**Inspection dates** 

# North Shropshire College

General further education college



Overall effectiveness Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management 
Inadequate

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare Requires improvement

Outcomes for learners Require improvement

16 to 19 study programmes Require improvement

Adult learning programmes Good

Apprenticeships Require improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

# **Summary of key findings**

#### This is an inadequate provider

- Arrangements to assure the safety and welfare of young people and vulnerable adults are ineffective; procedures to ensure learners are safe are incomplete and they are not implemented consistently.
- Governors, leaders and managers have failed to secure sufficiently rapid improvements for learners in the quality of education that they receive since the two previous inspections; standards vary too much by course, programme type and setting.
- Too few learners aged 16 to 19 who retake GCSE maths or English successfully achieve an A\* to C grade.
- Self-assessment does not provide governors and leaders with a sufficiently accurate view of the current standards across the college to enable them to scrutinise and challenge poor performance.
- The college's current financial state is inadequate.

#### The provider has the following strengths

- Partnership working is good, particularly with the local enterprise partnership (LEP), which helps to ensure that the curriculum supports local and regional skills needs.
- Adult learning programmes effectively develop learners' skills and confidence and support many to progress into employment.
- Leaders have a good understanding of regional skills needs and work effectively with the local enterprise partnership.



# **Full report**

### Information about the provider

- North Shropshire College is based on two main campuses at Oswestry and Baschurch, with smaller specialist centres in Shipley, Burford and Wem. The majority of learners come from North Shropshire, although learners in land-based courses come from Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Powys as well. The college offers classroom-based courses in all 15 sector subject areas and work-based learning in six.
- North Shropshire has a population of around 64,000, a lower unemployment rate than the Marches average and a higher proportion of micro-businesses than average. The proportion of pupils leaving school with five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics is similar to that nationally.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of utmost urgency, leaders should conduct a thorough and comprehensive review of all aspects of safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are robust, prioritise the welfare and safety of all learners and meet statutory requirements.
- Prioritise sharply focused actions including attendance of staff at continuous professional development sessions so as to rapidly improve teaching, learning and assessment and ensure speedy implementation in the classroom for the benefit of learners.
- Ensure more governors attend key subcommittees regularly so that discussions on quality benefit from a broader range of contributions by attending members, and increased scrutiny supports timely decision making. Increase the extent to which the board hold senior leaders and managers to account for the accuracy of self-assessment, the quality of teaching and learning and their impact on learners' outcomes.

# **Inspection judgements**

#### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

is inadequate

- Since the previous inspection, the college's financial situation has deteriorated considerably and is now inadequate. Governors and senior leaders have overseen the implementation of a number of significant changes to staffing and reporting arrangements intended to restore financial health, quicken the pace of change and ensure staff are more accountable for the outcomes of their actions. Nevertheless, the rate of improvement since the two previous inspections has been too slow.
- Leaders and managers' evaluation of the college's provision, although broadly accurate, is overgenerous in grading aspects of provision. The self-assessment report places too much emphasis on the modest rate of improvement identified by inspectors since the previous inspection. Employers' involvement in work-based learning self-assessment is insufficient.
- While leaders have successfully ensured that some aspects of the quality of teaching and learning have improved, leading to improved results for learners, there are still too many inconsistencies and variations in performance to ensure that learners across all campuses and courses benefit from a good or better standard of education and training.
- The judgements of observers in lesson observation are now improved and form a relatively sound basis for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A small minority of observers do not give sufficient prominence or importance to the standard of learners' English or mathematics skills or give sufficient attention to the progress learners make over time. As a result, observation records are too often overly positive.
- Arrangements to manage staff performance have improved. Managers now more routinely challenge underperformance and where necessary hold staff to account, including using capability and disciplinary procedures. Appraisal now clearly focuses on reviewing past performance, setting objectives for improvement, and providing support according to individual needs.
- Most teachers are offered the training and development they need, but their attendance at twilight professional development sessions has been too low. Teaching and learning have not improved consistently or quickly enough.
- Leaders have very recently revised the college-wide English and mathematics strategy to emphasise how these essential skills support learners in their learning and personal lives. While the revised strategy sets out a clear statement of intent and is beginning to lead to improved attendance, it is too early to judge its effectiveness or impact on learners' achievements.
- A well-considered equality scheme supports the college's ambition for an inclusive community to be achieved through effective promotion and management of equality and diversity, eliminating all forms of discrimination. Incidents and complaints are closely monitored for equality issues and bullying is not tolerated. However, as acknowledged by the college, not all teachers make the best use of opportunities to increase learners' understanding of equality and diversity in lessons and reviews. A number of staff have been appointed to act as equality and diversity champions, and there are early signs that this is increasing learners' understanding of diversity in society.
- Partnership working is good. Leaders and staff respond well to the needs of local employers, the local community and the Oswestry Chamber of Commerce. Initiatives such as the Nurturing Enterprise Skills and Training project, which the local business community actively supports, enable learners to gain invaluable work experience and commercial skills. Carefully selected subcontractors extend the skills and training offer available to learners. Managers work effectively with the Marches LEP to ensure that current and planned courses rightly focus on career pathways that meet local and regional priorities. Leaders have recently restructured the management of work-based learning to address some of the poor performance identified at the last inspection; employers welcome the recent changes.

