

Stafford College

Inspection report

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. Stafford College is a large college serving the town and a large part of mid and south Staffordshire, with one main and two smaller sites in the town centre. The college offers work-based, vocational and general education courses from foundation to higher education levels across all 15 subject areas funded by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency. The college is a member of the Stafford Collegiate, a partnership with local secondary schools, which offers GCE A, and AS level courses. The majority of learners are aged 16 to 18, and study full-time. Most adult learners study on a part time basis. Male and female learners are equally represented in the learner population with a slightly greater proportion of adult males than females. The percentage of learners from minority ethnic groups at 11% is higher than the percentage within the local catchment area at 5%. Some 20% of learners declared a learning difficulty or disability in 2010/11. The proportion of pupils aged 16 who achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C including English and mathematics in Staffordshire is slightly above the national average.
2. At the college's previous inspection in November 2009, outcomes for learners were satisfactory and all other aspects good, including equality of opportunity and safeguarding. The four subject areas which were inspected, health, care and early years; engineering and manufacturing technologies; sport, leisure and recreation and visual arts, were all graded as good. The college's mission is to 'meet learner needs and aspirations through excellence in performance and successful partnerships'.
3. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Francesco's (hairdressing)
 - LAW Training (sport)
 - CCEL (storage and warehousing)

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11 |
|--|--|
| Provision for young learners: 14 to16 Further education (16 to18) Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment | 230 part-time learners 2,667 full-time learners 559 part-time learners 54 full-time learners 29 part-time learners |
| Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+) | 506 full time learners 1,803 part time learners |
| Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships | 226 learners 441 apprentices |

Summary report

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

| Overall effectiveness of provision | | Grade 4 |
|------------------------------------|--|---------|
| Capacity to improve | | Grade 4 |
| | | Grade |
| Outcomes for learners | | 4 |
| Quality of provision | | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | 4 |
| Safeguarding | | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | | 3 |
| Subject Areas | | Grade |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | | 2 |
| Foundations for learning and life | | 4 |
| Business administration and law | | 3 |

Overall effectiveness

- Overall effectiveness is inadequate. Success rates have declined since the previous inspection and are low, particularly for learners on advanced courses. Learners on AS-level courses have very low success rates and only half of those who complete progress to A levels. Nearly a third of those starting two-year advanced vocational courses do not complete the programme. The college is beginning to resolve the low retention; in-year data shows some improvement. Most learners make satisfactory progress and their progression within the college is good. Progression to both higher education and employment are satisfactory. Learners aged 14 to 16 succeed well and success rates for apprenticeships are satisfactory. Success rates for functional skills are very low.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. However, too many lessons are uninspiring and fail to challenge or stretch learners. Less effective lessons have insufficient planning, are over reliant on teachers and do not engage and encourage learners. Practical vocational sessions are mostly well taught and reflect industry standards. Assessment is generally good and additional support is satisfactory. The college offers a wide range of courses, which is improved by carefully chosen strategic partnerships. Support for learners is satisfactory. Tutorials cover a good range of topics and are well supported by good materials.

6. Leadership and management are inadequate. Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient action to remedy the decline in success rates. They have not applied quality assurance arrangements consistently across all provision to ensure improvement. This is particularly so for AS and A-level provision where the college's quality improvement arrangements within the collegiate have not halted the decline in AS-level success rates. Self-assessment processes are inclusive but fail to give sufficient weight to success rates in grading, and plans to resolve issues lack urgency. Safeguarding is good. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory and the college analyses the performance of different groups appropriately. However, the college has not identified or addressed the lower success rates of males on advanced courses.

Main findings

- Success rates on advanced courses are low, particularly on AS level courses, and only half of these learners progress to A-level provision. The college is beginning to remedy low retention and in-year rates have increased. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes are at a satisfactory level.
- Most learners make satisfactory progress. They progress well between most levels within the college, and the majority of learners on advanced level programmes progress to higher education or employment.
- The college offers a safe environment where learners develop the skills and confidence to contribute well to the college and wider community. Vocational courses help learners develop skills that equip them effectively for employment.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers know their subjects well but the quality of lessons across the college varies too much. Inspectors found good teaching and learning in over half the lessons observed but too much that was satisfactory and did not challenge learners enough to reach their full potential. The assessment of learners' work is generally good.
- Additional learning support is satisfactory. The college gathers extensive information about its learners' needs and some staff use this well to plan lessons. Specialist support for learners with dyslexia and physical support needs is good. Not all learners receive tuition and help with literacy, numeracy and functional skills to support them in their studies. Changes are taking place to resolve this problem.
- Staff have access to very good training opportunities to improve teaching and learning and managers observe lessons to identify areas for development. However, some observations focus too much on teaching activity rather than the extent of learners' understanding and learning.
- Staff inform learners appropriately about the content of their courses and progression opportunities when they join the college and a high proportion progress to further study or employment on completion. New arrangements to support those at risk of falling behind or leaving early are beginning to have a positive impact on retention.
- Learners value the tutorial system, which effectively raises their awareness of personal safety, equality and diversity and healthy living. Learners frequently review their performance with tutors. Target setting is developing well across

