

# Central Bedfordshire College

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 130598

**Name of lead inspector:** Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 11 November 2011

**Type of provider:** General Further Education College

**Address:** Kingsway  
Dunstable  
Bedfordshire  
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## Information about the provider

1. Central Bedfordshire College is a medium-sized general further education college with its main site in Dunstable town centre. Other college sites are located in Luton, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard. The college's core business is vocational education with the majority of its further education provision funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The college offers provision in 14 subject areas. Most learners study advanced level programmes. The largest numbers of enrolments are in preparation for life and work, health, public services and care and visual and performing arts and media. The college provides a range of programmes for learners aged 14 to 16. Up to 2010 the college provided Train to Gain programmes in five subject areas. It offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in six areas with the largest numbers in engineering and business administration.
2. In 2009/10, the proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A\* to C in Bedfordshire was 54%, in line with the national average. Around 31% of learners who study at the college are of minority ethnic heritage, above that of the local population. Just under two thirds of all learners are female. The college appointed a new principal in January 2011.
3. The college's mission is to "establish and maintain a distinct role as a high quality provider of vocational training and education for the community of Central Bedfordshire".

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<b>Provision for young learners:</b> 14 to 16	321 part-time learners
Further education (16 to 18)	1,218 full-time learners 175 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	9 part-time learners 331 full-time learners
<b>Provision for adult learners:</b> Further education (19+)	469 full-time learners 1,876 part-time learners
<b>Employer provision:</b> Train to Gain Apprenticeships	282 learners 106 apprentices

## Summary report

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
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	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	4
Equality and diversity	3

<b>Subject Areas</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Health and social care	3
Information and communication technology	4
Visual arts and media	2
Literacy and numeracy	3

## Overall effectiveness

- Central Bedfordshire College is a satisfactory college. An increasing proportion of learners successfully gain their primary qualification, most notably adult learners. While outcomes for learners aged 16 to 18 and for learners on work-based programmes are broadly average overall, performance varies markedly across subject areas and between a few different groups of learners. Staff effectively support a large majority of learners to progress to their chosen destination at the end of their studies.
- Teachers plan most lessons well and learners enjoy lessons. Good use of written assessments, in most cases, aids learners' progress. Too often however, within lessons teachers do not check learners' understanding enough or use questions sufficiently to extend learners' knowledge. This hinders the progress of a minority of learners in lessons. Strategic partnership working is a strength of the college, but weaker across subject areas.

6. The new principal, his senior team, governors and staff are committed to improving learners' educational experience and have worked collaboratively on producing a clear strategic direction for the college. The college has continued to improve learners' success in gaining qualifications. The rate of improvement across departments however, is too uneven. Aspects of quality assurance and self-assessment, such as the college's monitoring and overview of teaching and learning and the reporting of the performance of different groups of learners, lack rigour. Underdeveloped analysis and evaluation of data in a significant minority of cases in combination with insufficiently clear lines of accountability, are delaying the college's overall progress.
7. At the inspection, the college did not fully meet government requirements in regards to its single central register for safeguarding. The college has responded swiftly and appropriate measures are now in place while the college awaits formal documentation relating to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for a few teachers. The college provides a positive learning environment in which learners feel very safe.

## Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates have risen faster than the national rate, particularly for adult learners. Success rates were high for adult learners and for those aged 14 to 16 in 2010/11. They were at a satisfactory level for those aged 16 to 18 and for work-based learners. Marked differences exist however, in the performance across subject areas.
- Learners make expected progress against their starting points. Most enjoy college and attend satisfactorily, although attendance in a number of subject areas is low. An increasing proportion complete their courses but pass rates vary and remain low on intermediate level and a minority of advanced level programmes for those aged 16 to 18.
- The college considers the performance of different groups of learners although its analysis and reporting of this through self-assessment is not comprehensive. Not all trends, such as the notable decline in success rates of Asian Pakistani learners aged 16 to 18, are identified sufficiently well and action clearly taken.
- Learners develop appropriate literacy and numeracy skills during their studies. Many progress to their chosen destination. A range of initiatives promotes learners' physical and emotional well-being although managers do not evaluate these activities sufficiently to determine their impact on learners. The majority of learners make a very positive contribution to the college and wider community.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan almost all lessons well. Lessons contain a variety of activities but a few do not meet learners' needs. Teachers check on learners' understanding, but their use of questions to make learners think for themselves to help them make consistently good progress is insufficient.