#### **■** The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection, governors have recognised the need to make key changes to help them hold senior managers to more robust account. They have increased the level of scrutiny and challenge of teaching and learning.
- Governors' attendance at the main board meetings is above the 80% target that the corporation set for itself, but attendance at the quality and standards committee meetings does not meet the target set by the main board; at one meeting attendance was as low as 40%. This limits the opportunity for more extensive discussion and debate by members.
- Governors now have access to more reliable college data through a newly developed data dashboard and have strengthened their links to subject areas through learning walks. Governors have a better

understanding of what the college does well and the areas of continued underperformance, but over half of the key targets set for the college in 2014/15 were not achieved.

#### **■** The arrangements for safeguarding

- Procedures to ensure that all young people and vulnerable adults are safe are not implemented consistently or to an appropriate standard. Inspectors identified a number of poor safeguarding practices.
- The standard of recording of safeguarding incidents requires improvement; records detailing the actions taken to keep learners safe are incomplete and do not provide sufficient assurance that information relevant to the safety of vulnerable learners is collected or shared appropriately. Leaders and managers failed to ensure that a vulnerable learner known to be at risk was suitably protected from the danger of further harm or that other relevant agencies were promptly informed when a serious safeguarding concern was brought to the college's attention last year.
- Inspectors identified an occurrence where although a clean disclosure barring service (DBS) certificate had been obtained for a new member of staff, managers had not ensured that, as part of preemployment checks, a written reference was obtained from a former employer to confirm both their previous employment history and suitability to work in an educational setting. This oversight remained undetected for over three months until it was brought to the college's attention during the course of the inspection. Managers subsequently responded very promptly and obtained the missing reference.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that learners have an appropriate understanding of the dangers associated with online grooming, cyber bullying and radicalisation and extremism or how to protect themselves when using social media or the internet.
- Most staff have completed a basic formal qualification to raise their awareness of the dangers posed to learners from radicalisation and extremism. Senior leaders and governors have completed more indepth 'Prevent' training. Leaders have recently developed a cross-college 'Prevent' policy and associated action plan but it is too soon to judge their impact on learners.

# Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

#### requires improvement

- On the study programme and apprenticeships, teachers and assessors do not have sufficiently high expectations of their learners. Too many learners do not make as much progress as they are capable of, either because teachers do not probe their understanding of topics sufficiently or because the work they are given is too easy. In a significant minority of lessons, neither teachers' questioning nor the tasks they set make learners think deeply enough. As a result, learners' vocational knowledge and skills do not always develop rapidly enough or in sufficient depth.
- Despite timely and effective oral guidance and encouragement, the feedback that learners on study programmes and apprentices receive is too variable in quality. Written feedback on assignments too often lacks sufficient detail to guide learners and apprentices on how they need to improve their work. For example, teachers and assessors do not provide sufficient advice on how to expand ideas and develop research. Teachers do not systematically reinforce the college regulations on plagiarism, and too many learners simply copy from research they find online to support the completion of projects and other assignments.
- Initial assessment of learners and apprentices effectively identifies any support needs. However, the setting of targets with learners to help them progress is not consistently precise enough, and they are not systematically used to inform planning of individual goals to ensure learners achieve their potential.
- Teaching to develop learners' mathematics and English skills requires improvement. Teachers skilfully include mathematics skills in adult learning and study programme lessons. Teachers and assessors on the apprenticeship programmes do not systematically exploit naturally occurring situations, for example to practise calculations such as weight, fractions, or measurements. Teachers do not systematically correct errors in the use of English grammar, capital letters, spelling or punctuation. Feedback to young learners and apprentices on their written work is not consistently good enough to help them to improve their use of English. Learners receive insufficient encouragement to take notes during lessons or training activities to help develop this skill.
- Teachers and assessors use their good subject knowledge and industry expertise well to help learners develop their vocational skills and their knowledge of the employment requirements in each industry. Staff provide effective careers guidance and act as positive role models, and this helps learners and apprentices to raise aspirations and plan their future progression effectively.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well in both practical and theory lessons in the study programmes and on adult programmes, but this is not always the case on apprenticeships. Apprentices are not always challenged for their use of inappropriate language, and during assessors' visits in the

