

Central College Nottingham

General further education college

Inspection dates

19–22 January 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Managers have developed a range of programmes that is very well matched to regional and national priorities.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved and is now good across all locations and programme types.
- Current learners and apprentices make good progress in developing the skills and knowledge they need to progress in education and employment.
- The college has a very welcoming culture in which British values are promoted well.
- Staff provide a broad range of additional activities that help expand the horizons of learners and apprentices and develop their personal and social skills.
- Suitably qualified and experienced governors hold leaders and managers successfully to account.
- Safeguarding practice is exemplary.
- Staff provide a wide range of support that helps learners and apprentices overcome any difficulties they may have.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- The proportion of learners and apprentices who complete their programmes successfully is not yet high enough.
- A small minority of teachers do not plan sufficiently to meet the differing needs of all learners, including the more able.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not yet good enough in a minority of English and mathematics lessons.
- Learners' attendance, although rising, is not yet high enough.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Central College Nottingham is a large general further education college with 10 sites in the Nottingham area. The college provides a wide range of courses including apprenticeships, study programmes and adult learning programmes. Apprentices and learners attending courses with subcontractors come from all parts of the country. Around 37% of college learners are from minority ethnic groups, compared to 28% of the local population as a whole.
- The proportion of young people leaving schools in Nottingham with at least five GCSEs at grade A* to C, including English and mathematics, is much lower than the national average. Educational levels of the population as a whole are slightly lower than for the nation as a whole. Unemployment is higher than the national rate and fewer individuals are employed in managerial and technical roles than in other parts of the country.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Managers should use a broad range of methods to increase the proportion of learners and apprentices who remain on their programmes and achieve their qualifications successfully. These methods may include:
 - Further strengthening initial recruitment and course progression processes to ensure that only those learners with a realistic chance of benefiting from programmes are enrolled on them.
 - Continuing to develop processes to support those learners and apprentices identified as being at risk of dropping out.
 - Improving the quality of teaching to eliminate the small minority of lessons where the individual needs of learners and apprentices are not fully met.
- Continue to improve the quality of English and mathematics lessons through continuing professional development for teachers and effective performance management, so that the remaining small amount of poor practice is eliminated.
- Strengthen attendance monitoring so that dips in learners' attendance are identified immediately and interventions, particularly in English and mathematics, are successful in ensuring that more learners complete their course successfully.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers have tackled all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and have improved the vast majority successfully. They have secured significant improvements in apprenticeship programmes and in aspects of underperformance across a range of subjects.
- Leaders place a very strong focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment. Managers make good use of lesson observations, and successfully assess quality and identify the strengths and areas for development of individual teachers. Teaching and learning coaches provide support to colleagues through training and development and this leads to teaching that is good. Teachers and assessors are able to access a very broad range of helpful professional development materials through a variety of media. Developments such as an assessor network have facilitated the sharing of good practice, which is now much improved.
- Management of staff performance is good. A thorough system of appraising individual performance, linked to college targets, means that staff understand the contribution they make to the college's overall success. Managers provide good support for their staff, ensuring that teachers access appropriate training and development opportunities and this leads to improvements in teaching practice. However, they do not shy away from making difficult decisions in relation to performance.
- Managers have developed a curriculum that is very well matched to local labour market demands and caters successfully for learners aged 16 to 18, adults, learners with high needs, and apprentices. Managers have made very effective use of information from a variety of sources, including the Local Enterprise Partnership, to identify priority skills for the local area. Managers map learning provision carefully against local need and work very positively and constructively with a large number of partners to develop the curriculum. This has led to changes in provision in such subjects as construction, engineering, motor vehicle, logistics and transport, to the benefit of learners and apprentices.
- Managers have carefully increased the numbers of apprentices and adult learners while at the same time ensuring that the quality of these programmes is not compromised. Thorough, robust and comprehensive contract management arrangements are at the heart of this steady growth. As a consequence, the proportion of learners and apprentices who complete their programme successfully is rising.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have prioritised the provision of good careers information, advice and guidance by introducing dedicated progression advisers who ensure all learners receive highly effective individual support. The result is that the vast majority of learners and apprentices progress to positive destinations including further study, employment and higher education.
- The self-assessment process is thorough, comprehensive and inclusive of all partners. This has allowed leaders and managers to identify areas for improvement accurately and implement the associated action plans that result in improved quality. Comprehensive and frequent departmental reviews provide helpful opportunities to share good practice and allow managers to effectively identify and address performance shortfalls.
- An overall culture of respect and tolerance permeates the college. Managers and staff take every opportunity to celebrate diversity. Consequently, learners display a good understanding of different faiths and cultures and are highly respectful of each other. Learners with disabilities are helped to participate fully in all college activities.
- Leaders and managers have made slow progress in improving the small pockets of uninspiring teaching and in making sure that more-able learners become increasingly independent and gain the grades of which they are capable. Although they have made substantial progress, they have yet to ensure that English and mathematics teaching is consistently good.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance arrangements are strong and governors frequently and successfully hold leaders and managers to account, for example in relation to safeguarding matters, performance issues and progress against targets.
 - Sound stewardship by governors and strong financial control ensure that the financial health of the college continues to improve, and that leaders and managers have sufficient resources to ensure the sustainability of improvements.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Safeguarding practice is exemplary. Staff identify the more vulnerable learners early and individual support is ongoing and effective. When incidents do occur, staff investigate them promptly and take appropriate actions, including multi-agency interventions, to ensure that learners are well protected and remain safe.