- Assessment supports learning well. Staff plan most assessments well using relevant and interesting tasks. The feedback they provide supports learners effectively in lessons and improves their work. Assessment on work-based learning is regular and fair. Initial assessment is thorough, but staff do not always use it effectively.
- The lesson observation process is comprehensive, but lacks rigour. The analysis of the findings from observations is often superficial and does not effectively inform actions for improvement.
- The college's range of provision is satisfactory. In a minority of subjects, provision is wide ranging but in others, it is narrow. At department level, curriculum planning clearly identifies staff and resource needs, but it does not always analyse external factors and the rationale for some course changes are unclear.
- Partnership working is good. At strategic level, collaboration with a wide range of other organisations is strong and beginning to bring about benefits for learners. While very good strategically, partnership work is less well established across all subjects and the potential impact of collaborative work, such as extending work placements, is not always maximised.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Individual tutorials are supportive and valued by learners. Group tutorials are frequent and often responsive to learners' requests, but their quality is too variable and do not always engage learners sufficiently. The quality of recording within learners' individual learning plans is often devoid of detail and makes it difficult to gauge learners' progress.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has a clear strategic direction which managers' share with all staff, that focuses on improving standards and outcomes for learners. Governors have been partners in developing the strategy. They challenge appropriately to ensure operational developments match the college's vision. Lines of responsibility are not always clear enough.
- Current arrangements for safeguarding do not meet government requirements. At the inspection, a small number of teachers did not have CRB checks. The college acted promptly to apply for these, and in the meantime, appropriate risk assessments are in place to ensure learners' safety. Learners feel very safe and the college has good links with local organisations involved in safeguarding.
- Equality and diversity are satisfactory. Managers and staff promote cultural diversity well through cross-college celebrations and events. Most groups of learners succeed at similar rates. In a few significant areas, however, the achievement gap for a minority of groups is not clearly identified and any action taken to resolve these issues is not explicit enough.
- Aspects of quality assurance and self-assessment lack rigour. A new quality team is developing processes to target improvements for learners and learning. The college has identified areas of significant underperformance and acted successfully to raise headline success rates. Improvement however, is not widespread across all departments. Much analysis and evaluation of data is underdeveloped, particularly in the self-assessment reports.

## What does Central Bedfordshire College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the college meets government requirements in all its arrangements for safeguarding by making sure all relevant documentation is reviewed frequently and that the college's single central register is up to date and complete.
- Provide greater consistency in improvements by clarifying all lines of accountability and responsibility within the college so that all staff know who is responsible for monitoring specific activities and processes. In addition, ensure all action plans outline the issues, actions and timescales clearly and the presentation of data is clear so that trends and inconsistencies are easily visible.
- Increase pass rates for those aged 16 to 18 on intermediate and advanced level programmes and ensure greater consistency in success and attendance rates between departments by raising the standard of managers' skills in the analysis and evaluation of data and outcomes, raising the standard of self-assessment to identify accurately areas of strength and underperformance.
- Increase the success rates of different groups of learners, notably Asian Pakistani learners aged 16 to 18, by ensuring the analysis and monitoring on the performance of different groups are sufficiently comprehensive, reported clearly through self-assessment, and are part of quality improvement plans. Additionally, ensure managers evaluate clearly the performance of different work-based learning groups.
- Raise the standard of lesson observations, including evaluating the promotion of equality and diversity, by ensuring observations have greater rigour and that managers fully analyse findings to inform actions to improve lessons.
- Improve teachers' checks on learning in lessons by ensuring these take place frequently, staff have training to undertake this task effectively and increase the use of demanding questioning. In addition, make more use of initial assessment information to improve further the planning of teaching and learning.
- Strengthen the curriculum offer across the college by increasing the rigour in the planning of the provision at department level and ensuring that the benefits of partnership working are maximised and, where appropriate, better shared across departments.
- Improve the impact of support by better monitoring of learners' progress through their individual learning plans. Ensure where group tutorials are of a lower standard, managers identify this issue and take action to raise standards including engaging learners more in discussion and debate.