the college, but is less effective in a few areas and weak for a minority of apprentices.

- Partnerships with schools, other learning providers and employers provide learners with a wide choice of complementary programmes. Good opportunities for pupils aged 14 to 16 result in high success rates and a high proportion starting full-time courses at the college.
- The college's development plan is insufficiently rigorous. It includes appropriate targets for a few aspects of provision such as recruitment and financial performance. It does not have targets for success for the college as a whole and does not include an action plan to manage and measure progress towards meeting targets. The monitoring of in-year learner retention is insufficient. Not all learners who should take functional skills qualifications do so.
- The college's financial management and position are strong, enabling it to develop its accommodation without external assistance. Learning resources are good. Staff development and performance review have an appropriate focus. Nevertheless, these processes have not managed to raise the low success rates, or improve the quality of much of the teaching above satisfactory.
- The promotion of safeguarding is strong. Arrangements for equality and diversity are appropriate and their promotion is satisfactory. The college analyses the performance of different groups but has not identified some significant gaps in performance, particularly by gender. Engagement with learners is a strong feature and leads to improvement.
- The accuracy and effectiveness of self-assessment reports at subject and college level is variable. Employers' involvement in work-based learning self-assessment is insufficient. Targets for outcomes at course level are challenging, but those to resolve underperformance at college level are insufficiently extensive or demanding. Quality improvement has insufficient impact on outcomes or teaching. Quality assurance for the A-level provision in the collegiate is insufficiently rigorous.

What does Stafford College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of the provision and raise success rates by ensuring self-assessment reports are sufficiently comprehensive and the college's development plan includes challenging targets for more than just retention and pass rates.
- Ensure that the observation of teaching and learning identifies clearly areas for improvement and links closely to targeted and effective staff development to increase the proportion of good or better teaching.
- Monitor carefully the effectiveness of changes taking place to improve the provision of literacy and numeracy support to increase learners' employment prospects.
- Extend the monitoring of and support for the collegiate to ensure that the wide range of courses offered is of a high standard and results in good outcomes.
- Ensure that guidance, support and target setting supports all learners in choosing the right course of study, completing it, and realising their full potential.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the support available
- helpful teachers
- good library facilities
- the practical approach to learning
- the broad range of courses offered
- the opportunity to earn and learn
- frequent visits from assessors.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the quality of some computer and laptop equipment
- the information on English and maths assessment and functional skills.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- positive and honest responses to their needs
- the range of programmes including the development of appropriate foundation degrees for staff development
- flexible arrangements for assessment.

What employers would like to see improved:

- no improvements suggested.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

7. Quality improvement processes, including self-assessment, professional development and the performance review of staff are comprehensive. However, self-assessment reports are of variable quality and effectiveness. Challenging targets are set at course level. However, the targets at college level for learners' performance and the quality of teaching are not comprehensive enough, nor are they sufficiently challenging. Senior managers do not monitor the trends in some key performance indicators, such as in-year retention, sufficiently closely. Success rates are low and the quality of teaching and learning has declined since the previous inspection. Observations of teaching and learning are inconsistent in the way judgements are linked to the progress learners make in lessons. Quality assurance of the college's provision in the collegiate has not been effective in raising the low success rates for the GCE provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 4

8. Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Success rates for the substantial proportion of learners on advanced courses are low and well below national averages. In 2010/11, 72.1% of all learners who started long qualifications completed them successfully. Vocational courses account for the majority of advanced programmes; most are two-year programmes. Success rates are low with only two-thirds of learners completing successfully. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on both AS and A-level programmes have declined over the past three years and are very low. Learners aged 16 to 18 achieve adequately at foundation and intermediate level, but success rates for adults on foundation programmes are very low. Both retention and pass rates are below national averages. Retention rates are consistently below achievement rates at every level and are six percentage points below the national average on long courses. The college is tackling low retention, and in-year data shows some improvement. Success rates in functional skills are inadequate.
9. The proportion of learners on A-level courses achieving high grades is low, and has declined over the past three years. The proportion achieving high grades on AS level courses has increased over the past three years but remains slightly below the national average. Learners undertaking vocational courses achieve a higher proportion of high grades than the average. Learners generally make the progress expected given their prior attainment, apart from at A-level where they achieve less well than expected.
10. Female learners mostly achieve higher success rates than males, particularly at advanced level where the gap has widened to eight percentage points. Most groups of learners achieve in line with the college average although some minor exceptions exist. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are high and two-thirds progress to college courses. Each year nearly three-quarters of learners within the college progress to a higher level programme. Progression to higher

education from advanced courses is satisfactory. However, the number of learners progressing from AS to A-level is very low. Attendance is satisfactory overall, but attendance in the lessons observed during inspection was low.

11. Overall success rates for work-based learning are at a satisfactory level and are currently around the national average. The numbers completing by their target end dates are slightly above the average. Success rates for business administration apprentices are very high. Apprentices develop useful skills and knowledge to perform their jobs more effectively. They also develop good social skills and increase their economic potential. The college's vocational programmes help learners develop good employability skills. Progression to relevant employment is high on a minority of programmes, such as hairdressing.
12. Learners feel safe. The college carries out thorough risk assessments in classes and the workplace and health and safety was well promoted in some classes. Tutorials cover internet safety and anti-bullying well. Learners are also involved in contributing to a safer environment. They participate in, and benefit from, the college's promotion of a wide range of health initiatives. They contribute well to both the college and wider community. A minority of courses have good links with community organisations to benefit both learners and local people. Learners engage in a wide range of fund raising initiatives and organise events around cultural diversity and sustainability.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge but the quality of lessons across the college is too inconsistent. Inspectors found good teaching and learning in just over half the lessons they observed. Very few lessons are inadequate, but too many lessons are satisfactory and do not enable learners to achieve their full potential. The better lessons make good use of recap and warm-up activities to ensure learners are interested and well motivated from the start. They are characterised by activities and resources that are well planned to sustain interest and support learning. Practical activities use best practice from industry in vocational areas, and topical and relevant examples help learners in developing their theoretical knowledge.
14. In less effective lessons teachers do not plan sufficiently to meet the needs of individuals. As a result, a minority of learners lose interest or are not sufficiently challenged by the work. Other less successful aspects include lessons where the teacher spends too much time describing and explaining to learners without checking their understanding. In these classes, learners are passive, make little contribution and carry out the minimum work required.
15. Staff use information technology increasingly well to support learning within lessons and through the college's virtual learning environment (VLE). In a sports coaching lesson, learners made good use of technology to record their roleplay activities, enabling them to assess their own and peer performance. Learners appreciate being able to access learning materials and submit

assignments via the VLE, though this is more developed in some subjects than others.

16. The monitoring of teaching and learning links well to extensive staff development opportunities. These are being improved in the current year by an exchange programme for teachers. The core team of observers has a clear understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning. However, a wider range of staff carry out observations and inspectors found inconsistencies in the evidence they used to make judgements. In minority of cases, there was insufficient recording of the learning taking place to explain the grade awarded.
17. The provision of additional learning support is satisfactory. The college gathers extensive information on the needs of individual learners and all classes have well-documented group profiles. However, only a minority of teachers across the college use these very well in planning lessons. The deployment of in-class learning support workers is mostly effective. All foundation and intermediate courses have a support worker in the early weeks of the course to further assess needs. Specialist support for learners with dyslexia and physical disabilities is good. However, support for literacy and numeracy is not as well developed. The college is resolving this by changes to functional skills in the current year, and plans to improve the effectiveness of GCSE English and mathematics resit courses. The college also provides drop in sessions for additional support.
18. Assessment practices are generally good. Extensive staff training has taken place to resolve issues in the quality of feedback to learners and inspectors found mostly good practice. Internal verification is strong. Assessment for work-based learning is generally good.
19. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners and local employers is satisfactory. It offers a broad range of courses and clear progression routes that enable learners to study at an appropriate level and subsequently to take further qualifications. The curriculum meets Stafford's local and regional priorities effectively. The addition of a January start for a few courses provides good opportunities for those not in education, employment or training to access the college. The college responds well to employers' needs through a range of apprenticeships and specialist programmes. The range of courses for pupils aged 14 to 16 is good. Learners value the well-developed vocational enrichment although a minority of vocational courses do not offer learners the opportunity to gain work experience.
20. Partnership arrangements are good and contribute well to the development of learners' personal and economic well-being. The collegiate arrangements and links with local schools provide learners with a wide choice of study. However, the college does not adequately ensure that the quality of provision meets learners' needs. Partnership arrangements with other learning providers ensure that learners have access to a wide range of complementary provision without creating unnecessary competition. Collaboration with the local health trust, drama groups, and emergency services provides a range of health education and personal development for learners. Foundation learners benefit well from