- All staff are recruited and vetted suitably, and the central register is accurate and up to date.
- Staff promote British values frequently and, as a result, learners develop a good awareness of the dangers posed by extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Teaching, learning and assessment are now good across all provision types, in classrooms and the workplace and in direct and subcontracted delivery. The large majority of sessions are well planned. Teachers and assessors use their knowledge and experience very well to stimulate learners' interest in topics, and make sure activities help learners and apprentices of all abilities to make good progress. Teachers plan sessions particularly well for learners with high needs, taking account of a range of factors including individuals' interests, prior attainment and support needs.
- Teachers have high expectations of learners and apprentices and this encourages them to aim high and produce work of a good standard. Learners and apprentices work very well on practical activities, developing their skills to the level demanded by employers. For example, in hospitality and catering, learners work at prestigious venues and provide a service to a wide array of clients, including international sportsmen, and this inspires them to work hard to perfect their skills.
- College staff provide wide-ranging and highly effective support for learners and apprentices. They use suitable processes to test for and identify additional learning needs and ensure that helpful support arrangements are quickly implemented as required. Support staff have high levels of expertise in different areas, such as sight and hearing impairment, and work well with subject teachers to ensure that lessons and activities are inclusive. Staff and learners together review the benefits of their support and adapt it as necessary. Specialist staff provide outstanding support for high-needs learners. Learner achievement coaches, who are based in subject areas, work successfully with learners and apprentices at risk of not completing their studies, helping most to stay on track.
- Teachers and assessors work hard to motivate learners and apprentices and to help them understand the expectations employers have in relation to behaviour and attitudes in the workplace. Consequently, learners and apprentices have very positive attitudes to learning and are prepared well for progression into work.
- Assessment is frequent and thorough. Learners and apprentices are clear about the progress they are making. Teachers and assessors provide good oral feedback to learners and apprentices that helps them to improve their work. Learners and apprentices find the large majority of written feedback helpful but in a small minority of cases staff provide written feedback that is too brief and not specific enough to aid progress.
- Vocational staff have worked hard to ensure that they promote the development of learners' and apprentices' English and mathematics skills. In a sports lesson, for example, learners worked out appropriate timing ratios for exercise and rest segments of training programmes and checked each other's work for spelling and grammar. In other courses, learners use more varied techniques and extended vocabulary in their writing, and use scanning skills, learned in English lessons, where there is a large amount of reading required. Learners can articulate well the progress they have made in improving their skills. English and mathematics teaching practice is not, however, uniformly good and a few teachers do not focus sufficiently on developing apprentices' writing skills.
- English and mathematics lessons vary too much in quality and too many lessons are weak. In mathematics lessons, for example, teachers fail to appropriately identify and correct learners' errors to support their progress.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers and trainers do not plan lessons well, and do not pitch them at the right level. In these lessons teachers and trainers set work that is at too low a level for the more able, or activities that are too challenging for the less able. Consequently learners and apprentices make slow progress in these sessions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

- Learners and apprentices are ambitious, want to succeed and are proud of their achievements. They are growing in confidence and are able to describe in detail the progress they are making in developing their knowledge and understanding and the skills that will help them find work.
- Staff provide a broad range of approaches that help learners develop the skills and qualities that are valued by employers and are of benefit to the wider community. Good use is made of realistic work activities to develop learners' employability skills, including projects with the local community. A significant number of learners from different subject areas benefit from well-established overseas links.