## **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What learners like:**

- the friendly, approachable staff who are good at helping with problems
- the opportunities provided for learners from a wide range of differing backgrounds and abilities
- teachers' specialist subject knowledge
- teachers' positive approach and their caring attitudes towards learners
- good, reasonably priced food at the Kingsland campus
- the good improvements to a few facilities, including toilets
- good library facilities with a wide range of on-line resources.

### **What learners would like to see improved:**

- the range of enrichment activities
- the provision of social spaces
- timetabling and course organisation on a few courses
- out-of-date or limited resources in a few areas
- the promptness of feedback on assessed work
- less bunching of assignments.

## **Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What employers like:**

- the provision of courses to meet employers' specific needs
- the good links with work-based learning staff
- the valuable and practical support provided to employees
- the improved support for learners at risk of underperformance.

### **What employers would like to see improved:**

- employers did not identify any major areas for improvement.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 3**

8. The college's capacity to improve is satisfactory. The new principal and executive team have a clear strategic vision. They involve all staff in planning how this is implemented so that actions impact positively on learners. The college's headline success rates have increased notably over the last three years from a low base to slightly above that of other general further education colleges. Governors have appropriate skills and experience and ask challenging questions. Self-assessment is inclusive and has led to improvements in retention and course monitoring. The process overall however, is not well established and the college is aware that its analysis and evaluation of data is not sufficiently robust to lead to clearly focused actions for improvement. The current self-assessment report identifies several of the issues found by inspectors, although these are not given sufficient weight by the college in forming their overall judgements. A few areas for improvement found at the previous inspection remain as issues in this inspection.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 3**

9. Overall, outcomes for learners are satisfactory. For adult learners, success rates increased notably to a high level in 2010/11. For those aged 16 to 18, success rates increased to broadly average, but marked differences in performance still exist between different subject areas. Success rates are low in a significant minority of areas. The rise in overall success rates is predominantly down to a substantial rise in the number of learners being retained on their programmes. The number of learners passing their qualifications has also increased overall, but for those aged 16 to 18 on intermediate level and on a minority of advanced level programmes pass rates are low. Learners aged 14 to 16 achieve well. It is not possible to report on the achievement of higher grades overall, as until very recently, the college has not formally processed this information.
10. Overall success rates for learners on Train to Gain programmes increased in 2010/11 to broadly average and most learners completed their qualification in the time allocated for their programme. For apprentices, overall success rates fell from a previously consistent high level to be below average in 2010/11. While most apprentices completed their qualification in the expected time, the proportion has declined over the past three years.
11. Learners make progress in line with expectations. In a minority of subjects, such as visual arts and media, progress is good. The standard of most learners' work is at least satisfactory and good in a few subjects. The majority of learners enjoy college and attend satisfactorily. Attendance across subjects however, varies notably and the college self-assessment report acknowledges that attendance has been too low in a minority of departments.



12. The college considers the performance of different groups of learners although its analysis and reporting of this through self-assessment is not comprehensive. For example, it did not identify sufficiently the notable decline in success rates of Asian Pakistani learners aged 16 to 18, its largest cohort of minority ethnic learners. Most of the previous differences in performance between male and female learners in 2009/10 reduced in 2010/11 and were mostly negligible. Learners' performance by gender, those within work-based learning and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not clearly reported through the self assessment. Looked after children, while not formally reported, achieve and progress very well.
13. Learners feel very safe in college and show a good awareness of safe working practices in lessons. Learners develop satisfactory literacy, numeracy and work-related skills through their programmes of study which helps prepare them appropriately for life after college. At the end of their studies, a high proportion of learners move successfully to higher education, further education or employment. A range of activities and initiatives promote learners' physical and emotional well-being. However, managers do not evaluate these activities well to determine their full impact on how learners make informed choices about pursuing health lifestyles. A good range of opportunities enables learners to make a positive contribution to the college and local community, including involvement with charities and voluntary work at local hospices.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 3**

14. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners enjoy their lessons and value teachers' specialist skills and vocational knowledge. Almost all lessons are at least satisfactory. A few are good or better than the college's lesson observation grade profile indicates. Teachers are keen to improve their practice and often plan lessons carefully and promote good attitudes to learning in classes. In the majority of lessons, teachers use a wide range of teaching methods which often add variety and interest to their lessons. Teachers however, vary in their expertise and confidence in ensuring that these methods consistently promote learning and help learners to make good progress. Too often during lessons, teachers make insufficiently thorough checks on learners' understanding. Teachers also miss opportunities to make learners think for themselves. For example, by answering their own questions rather than challenging learners to provide detailed answers or missing opportunities to promote learners' independent research skills. In lessons which include a wide ability range, teachers do not consistently adapt their approaches to meet the needs of different ability groups. Learners are mostly confident in their use of information and learning technology because teachers use this regularly as part of their lessons and for providing additional learning support. The virtual learning environment is being used increasingly well to support learning.
15. Assessment supports learning well on the majority of courses. Staff plan assessments well with relevant tasks clearly set out. Learners receive useful

help with their assignments and constructive feedback on their work, although the focus on improving grammar, punctuation and spelling is not always strong. The college has improved assessment schedules in several subjects and in work-based learning to ensure that the learners' workload is spread appropriately over the academic year. Initial assessment is thorough but staff do not always use it productively in planning lessons to meet all learners' needs. Target setting in a few lessons is too general, limiting the potential progress of learners. Learning support assistants work well with teachers in providing additional support.

16. The college's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is over generous, in part, because as the college recognises, the lesson observation procedure lacks rigour. The analysis of the results of lesson observations is often too superficial to support the identification of improvements. While a small minority of lessons promote equality and diversity well, this is not widespread across all teaching. Sharing of good practice between college sites is not well developed.
17. The range of provision across the college satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of learners. In subjects such as visual arts and media, the provision is rich and wide ranging, but in others, such as information and communication technology, it is narrow and provides limited opportunities for progression or work placements. The college's central programme of enrichment has a wide range of activities and many learners frequently participate in these. The range and availability of enrichment within subject areas is more uneven.
18. The college has revised its curriculum for functional skills by ensuring that learners consolidate their skills fully at each level before moving on to the next stage. While this supports the full development of learners' functional skills, it means that the level of challenge and sufficient work at an appropriate level relative to a learners' main programme is limited for a few learners. Curriculum planning at departmental level fully involves subject staff and managers clearly define resource requirements. In a few cases however, curriculum planning lacks rigour and the use of information about external influences is limited and rationales for course changes lack detail.
19. Partnership working is good. The college uses partnerships well at strategic level to ensure that its overall provision complements, rather than competes with that found in the rest of Bedfordshire. The involvement of partners to aid future planning is strong including advanced plans for a university technical college and provision in sustainability. Partnership working is good within visual arts and media, but not well established or maximised within all subject areas.
20. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Initial advice and guidance clearly identifies learners' aspirations and support needs and in most cases ensures learners are placed on the appropriate course. The number of learners completing their chosen programme of study has increased markedly as a

result. Learners have good access to and benefit from, a wide array of welfare and personal support services.

21. Individual tutorials to support learners' pastoral needs are good and valued by learners. All learners have individual learning plans. Staff and learners review these plans regularly. Individual goals within these plans however, are often too vague or do not have clear target dates, making learners' progress against them difficult to gauge. Group tutorial provision is flexible and very responsive to learners' requests. The teaching and learning however, within group tutorials are too variable and often do not involve or engage learners sufficiently.
22. Learners speak highly of the additional support they receive. Learners receiving additional learning support achieve at least in line with their peers. The college has strengthened its processes for monitoring learners' attendance, but it was too early at the the inspection to judge the full impact of the recent changes.