effective partnerships with a wide range of support agencies, charities and other relevant organisations.

21. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Comprehensive arrangements including open evenings, taster days, interviews and transition arrangements help learners to make informed choices when they join the college, although not all prospective learners have access to taster days. The recently introduced 'stay-days' aimed at identifying learners falling behind or at risk of leaving early are beginning to have a positive impact on retention. Collaboration with a range of external agencies supports vulnerable learners who may not otherwise be able to continue their education. Appropriately themed group tutorials, supported by a range of good quality learning resources and activities, effectively raise learners' awareness of personal safety, equality and diversity, and healthy lifestyles. Most tutors effectively use the frequent individual tutorials to discuss learners' progress, update their individual learning plan and agree improvement targets. Learners speak highly of the support they receive from their personal tutors. Progress reviews and target setting for apprentices are weak in a minority of areas. Careers guidance is effective as is support for those applying for university.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

22. The college has an appropriate mission and a development plan that is set in the context of local, regional and national priorities. It sets clear targets for a minority of aspects of provision such as recruitment and financial performance and to resolve current underperformance in learners' outcomes. However, it does not set targets for success, retention and pass rates for the college as a whole and does not include an action plan with clear time-frames, targets and responsibilities by which leaders and managers can manage and measure progress. Senior management team meetings do not monitor consistently in-year retention for the college. At course level, challenging success rate targets are set and staff use them to measure performance. The college is not implementing fully the national priority to provide functional skills qualifications.
23. Governance is satisfactory. Governors play an appropriate part in establishing the college's strategic direction and they monitor the college's performance adequately, including the progress of underperforming courses. An appropriate range of reports keeps them informed of college performance and national and regional issues. Governors provide an appropriate level of challenge and possess a good range of experience which they improve by effective use of co-opted members and external advice. Nevertheless, they have not been effective in ensuring success rates increase from their current low level.
24. The promotion of safeguarding and health and safety is strong. The college gives a high priority to safeguarding with the principal as the designated safeguarding lead. Staff receive appropriate induction and training and the college meets legislative requirements. Learners receive advice and guidance through induction and the pastoral programme which includes a safeguarding week in which drama productions and other activities take place. Learners have a good awareness of safeguarding issues and what actions to take if necessary.

Although all learners have to carry college identification, they do not have to display it openly. The use of wall and other displays to promote safeguarding is good.

25. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Equality and diversity feature strongly in staff and learners' induction and in the pastoral programme. Professional development receives high priority and staff receive appropriate training. Central college events promote equality and diversity well, including an annual diversity day, black history month and an international women's day. Learners' views are analysed by different groups and performance data is analysed for gaps in achievement. However, some significant underperformance is missed, for example the widening achievement gap between males and females aged 16 to 18 on advanced programmes. The college has noted the underperformance of some minority ethnic groups and is collecting detailed evidence of the underlying causes.
26. User engagement is a strong feature of college work. Learners attend course team meetings, and meet as groups at faculty level, with selected representatives attending the learner voice council. An annual learner voice conference is well managed and well attended and is highly regarded by learners. The college keeps learners well informed about actions taken to resolve issues they have identified. The college supports student governors well in their role as members of corporation and college committees. Learners participate in the recruitment of staff. Employers' surveys take place twice a year, with managers and staff following up issues. However, work-based learning employers are not involved sufficiently in the self-assessment of the provision.
27. Self-assessment involves all staff well and is informed by a wide range of evidence. Course level success rates are compared with national averages and targets at this level are appropriately challenging. At higher levels of aggregation, retention and pass rates are compared with overall college performance rather than national rates, thereby providing insufficient challenge and resulting in the overly optimistic grading of outcomes. The self-assessment report does not analyse the trends in success rates with sufficient rigour. The college has appropriate moderation procedures at each level. Annual course reports and self-assessment reports result in quality improvement plans which are refreshed as new evidence becomes available. Leaders and managers monitor the implementation of these plans closely. However, the quality of self-assessment reports remains variable. They contain a wealth of detail and information but the evaluation of important aspects is poor. Some targets for these key areas do not provide enough challenge, resulting in an insufficiently strong steer to improve provision. Faculty reports do not evaluate the quality of teaching and learning sufficiently. Underperforming courses are now subject to close monitoring and additional support processes which are having a positive impact on retention. Quality assurance arrangements for the college's funded work in the collegiate have not been sufficiently robust to prevent the AS success rate, in particular, dropping to a very low level in 2010/11.