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- workplace, assessors do not encourage them sufficiently well to fully explain their understanding of equality and diversity in their vocational contexts. Similarly, assessors do not systematically check with their apprentices that they are safe and know how to keep safe in their workplace.
- Learners on study programmes benefit from relevant and challenging work experiences and placements. They develop good work-related skills, such as attending work punctually, making a good contribution in teamwork, and taking initiatives that benefit the business. Apprentices rightly value the support they receive from their employers, and develop professional behaviours. They clearly understand what to do in work-related scenarios and demonstrate a professional understanding of their roles. On the work-readiness programmes, the majority of unemployed learners enter or return to employment or volunteering.
- Teachers on adult learning programmes have high expectations of their learners. Teaching and learning supports learners' progress well on these courses. Unemployed adults benefit from well-structured, short and intensive programmes to improve their job-seeking skills and to build resilience. The majority gain employment or engage in volunteering activities. Adult learners on community learning funded programmes develop self-worth, gain a wide range of technical skills, learn to take better care of themselves, and build positive connections to live more independent and richer lives. Adult learners benefit from good personal support to help them to return to education or training.

# Personal development, behaviour and welfare

#### requires improvement

- Attendance at discrete functional skills lessons is too low; apprentices do not understand the relevance and importance of these skills to their careers and too many of those nearing the end of their planned programme have yet to achieve their functional skills qualifications.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) skills for apprentices in agriculture are not sufficiently developed through assessed work and evidence collection. Work is handwritten, and the quality of photographic evidence collected by the apprentices to demonstrate competence in an activity is poor; motor vehicle apprentices are too reliant on their assessors to upload work to their e-portfolio and are not developing their ICT skills as a consequence.
- The quality and usefulness of information, advice and guidance varies too much across courses because it depends on the skills of individual tutors. Apprentices in health and social care, which has been an area with historically low performance, do not always go through the same initial assessment and induction process as other apprentices, and information relating to their initial advice is not formally recorded. Apprentices in motor vehicle engineering cannot recall the advice they were given at the start of their training or at the point of progression to a more advanced level. On employability programmes, learners are not sufficiently aware of how they can access impartial advice, for example through the national careers service.
- Learners do not have a good enough understanding of important safeguarding topics such as e-safety, fundamental British values or how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation or extremism.
- Learners are motivated to do well and develop new skills; they take pride in their work, which is at least at the expected standard, and particularly good in customer services. Apprentices demonstrate good attitudes and value their employment. They are confident and capable and develop skills appropriate to their individual sector workplaces, including their ability to deal with members of the public and work colleagues.
- Unemployed learners on two-week intensive programmes develop positive teamworking skills, self-confidence and resilience, knowledge of health and safety and of first aid at work. They enjoy teamwork, are effective in supporting peers, and persevere to complete challenging tasks on time such as online practice tests for the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme. They benefit from exercises to write curriculum vitae and application letters, as well as practical activities to develop their mathematics skills.
- Learners on study programmes recognise that work experience has improved their confidence and communication skills in dealing with the public. Level 3 business learners are highly motivated, enthusiastic and keen to talk about the benefits of their course, including their work experience projects, and how they have become more responsible and confident.
- Learners are respectful and conduct themselves very well across the college. Attendance and punctuality are good in most lessons. Learners demonstrate a positive attitude to learning and take pride in their work. Attendance at discrete GCSE maths and English lessons has improved considerably compared with the same time last year and is close to the college target of 90%.