For example, construction learners have gained certificates to work in the European Union and tourism learners have greater awareness of work ethics and practices from their involvement in a project in Gambia.

- Staff help learners to prepare well for gaining employment or applying for higher education. For example, learners take part in mock interviews with national companies, complete real application forms for creative enterprises scholarships and collate evidence of the work-related experiences they are carrying out. As a consequence, a high proportion of learners progress into employment or further their studies in higher education.
- Learners and apprentices have a clear view of what they want to do in their careers and the internal and external progression routes available to them. Learners make good use of the varied careers activities to explore and extend their understanding of future options.
- The college is a safe place to learn. At induction, learners gain a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly using social media. In lessons, teachers integrate well the themes of British values, and the central tutorial system helps learners to develop their understanding of the risks of extremism and radicalisation.
- Teachers and assessors help learners and apprentices to understand equality and diversity topics and to relate these themes to their life and work. Learners and apprentices apply this knowledge well. Learners throughout the college demonstrate high levels of mutual respect. They work well together, support each other, and behave very well in lessons, around the college and in the workplace.
- Learners' horizons, cultural awareness and understanding of their responsibilities as citizens are expanded through a very broad range of enrichment activities, some of which are instigated and led by the learners. For example, health and social care learners raised funds for a visit to a village in the Netherlands that specialises in the care of dementia sufferers, to help them learn from best practice.
- Attendance and punctuality across the college have improved and are satisfactory in the vast majority of sessions. However, attendance is low in a minority of English and mathematics lessons.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Current learners make good progress in developing the skills and knowledge they need to progress in education or employment. Apprentices develop good skills that they can immediately apply to their workplace and many develop high-level technical skills. Those learners with severe or complex disabilities or learning difficulties make particularly good progress given their starting points.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications has risen rapidly as a result of effective intervention by managers and is now higher than the national rate. The proportion that complete their framework within agreed timescales has also increased rapidly, is above the comparator national rate and for advanced apprentices is much higher.
- The proportion of learners who gain English and mathematics GCSE and functional skills qualifications successfully has increased and is now higher than the national rate. In GCSE English and mathematics, the proportion who gain A* to C grades is now above the low national rate. Learners with severe disabilities or learning difficulties are as successful as their peers in gaining English and mathematics qualifications.
- Learners, particularly adult learners and those with severe disabilities or learning difficulties, produce work of a high standard. Apprentices produce work that meets industry requirements and this prepares them well for their future employment. Learners with severe difficulties develop the skills they need to become more independent and play an active role in the community.
- The large majority of classroom-based learners progress to employment, apprenticeships or further study at either college or university. The vast majority of apprentices secure permanent employment at the end of their programme.
- Learners from the most vulnerable groups, such as looked-after children and those for whom there are safeguarding concerns, are cared for well and as a result they remain in learning and achieve qualifications at a similar rate to other learners.
- Data show few gaps in the attainment of specific groups of learners, such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Managers are aware of where gaps do exist and, in almost all cases, implement successful strategies to close them.
- The proportion of classroom-based learners who achieve their qualifications has risen slowly and for all qualification types and levels now matches the performance of other similar colleges. One reason for this improvement is that managers have strengthened recruitment practices to ensure that learners are enrolled on courses from which they can benefit fully.
- In a small minority of cases, teachers do not give more-able learners aged 16 to 19 and apprentices sufficiently challenging work for them to progress as rapidly as they might. As a result, not all learners gain the grades of which they are capable.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The college has 3,311 learners on study programmes in 13 subject areas. The largest areas are arts, media and publishing, engineering and manufacturing technologies, leisure, preparation for life and work, and travel and tourism.
- Teachers have high expectations and their teaching reflects industry standards. They plan lessons imaginatively and well, and in most lessons the pace of learning is appropriate. Teachers use their own experience well to help learners develop their skills and knowledge.
- The large majority of teachers successfully help their learners to develop English and mathematics skills. They use well-designed assignment briefs that motivate learners to focus on these skills. For example, tourism learners measured the mileage from Milan to Mexico as part of a costing exercise, sport learners compared premier league footballers' goal averages, and catering learners carefully calculated the calorific values of carbohydrates when preparing lunches for clients. However, a few teachers do not provide written feedback that is detailed enough to help learners improve their English and mathematical skills.
- Staff provide highly effective guidance that prepares learners well for progression and, as a result, a high proportion of learners progress to higher-level courses, employment and university. Teachers and managers have established a good range of work experience opportunities including placements with a number of high-profile employers. Large numbers of public service learners complete valuable volunteering with the armed forces, police and ambulance services and many learners benefit from 'real world' briefs set by employers.
- Staff provide a programme of additional activities that helps learners to develop their personal, social and employability skills. This programme includes visits to exhibitions, trade shows and European cities, and participation in national competitions.
- Teachers plan assessment well and set challenging individual learning targets that they review frequently with learners. They give good-quality oral and written feedback that helps learners to improve their work. Tutors often use social and electronic media as well as computers to give rapid feedback to learners that helps them improve their skills and knowledge quickly.
- A small minority of lessons are less effective because the pace is too slow, teachers' expectations are low and insufficient account is taken of learners' individual needs. A minority of level 3 lessons lack sufficient challenge to help learners achieve their full potential.