28. The college's financial management and control and risk management are comprehensive and thorough and its financial position is strong. Business planning and management at faculty level is good. The college is financing a substantial new-build programme without grant aid. However, with inadequate outcomes for learners and satisfactory quality of provision, value for money is only satisfactory.

Subject areas

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

29. The college offers full and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and nail services from foundation to advanced level. Some 374 learners attend courses of which about 106 are adults. The vast majority are on full-time programmes. Four pupils from local schools are enrolled on programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates have declined on intermediate programmes over the past three years, but strategies to remedy this are beginning to have an impact. The success rate on intermediate hairdressing is now well above national average and retention on intermediate beauty therapy has increased markedly. Success rates on other programmes are around the national average. Some 80% of learners with additional learning needs achieved their learning aims in 2010/11.
- Careful monitoring of progress and good target setting through individual tutorials ensure that most learners make at least satisfactory progress and a minority make particularly good progress by completing their qualification before their planned end dates. Very effective scheduling of assessment helps ensure the timely completion of units.
- Learners develop good vocational and employability skills including teamwork, communication and client care. Most foundation learners develop very good creative skills in nail art. Success in national and local hair and beauty skill competitions is good. However, teachers insufficiently develop learners' functional skills and learners are unaware of their often-successful application of these skills.
- Progression to further study and employment is good. Some 73% of learners progress from intermediate level to advanced level. From advanced level, 70% progress to industry-related employment, many to well-known employers. A small number of learners progress to higher education programmes, which supports the much needed management expertise in the hair and beauty sector.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' planning meets the needs of individual learners well. Their questioning techniques develop learners' higher level thinking skills and they make good use of information and learning technologies. Teachers devise assignments so learners can access information from their mobile devices. In a few lessons teaching is uninspiring and an over reliance on the completion of paper-based workbooks.
- The college offers a broad and flexible range of programmes. Learners can study from foundation level to higher education. Learners can combine subjects to broaden their skills and employment prospects. Enrichment is very good and wide ranging. Learners are able to participate in, experience, and practice hair and beauty skills and techniques that are useful for future employment.

- The college has a beneficial partnership arrangement with a well-known national hairdressing organisation. The partnership is complementary, not competitive. Both parties profit from each other's discrete area of expertise. The college has effective relationships with good local spas that employ a high proportion of beauty therapy leavers. Partnerships with small local employers are undeveloped and too few learners benefit from work experience.
- Learners receive good care, guidance and support. A wide range of good initiatives enables learners to flourish. Valuable support is available through summer schools and additional teaching and assessment sessions. Individual tutorials provide particularly good and focused support. Initial assessment and guidance is good. Learners are very clear about what steps they need to take to improve career progression.
- Leadership and management are good. A strong and enthusiastic team of staff supports committed managers who continuously promote high standards. Managers set challenging targets for improvements based on negotiated agreement of achievable outcomes. Managers and staff have clear action plans for improvement. Frequent team meetings include analysis of progress towards quality improvements through the close monitoring of courses.
- Staff undertake a wide range of training in equality and diversity. Learners celebrate diversity through hair and beauty treatments. Teachers develop learning materials that reflect the rich and diverse range of clients that attend the training salons. However, the reinforcement of equality and diversity through the curriculum is not sufficient. A few staff are unsure on how to promote and emphasise equality and diversity in lessons.
- Self-assessment is good. Teaching staff make valuable contributions to the self-assessment process through individual programme reviews. Managers make effective use of improvement plans to promote improvements. However, the strengths and areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report are insufficiently detailed.
- Learners respect and benefit from the well-maintained, good and commercial standard accommodation and resources. A successful employer partnership influences the design and running of the salons. Particularly effective procurement ensures that the equipment purchased by learners is good value. Salons use high standard commercial products, which are sustainable through profits made from clients' visits.