## Leadership and management

## Grade 3

23. Following the appointment of the new principal, all governors, managers and staff are fully involved in developing a mission which puts learners and learning at the centre of all the college's work. Success rates overall have risen to around national rates from a very low base. Managers set and regularly monitor realistic targets for improvement for all courses,. Managers work closely with local organisations to ensure that the curriculum and times and modes of provision meet local needs.
24. Governors are involved fully in setting the college's strategic direction. They scrutinise college reports thoroughly, and challenge managers, when appropriate, to provide more information. For example, about equalities issues. Governors are skilled in appropriate areas, including finance, business and education. Staff and student governors play a thorough part in meetings. Safeguarding governance, an area in which they did not fulfil their statutory duty, has very recently changed, and is now the responsibility of a new governor with wide educational experience. Governors monitor business planning and finance very closely, to ensure that the college maintains its strong financial health and that all developments are in line with local needs.
25. Safeguarding is inadequate. At the inspection, the college was not fully compliant with safeguarding requirements, as a small number of teachers had neither CRB checks nor stringent risk assessments. The college has acted extremely promptly to apply for all CRB checks, strengthen its recruitment procedure, which will be implemented immediately, and put acceptable risk assessments in place. Security at the college is appropriate and learners feel very safe. Security staff challenge learners to show their identity cards, but they do not always have to wear them. This limits the effectiveness of the cards. The safeguarding team have good links with other groups locally, including the

- police Forced Marriage Unit and the local authority. All staff and governors receive training on safeguarding, which the college updates every three years.
26. Equality and diversity are satisfactory. Cross college events, advertising and celebrations of religious and national festivals promote cultural diversity well. The college adapts provision, duration and location to meet the needs of groups with poor access to main sites and to help those local residents with a short time to achieve qualifications. Departments analyse recruitment and encourage take up from underrepresented groups. The promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum is satisfactory. The analysis and evaluation of data on different learner groups and the use of these data to plan improvements are not sufficiently thorough or detailed. The college's analysis of equalities data for work-based learning is underdeveloped.
  27. The college listens carefully to learners. It seeks learners and employers' views during progress reviews for work-based learners. The student council, attended by the principal and vice principal, enables wide ranging and open debate on many college issues. All courses have learners' representatives. In the best instances, they are clear about their role, and bring forward ideas which result in changes to timetables, teaching and resources. Others have a less clear understanding of what is expected of them. The college recognises that systems for letting learners know that their views are heard and acted on are not sufficiently developed, and that learners need to be engaged more closely in influencing college practices.
  28. Quality assurance and self assessment are currently in transition, with a new quality team, including two learning improvement managers, part of whose role is to ensure that any new arrangements have a positive impact on learners and learning. The self-assessment report includes the views of governors, staff, learners and employers. Self-assessment is underdeveloped, and the report is not sufficiently evaluative. It identifies most, but not all, of the issues found by inspectors. The report does not give enough weight to the impact of inconsistencies across levels, groups and programmes and identifies some normal practice as strengths. Regular and frequent meetings are designed to ensure that attendance, retention and progress are monitored at all levels in college so that necessary interventions are prompt. Lines of accountability however, are not always clear. Managers do not always check that actions they have requested staff carry out have been undertaken and too many quality improvement plans at departmental level do not have actions with clear target dates.
  29. Staff are appropriately qualified, or are on teacher training programmes. Staff development is plentiful and well used. Accommodation is old, but well maintained, and the college makes good use of its rooms. The introduction of recycling and energy efficient lighting has been slow, although the college contributes to environmental sustainability through its commitment to maintaining and reusing buildings and furnishings.

## Subject areas

### Health and social care

### Grade 3

#### Context

30. At the inspection, 286 learners were following full-time BTEC health and social care and CACHE childcare and education courses from introductory to advanced level. Approximately two thirds were aged 16 to 18 years. Fifteen were male. Additional courses in personal and social development and paediatric first aid complement main programmes. A further 126, predominantly adult learners, study part-time courses including British sign language and counselling.

#### Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates on the majority of courses are broadly in line with the national average, although success rates for learners at the Luton campus are significantly lower. Success rates on the intermediate level health and social care are high.
- Learners enjoy their learning. Learners are engaged in lessons and make appropriate and sometimes better than expected progress for the level and stage of their course. Learners develop good employability skills through their lessons and a well-structured work experience programme. They use computers confidently but a few learners have underdeveloped research skills.
- A flexible tutorial scheme allows tutors to select topics that best meet the needs of particular groups or individuals and which helps learners to understand risks to their own health and well-being. Learners make good contributions to the local community through fund-raising, volunteering and their activities in work-experience placements.
- Teaching, training and assessment are good. In the best lessons, teachers plan lessons well, they are lively and enthusiastic and link theory to practice very effectively. In a few lessons however, teachers do not check learning sufficiently and they do not stretch and challenge all learners fully. Learners receive prompt and constructive feedback on their work to help them to improve.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Information prior to enrolment and careful assessment during induction ensures that learners are on an appropriate course. Staff identify additional learning needs early and provide effective support including communicators for the deaf, learning support in lessons and out of class support for specific needs such as Dyslexia.
- Staff regularly review academic progress. They encourage learners to evaluate their own progress through one-to-one tutorials. Individual targets for learners within these tutorials are not always sufficiently specific or challenging. Staff provide learners with effective help to plan their next steps into employment or higher education.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Course teams work well together to support their learners with shared and clear focus on increasing success rates. All courses have challenging targets, but staff do not always fully own or understand these targets. Staff prioritise safeguarding and support vulnerable learners well. Consequently, learners feel very safe in college.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Lessons have a mutual respectful atmosphere. Teachers use male role models effectively to encourage recruitment of more male learners into childcare courses. Managers and staff have taken action to resolve achievement inequalities for learners on childcare courses at the Luton campus but these have not had sufficient impact.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory. While the self-assessment report is broadly accurate, its use of data is insufficiently rigorous and often leads to the over emphasis of some strengths. Not all planned actions are specific enough to improve provision.
- Engagement with users is good. Managers and staff listen and act swiftly on learners and employers' views. For example, staff used effectively a meeting with placement providers to plan changes to the curriculum provision and classroom teaching for childcare.
- Teaching rooms are adequate, but have insufficient up-to-date specialist facilities for learners to practise their skills. Despite this, staff make best use of the facilities and they have sufficient resources to allow learners to complete their programmes of study successfully.

### **What does Central Bedfordshire College need to do to improve further?**

- Reduce the gap in achievement between learners at the Luton campus and those at Dunstable by sharing the good practice within the subject area to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Increase teachers' skills by ensuring they effectively check learning, stretch and challenge all learners, and develop learners' research skills.
- Develop managers' skills in supporting staff to enable them to use data effectively and make action points for improvement more specific to achieve challenging goals and targets at course level.
- Help learners achieve their full potential by making sure staff set clearer, smarter targets within individual learning plans.

## Information and communication technology

## Grade 4

### Context

31. Courses are available at intermediate and advanced level at the Dunstable campus. A very small number of learners study GCE-A and AS-level courses. The college has recently closed community provision as part of a strategic review of provision. Some 71 learners aged 16 to 18 and 36 adults are enrolled on courses. Almost all learners study full-time.

### Key findings

- Success rates declined between 2008/09 and 2010/11 to a low level. Success rates on the first diploma and the national diploma are well below the national average. Too many learners withdraw from two-year advanced level courses. Success rates on GCE A-level courses have increased to a high level, but those for the AS-level course are very low.
- Attendance overall is satisfactory, but is too low for functional skills lessons. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Teachers reinforce health and safety constantly, particularly in computer maintenance workshops. Staff make learners fully aware of how to work safely when using the internet. Learners very feel safe while in college.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although an increasing number of lessons are well-planned and engage learners thoroughly, too often teachers do not adapt their teaching to meet all learners' needs. In less effective lessons, teachers tend to talk for too long and the pace of the lesson is too slow.
- Teachers make good use of information and learning technology to support learning, particularly for individual coaching, which is often good. Teachers make effective use of the virtual learning environment and they have developed an extensive range of materials including interactive resources. Learners use these resources increasingly effectively, including remotely.
- As the college recognises, both the structure of courses and the arrangements for assessment and verification are unsatisfactory. Units of study run across the academic year but assessment and internal verification staff leave to the end of the course putting unnecessary pressure onto the learners. Learners do not benefit from any interim assessment or resulting feedback on their progress.
- The range of courses is narrow due to a strategic review of provision. Courses are full-time and run in the day-time only limiting the potential for access by some learners. A few college-based work placements are available but arrangements for other work experience are insufficient. Links with local employers are weak.
- The accuracy and rigour of initial advice and guidance, including progression between levels of study, are improving. Current learners are aware of the demands of their course and appreciate that changes the college is making to course organisation. Tutorial arrangements however, are underdeveloped and

are insufficiently comprehensive in covering important topics, such as careers advice.

