Support managers to take a self-critical approach through self-assessment and ensure that evaluation is rigorous and accurately identifies areas for improvement.

Literacy and numeracy

Grade 3

Context

40. The college offers part-time courses in literacy and numeracy at entry to intermediate level at the main campus and at five centres in the local community. Some 205 learners study literacy and numeracy. The majority are adults, most are female and a very small minority are of minority ethnic heritage. About a quarter of learners work towards college-based accreditation in literacy and numeracy. Courses are managed through two separate sections within the college. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses are no longer offered.

Key findings

- Learners' success rates are average overall. Success rates are very high at entry level and at intermediate level for literacy. Success rates are very low at foundation level and at intermediate for numeracy. Pass rates have improved on most courses. Retention rates have declined on most externally accredited courses.
- Learners gain confidence and improve their reading, writing and communication skills, thus improving their economic and social well-being. Their employability skills improve and a small proportion gain employment or participate in volunteering. Adult returners to education often achieve qualifications for the first time. Many progress to higher levels of study. Community-based learners often relate their newly acquired skills to their children's literacy learning.
- Learners feel very safe and secure at the college and at local community venues. Learners like the checks made on entering the main college. Safeguarding arrangements are good and well publicised. Rigorous risk assessments are completed and much attention focuses on health and safety in community settings.
- The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Ample checks and constructive helpful feedback are provided to learners on an individual basis and they make satisfactory progress. The monitoring of progress is thorough on the 'Working Together' course with tutors involving learners fully in evaluating and recording their learning.
- Lessons are satisfactory with some good features evident. Lessons cater for a range of needs and ability levels because they are mostly carefully planned. Teachers create a purposeful and supportive learning environment. In the majority of lessons, learners develop and improve their skills through careful use of a range of individualised activities and tasks.
- In less effective lessons, not all learners are challenged sufficiently and, in particular, more able learners. Too little consolidation of teaching points takes place on a whole group basis hindering learning. The promotion of equality and

diversity is satisfactory using sensitive choices of text in literacy and the selection of relevant topics to acknowledge and reinforce differences.

- Assessment is satisfactory. Diagnostic assessment outcomes are used well to plan teaching and learning. Identified weaknesses are incorporated into lesson planning and inform individual learning. However, target setting is not timely nor is completion of individual learning plans. Too few learners have effective individual learning plans and neither progress nor achievement of targets are systematically monitored.
- The curriculum meets learners' needs and interests satisfactorily. Local community venues are accessible and an increasing number of courses operate in employers' premises. The current cross college course offer of literacy and numeracy to meet the needs of young and adult learners at a range of skill levels and with different qualification aims is too limited.
- Partnership arrangements are satisfactory. Well-established partnerships with schools and community groups ensure that there is locally based provision in schools, community and church venues.
- Support for learners is satisfactory. Productive links with specialist agencies are particularly beneficial to part-time learners. An increasing number participate in enrichment activities offered at the college and in community based venues. Extra academic support is provided for those in need.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The cross-college provision has recently been relocated into a new section. Small teams of staff benefit from regular meetings and good communication. The majority of tutors are appropriately qualified and have completed subject specialist training. Accommodation is good at the main college centre and provides a conducive learning environment.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory although the analysis and evaluation is not comprehensive. Strengths related to learners' successes are over-estimated. Actions to increase the number of learners who complete their course are not yet effective. The Skills for Life policy is in need of revision and does not reflect national priorities.

What does Stephenson College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on externally accredited courses by monitoring learners' retention frequently and taking prompt action where needed to support learners at risk of underperformance.
- Improve individual target setting by ensuring that targets in individual learning plans are timely, specific, measurable and rigorously monitored. Review the curriculum to broaden the range of cross college course offer, to cater for young and adult learners, who aim to achieve different qualification aims. Work with a wider range of partners to do this.
- Improve teaching and learning by broadening the range of activities and increasing level of challenge to ensure that teachers are suitably demanding of all learners, particularly the more able.

- Update and revise the skills for life policy and related implementation plans to reflect national subject priorities.

Information about the inspection

41. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the college's Director of Quality and School Partnerships, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
42. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at the questionnaires that learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from across courses in the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Stephenson College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	1,180	932	248	0
Part-time learners	1,984	43	627	1314
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3			
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3			
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3			
How well do learners progress?	3			
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2			
How safe do learners feel?	2			
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2			
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1			
Quality of provision	3	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3			
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2			
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2			
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3			
Leadership and management	2	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2			
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2			
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2			
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3			
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3			
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2			

*where applicable to the type of provision

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