What does Stafford College need to do to improve further?

- Refine the existing strategies for close course monitoring so that further increases in success, retention and pass rates across all programmes can take place.
- Improve the English and mathematic skills of learners in lessons so that they improve their career choices and employment prospects.
- Extend strong links with all employers and develop a well-structured work experience programme so that learners further develop a professional work ethic.

Foundations for learning and life

Grade 4

Context

30. The college has 836 learners aged 16 to 18 and adults on foundations for learning and life courses from foundation to intermediate level. Some 510 study functional and basic skills programmes along side their main full-time course and 208 are on stand-alone courses. The college has 94 full-time and 64 part-time learners on courses for those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. An additional seven pupils aged 14 to 16 follow courses in literacy or numeracy as part of their Key Stage 4 programme at school.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Successes rates for functional skills are low and well below national averages. Mathematics at entry level 3 is particularly poor. Success rates in literacy and numeracy are low and foundation level success rates are low on several vocational programmes. Most success rates have declined since the previous inspection. In-year retention on many foundation programmes is improving but attendance is low.
- Functional skills learners make inadequate progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Learners on foundation programmes make satisfactory progress. Learners develop confidence and independence skills and they make reasonable progress from their starting points. They take pride in their work and improve the quality of written tasks over time. Feedback to learners is satisfactory in foundation learning and functional skills provision.
- Learners feel safe at college and induction is satisfactory. Learners understand the need to maintain a safe workplace and respect each other's views and opinions. Foundation learners make a positive contribution to their community by raising money for charity and working with other learners on community campaigns.
- Too much teaching and learning in functional skills is satisfactory. Lessons are insufficiently challenging, lack variety and checks on learning are infrequent. Teachers do not use targeted questions to test learners' understanding. The pace of learning is too slow in some functional skills lessons and teachers do not use additional activities to stretch learners. Detailed group profiles cover the individual needs of foundation level learners appropriately. Learning resources are mostly good.
- The range of functional skills provision is inadequate to meet the needs of all learners. Not all vocational areas promote functional skills. Foundation learners have good opportunities to practice their skills in a vocational context. Work experience in a wide range of areas includes college-based placements to build confidence and skills. Some learners have successfully gained employment and others have progressed to supported employment schemes.
- Foundation learning programmes have good partnerships that widen participation within the community and meet the needs of vulnerable groups. The range includes care homes, charity groups, homeless people and young offenders.

- Guidance and support are satisfactory. The majority of planning documents identify the individual needs of learners and provide details for support requirements. Individual learning plans are broadly satisfactory and managers are aware of areas for improvement. However, the targeting of support to best meet the individual needs of all learners is not always adequate.
- Leadership and management are inadequate. Success rates have declined considerably over the past three years. A new management structure is in place with functional skills centrally managed and coordinated by subject specialists. Managers have implemented a range of quality improvement strategies including close course monitoring, intensive learning weeks and additional learning sessions, but it is too early to judge the overall impact of the changes.
- Safeguarding is good and staff promote it well with posters and displays in classrooms and public areas of the college. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. However, managers were not aware of the gap in success rates between male and female learners.
- Staff are fully involved in self-assessment and judgements are broadly accurate. However, the majority of targets in the functional skills quality improvement plan lack detail and timescales. Staff share resources well to improve their professional practice.

What does Stafford College need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates on all programmes by closely monitoring provision at all levels of learning. Use data more frequently to carry out in-year checks to improve success rates. Further develop the use of data to monitor progress at a faculty level.
- Increase participation levels in mathematics and English functional skills within all subjects by promoting and extending opportunities for learning to all full-time learners. Develop a strategy in functional skills that clearly defines the standard to which the college aspires, and which meets national criteria.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers provide learning to agreed standards and specifically resolve areas for improvement through the regular development of staff. Share good practice between teams across the college.
- Ensure that targets in the functional skills quality improvement plan are evaluative and detailed with clear timescales and responsibilities so that staff are aware of their contribution to improving the quality of provision.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