- Management of the provision is weak. New leadership is now in place but much needed actions to increase success rates have been both slow and insufficient. Changes to the structure of the curriculum have only just happened and are disrupting learners' study. The analysis of data is insufficient to inform actions to improve provision.
- The promotion of safeguarding is satisfactory. Staff development activities cover appropriate topics such as drug awareness and understanding of mental health issues. All staff have undertaken equality and diversity training but are not making good use of opportunities to promote equality themes through the curriculum.
- Self-assessment and improvement planning are mostly ineffective in supporting the development of more effective provision. Recent moderation of the self-assessment report however, has identified more clearly the provision's inadequacies. The improvement plan identifies a few actions with measureable but undated targets.

### **What does Central Bedfordshire College need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that managers at all levels monitor learners' progress and attendance closely, take prompt action to support learners at risk of underachievement, continue to apply rigorous entry requirements and that the demands of courses are clearly stated.
- Ensure the clear identification of all areas for improvement with appropriate actions, including target completion dates, and the closely monitoring of provision by developing managers' skills in self-assessment and improvement planning.
- Support teachers to develop their range of teaching methods so that they can adapt their approach to meet the needs of learners and help learners to take more control of their learning.
- Review the structure of courses and the arrangements for assessment and verification to ensure that the curriculum supports learners to achieve and that staff use regular assessment to inform learners about their progress.
- Develop links with employers and ensure that learners have opportunities for work experience as part of their courses.
- Review tutorial arrangements, through making sure that the scheme of work for this area is comprehensive and tutors use it consistently to ensure that learners receive support and guidance across a range of relevant topics.



## Visual arts and media

## Grade 2

### Context

32. The college offers full and part-time courses in art, design and media at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. At inspection, 300 learners were studying full-time of whom 160 were aged 16 to 18. The proportion of enrolments is evenly split between visual arts and media. Some 95, predominantly adult learners, follow part-time art and design courses.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are consistently very high, but the high success rates on the advanced level courses in media and in visual studies have declined over the last three years. College data indicate an above average proportion of learners achieve a merit or distinction. Learners make good progress in lessons and attend well.
- The standard of learners' work and sketchbooks is good. The quality of some of learners' work, such as experimental surface pattern work within art foundation, is very good. In a few cases, opportunities to extend learners' research skills and techniques and develop their use of specialist terminology teachers are not always maximised.
- Learners feel very safe and understand safe working practice in the studios and classrooms. In media, learners demonstrate a good understanding of safety and routinely complete risk assessments while undertaking external activities such as video shoots.
- Teaching and learning are good. Staff are well qualified and most assignments topics are creative and enhance learners' interest and motivation. For the vast majority of lessons planning is comprehensive. In a few cases however, lessons are too teacher led to allow learners to contribute, do not always challenge more able learners and opportunities are missed to encourage learners' to critique their own or colleagues' work.
- Assessment is fair and in line with awarding body requirements. In most cases, learners receive detailed feedback on their work, which outlines how they can improve, although a small minority of written feedback on learners' work is too brief.
- The range of courses to meet learners' needs and interests is outstanding. Managers plan courses very well to provide very good opportunities for progression. Learners' progression between courses is high. Enrichment is good and includes some professional information technology qualifications to improve learners' employment prospects. The college provides study and residential trips on all courses.
- Partnership working is productive and supports an array of community projects and assignments. For example, learners in media worked collaboratively with local schools to produce an Olympics video. Established links with a national

charity has led to a popular Saturday art club run by the college to engage local school pupils.

- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners speak highly of their tutors and the support they receive, particularly planning for progression, especially for higher education where staff are able to guide expertly learners' applications. All learners who wish to progress to further education or higher education do so successfully.
- Leadership and management are good. Teamwork is strong and communication between the media and arts teams is frequent and productive. Self-assessment is inclusive, but makes limited explicit reference to the progress made by learners or the quality of their work. Managers and staff do not use feedback from course representatives systematically as part of all course reviews.
- Most specialist equipment and accommodation is fit for purpose. The majority of art rooms provide a spacious area for learning. A few specialist areas however, including rooms in photography, media and printmaking are small and often cramped and at times restrict the opportunities for learners to extend their creativity.

#### **What does Central Bedfordshire College need to do to improve further?**

- Fully engage with all learners and maximise their progress by extending the opportunities for them to critique their own and others' work and through teachers providing further challenge for the more able by more directed questioning.
- Develop and extend learners' research skills and techniques and encourage more explicitly their use of specialist language through their programme.
- Within budgetary constraints, review specialist accommodation to ensure all learners are able to access easily the full range of specialist resources to improve their work, independent learning skills and creativity.

## Literacy and numeracy

## Grade 3

### Context

33. Currently, 1,119 learners attend programmes in functional maths and English and literacy and numeracy. Most attend courses in functional skills at foundation level as part of their main learning programmes. Some 12% of enrolments are on intermediate level courses.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are broadly satisfactory. Functional skills success rates at foundation level increased substantially in 2010/11 to a high level. Success rates on intermediate programmes remain low.
- Learners develop satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills and most complete work to a high standard. The progress of a significant number of learners however, is impeded by work being either too easy or too complex for their abilities. Learners develop good employability skills in a minority of lessons for English functional skills.
- Learners feel safe and work safely in lessons. Learners do not always wear their identity badges, which staff do not always challenge.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers engage learners by linking topics to everyday life or vocational subjects. Appropriate use of information learning technology and the internet make lessons more interesting. Teachers do not always use effectively initial and diagnostic assessment information when planning lessons to meet the needs of mixed ability groups.
- The monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory. Individual learning plans are in place for literacy and numeracy, which teachers and learners review frequently. Targets within these plans however, are often too vague to be useful for teachers to measure learners' progress.
- It is too early to judge the impact of the college's new curriculum model. The college has recently revised its functional skills provision based on ensuring that learners consolidate their skills fully at each level before moving on to the next level. While this model supports the full development of learners' functional skills, it means that the level of challenge at an appropriate level relative to a learners' main programme is limited for some learners.
- Partnership working is satisfactory. The college works with other providers and national initiatives to develop functional skills resources and activities. The college has been responsive in providing some additional classes in literacy and numeracy to meet local demand.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Teachers support learners when experiencing problems in lessons with their class work. Learners are confident in asking for any help they require.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified and have relevant subject specialist qualifications. The college has a central strategy for providing functional skills but this does not align completely to the college's operational model and does not provide clear enough guidance for staff.
- Self-assessment is inclusive and includes all preparation for life and work programmes. The self-assessment report however, gave insufficient emphasis to functional skills, which makes up a substantial proportion of this subject area, when making its judgments about the provision.

### **What does Central Bedfordshire College need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the success rates on intermediate level programmes by ensuring teachers plan lessons effectively to challenge all learners in mixed ability groups, in particular those capable of achieving an intermediate level qualification.
- Improve the progress of learners of all ability by ensuring that teachers use learners' initial and diagnostic assessment information effectively in planning lessons to provide challenge.
- Strengthen and better promote the college's central strategy for functional skills and literacy and numeracy to ensure it aligns more closely to the college's revised model.
- Provide teachers with appropriate guidance and documentation for the planning of learning and monitoring learners' progress including ensuring individual targets are precise and meaningful.

## Information about the inspection

34. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's vice principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, 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.
35. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from across a range of subject areas the college offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Central Bedfordshire 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 <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>					
Full-time learners	2,068	170	1,134	665	99
Part-time learners	1,204	0	86	1,118	0
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	3				
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
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?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>3</b>				
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3				
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				
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>				
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>	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	4				
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?	3				
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?	3				

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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