Adult learning programmes

are good

- The college currently has 5,940 adult learners on programmes in 13 subject areas across the college. The college also offers employability skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and learning through a number of community venues.
- Managers make very good use of local information and a range of funding streams to create a curriculum that meets local priorities, is responsive to learners' needs and is effective in attracting groups whose circumstances have made them hard to reach. The curriculum provides clear progression routes to employment and further study.
- Teachers plan and deliver interesting, engaging, well-resourced lessons that meet learners' needs, maintain their interest and support good progress. As a result, learners are highly motivated to do their best and are proud of their achievements. Attendance is satisfactory.
- The vast majority of teachers help learners to develop their English and mathematical skills well. Learners communicate clearly, improve their writing and use technical vocabulary correctly and in context. Teachers' careful and thorough marking of learners' work for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar helps learners develop their writing skills quickly.
- Learners develop a good range of skills that help them progress in education and employment and to play an active role in their community. Learners in access to higher education classes develop good study and research skills that equip them very well for progression to university. Learners on employability programmes develop their confidence, re-engage with learning and improve their skills; progression into employment for learners who are referred through Jobcentre Plus is good. Learners on community-based crafts courses develop a wide range of personal, social, and employability skills.
- Learners value very highly the exceptional support that they receive from staff that removes barriers to learning and helps them excel. Teachers have high aspirations for their learners, for example helping those who enrol at the college with few qualifications to develop their skills and gain places at university.

- Managers have made significant changes to ESOL recruitment to address historic underperformance. Current ESOL learners develop their skills very well and make rapid progress. Early examination results show improved performance but it is too early to determine the full impact of changes.
- In a small minority of mathematics lessons, teachers' whole-class teaching and limited assessment of learning result in a lack of challenge and progress for more-able learners. In a few lessons, learners' understanding and progress are hindered by input from the teacher that is too rapid or where errors are not corrected quickly enough. In a very small minority of vocational lessons teachers do too little to improve learners' English skills.