31. The college offers full and part-time courses in business, accounting, administration and law. Of the 396 learners, 226 are aged 16 to 18 and the remainder are adults. Some 214 learners follow full-time courses and 182 are on part-time courses. In total, three learners are studying at foundation level, 103 at intermediate level and 245 at advanced level.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. Success rates are low on the majority of courses because of low retention, particularly for male learners. Achievement overall is good and the success rate for intermediate level administration learners was high in 2010/11. Retention so far this year has improved for many courses although AS Law remains poor.
- Most learners are progressing well with most achieving their intended, or higher, grades. The progress made by A-level law learners is insufficient. The standard of learners' work is mostly good. However, the development of their English and maths skills is poor. Learners have a good range and standard of business skills and they confidently use appropriate terminology and workplace behaviour.
- Learners feel safe and they link health and safety theory and practice well. Learners engage in charitable activities linked to entrepreneurial work, which benefits a national charity chosen by the learners.
- Teaching and learning are mostly good. Learners are keen and motivated and work well in lessons. Teachers use very effective revision techniques with learners who regularly use the college's VLE. Teaching and learning benefit from good quality resources. Learners who are more able are not sufficiently challenged in lessons. Teachers are experienced and have strong professional backgrounds.
- Assessment is very good with staff providing prompt, clear and constructive feedback to learners. Teachers use a good variety of assessment methods that enable learners to demonstrate their newly-acquired skills and knowledge in ways appropriate to them. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities for the assessment of functional skills and speaking and listening within the lessons.
- Progression by learners from one level to another and, in particular, from intermediate level into employment is good. Sufficient courses exist at the right levels to provide routes for learners to progress within the college and then into higher education. Communication with the work-based learning team is weak and the promotion of apprenticeships as a progression route for full-time learners is under-developed.
- Links with businesses are under-developed for the full-time provision, but work experience for intermediate level administration learners is effective. The college's higher education programmes have good links with businesses, but their use to improve the experiences of further education learners does not take

place. The college has good systems to keep parents and carers informed and involved in the progress of learners.

- Support for learners is satisfactory. Initial advice and guidance for a minority of AS level law learners are ineffective. Vocational learners experiencing difficulties receive good support from their teachers. Teachers set learners useful learning targets, which they record well on the electronic individual learning plan.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers provide effective direction to staff and create a strong team ethos. Actions to remedy retention issues in business have been effective. Internal verification is robust. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and team meetings are frequent and informative.
- Staff participate in, and benefit from the extensive professional development opportunities offered, including external professional up-dating. Appraisals are effective and informed by the internal observation results and action planning process. Learners across full and part-time courses have opportunities to share their views and their feedback staff use well to inform changes to the provision.
- The promotion of safeguarding and equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff are confident in their approach to these subjects and learners are clear on the procedures to follow. However, the analysis of the performance of different groups of learners is weak.
- Self-assessment includes all staff and is mostly accurate. However, managers have not always identified, and acted upon, issues related to performance data and the self-assessment report pays insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and learning.

What does Stafford College need to do to improve further?

- Improve retention on all courses by ensuring that learners are fully aware of the commitment and attendance required and managers and staff closely monitor in-year data.
- Develop an individualised approach to the implementation of functional skills for all intermediate level learners so that they will be equipped with the competencies they need to progress into employment or further education and training.
- Develop closer links with businesses to promote work placements more effectively and increase the involvement of businesses in the curriculum so that learners are better equipped for employment. Ensure that apprenticeships are recognised as progression routes for learners.
- Improve the co-ordination and communication between the full-time and the central work-based learning teams to ensure the implementation of a cohesive curriculum planning strategy.

Information about the inspection

32. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the college'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 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.
33. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Stafford 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 | 14-16 | 16-18 Learner responsive | 19+ Learner responsive | Employer responsive |
|--|----------|------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | | | | | |
| Full-time learners | 3,431 | 9 | 2,470 | 529 | 423 |
| Part-time learners | 2,538 | 231 | 616 | 1,691 | 0 |
| Overall effectiveness | 4 | n/a | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Capacity to improve | 4 | | | | |
| Outcomes for learners | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 4 | | | | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 4 | | | | |
| 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> | 2 | | | | |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | 2 | | | | |
| Quality of provision | 3 | n/a | 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? | 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 | | | | |
| Leadership and management | 4 | n/a | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 4 | | | | |
| <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? | 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? | 4 | | | | |
| 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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