Apprenticeships

are good

- The college has 3,748 apprentices in 10 subject areas, with the largest groups in health and social care, engineering, and business management and administration. Apprentices receive training directly from the college or through subcontractors. Managers have worked closely with a wide range of employers to develop programmes that are relevant and up to date. Apprentices are either new to their roles or require significant additional training to meet the demands of their job. They develop a range of new skills through well-coordinated on- and off-the-job training.
- Trainers and assessors know the apprentices well and have high expectations for their performance and are ambitious for them to succeed. They use a wide variety of stimulating activities and good resources in most lessons to maintain apprentices' interest. Apprentices study hard, work purposefully, and produce high standards of work. Employers recognise this and many give apprentices additional responsibilities. For example, hairdressing apprentices undertake duties in salons with a wider range of clients.
- Staff work closely with employers to ensure that they provide the most suitable opportunities for apprentices and that on- and off-the-job training are coordinated well. Trainers and assessors have good industrial experience, and receive further training that enables them to teach and assess apprentices up to current industry standards. For example, motor vehicle staff have received recent technological skills updating from manufacturers and use this knowledge well to teach apprentices. As a result, apprentices receive good preparation for their intended job roles.
- Staff check the progress of apprentices frequently during lessons, assessments and progress reviews. They provide apprentices with good feedback that helps them to improve. During visits, assessors and apprentices agree on action points that help apprentices and employers to understand areas for improvement.
- The great majority of apprentices make good progress in English and mathematics. Apprentices speak clearly and confidently, and use specialist terminology correctly in their vocational areas. Trainers often integrate mathematics into lessons and, as a result, apprentices develop good skills in this subject.
- Staff support apprentices well. Apprentices receive good advice and guidance that ensures that they are enrolled on suitable programmes, and trainers and assessors give them clear information about their future options. Apprentices with additional needs receive good specialist support that enables them to achieve. The vast majority of apprentices progress to sustained employment on completion of their programme.
- Apprentices feel safe and are appropriately aware of health and safety issues in the workplace. Assessors check frequently to evaluate if apprentices have any worries they wish to raise. Apprentices know what to do if they have safeguarding concerns at work.
- A small minority of training sessions are less effective. In these sessions, trainers do not challenge all apprentices to achieve their full potential, do not always ensure that all apprentices understand key points of learning, and do not place enough emphasis on developing their written skills.

Provision for learners with high needs

is good

- Most learners with very complex needs attend courses on the Horizons programme. Other learners with high needs join vocational or academic courses across the college. Currently, some 146 learners have high needs.
- Staff are skilled at finding out learners' starting points. They have helpful consultations with parents, and review learners' former learning and medical records. They use this information to carefully plan individualised and flexible programmes. Well-designed programmes include skills in independence, creative arts, communication and a good variety of outside activities that extend learners' experience of the world and prepare them well for adult life. Horizons learners make very good progress overall and almost all gain their qualifications.
- Outstanding specialist additional support allows learners with high needs to engage and succeed in the full vocational and academic offer of the college. Highly qualified and experienced managers lead a team of specialists in autistic spectrum conditions, visual and hearing impairments, occupational therapy,

medical advice, speech and language therapy, dyslexia, counselling and behaviour management. Teachers make very effective use of assistive technology, such as screen readers, to greatly increase learners' capacity to achieve their aims.

- Teachers embed English and mathematics within most activities and this, coupled with good discrete lessons in these subjects, enables learners to achieve qualifications at an appropriate level.
- Good arrangements within the college ensure that a high proportion of learners progress to higher-level courses or work. A particularly successful vocational taster programme allows learners to experience a good variety of different disciplines before making an informed choice about their career path.
- In a small minority of lessons, staff rely too much on 'question and answer' as a way of teaching new ideas or skills, and learners who lack the capacity to participate lose interest. In a few lessons staff talk too fast, too loudly or without allowing time for learners to process what they are being asked. As a result, learners become confused and lose confidence.
- Reviews of learners' progress on Horizons programmes are not fully effective. Targets on individual learning plans are too broad to use in measuring progress or to give learners new skills to aim for, and this prevents them from recognising their achievements fully.

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	19,928
Principal/CEO	Malcolm Cowgill
Website address	www.centralnottingham.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	633	2,731	1,272	2,500	1,721	680	6	29
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	520	1,928	228	991	0	81		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
	0							
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age								
Number of traineeships								
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Funding received from								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Russell Henry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pamela Blackman	Her Majesty's Inspector
Heather Barnett	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pippa Wainwright	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Loxton	Ofsted Inspector
Beverley Carter	Ofsted Inspector
Sylvia Farrier	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Winchcombe	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Nicholas Sanders	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the Vice-Principal – Organisational Development, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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