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#### **Outcomes for learners**

#### require improvement

- Too few apprentices, particularly those on intermediate courses, complete their qualifications within the planned time, and the proportion of those who successfully complete their functional skills has declined consistently for the last three years. The new management system designed to monitor more closely the progress apprentices make has not yet ensured that all current apprentices are on track to complete their programme on time, particularly in agriculture.
- Teachers have been unable to close the achievement gap between learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their peers.
- Despite a marked improvement over the previous year, only a minority of learners on study programmes who work towards a GCSE at grade C or above in mathematics or English are successful and too few adult learners gain a mathematics GCSE at grade C or above.
- Advanced apprentices make good progress, and completion rates within the planned time improved considerably in 2014/15 in the two biggest subject areas health and social care, and agriculture to be better than in similar providers.
- Most learners in science and mathematics, engineering, construction, languages and preparation for work complete their qualifications successfully.
- Learners on adult learning programmes make good progress, and have developed a wide range of practical skills, such as communicating effectively in a modern foreign language, producing cake decoration to professional standards, learning to write effective curriculum vitae and supportive letters for job applications, and becoming more effective in using ICT to communicate with others or sell or buy online.
- Most apprentices continue in employment at the end of their programme and most other learners progress into further education or employment. Of those learners who applied to higher education at the end of 2014/15, most were offered a place.

# **Types of provision**

# 16 to 19 study programmes

#### require improvement

- There are currently 1,421 full-time learners on 16–19 study programmes in 14 sector subject areas. The largest areas are animal care, sport, and health and social care. There are smaller numbers studying A levels and ICT.
- Teachers do not use the results of initial assessment well enough to set tasks that enable the most-able learners to make good progress. In theory lessons teachers' expectations of learners are too low and the pace of learning is slow. As a result, the most-able learners do not make progress according to their potential. Assessment and feedback strategies are over-reliant on directed questioning and answering which do not always provide sufficient depth to challenge learners' understanding and allow them to reflect on how to improve their work. Written feedback on learners' work does not provide sufficient detail to guide learners and support progress.
- Teachers do not effectively implement strategies to improve learners' English skills. Teachers attempt to address spelling and punctuation errors in written work, but this is not always consistently applied to ensure learners do not continue to make the same mistakes. As a consequence, learners make insufficient progress in their literacy skills over time.
- Target setting for individual learning goals is too variable and is not systematically used to support learners to make good progress. The majority of learners are aware of their target grades, but individual learning plans are not effective at supporting learners to achieve their potential grades. Short-term targets are not sufficiently detailed to ensure good levels of progress.
- Learners develop valuable employability skills throughout a wide range of provision. Most learners participate in relevant and worthwhile external work experience and work-related activity. Learners benefit from a broad range of opportunities to develop the skills required for future employment. Level 2 learners in catering participate in a two-week work experience opportunity in France where they apply technical skills in a professional restaurant. Level 3 business learners participate in high-quality project management and marketing activities to prepare them for future employment.
- In practical sessions teachers are good role models for learners, they mirror industry standards and demonstrate clearly the technical skills required; they help learners not only to develop their subject knowledge but also explain why and where to apply their skills. Level 3 hairdressing learners follow the high professional standards set by their teachers and are not allowed to enter salons if their personal

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- presentation is not professional. Level 1 learners in construction are challenged to complete individual tasks in a professional and timely manner.
- Teachers promote equality and develop learners' understanding of diversity well in both practical and theory lessons. Teachers positively address difficult situations experienced by learners in their everyday lives and fully understand the barriers they face; for example learners who have significant personal and social issues have been supported well to keep on track with their learning and they value the support from their teacher. Sports learners analyse differences between males and females in sporting environments.
- Teachers develop mathematics skills of their learners well both in vocational lessons and discrete provision. Teachers make effective links between mathematical concepts and vocational settings. For example, level 1 brickwork learners use measurement and calculation skills to calculate the cost of a job, and prepare an invoice as they would if they were in employment. In discrete provision, common mistakes are highlighted to support learners in examination techniques. However, for those who enter the programmes with a GCSE below grade C, teaching and learning do not consistently provide sufficient challenge to support a rapid improvement in grades.

#### **Adult learning programmes**

#### are good

- Adult learners account for around a third of the college's population. At the time of inspection, there were just over 830 adults studying at college or community sites, mostly on part-time, full-cost programmes, community learning funded courses, or on short work-readiness programmes.
- Managers and teachers have a good understanding of the local labour market, and the needs of local communities. Highly effective partnerships with Job Centre Plus enable unemployed adults to develop good skills in areas where there are skills shortages, such as construction. Learners make good use of their time during lessons, develop good teamworking skills, and produce well-presented curriculum vitae and letters to support their job applications. As a result, they progress well into employment or into volunteering, and take pride in their achievements.
- Effective work with voluntary and community groups helps isolated adults with multiple needs to return to education and training. Others benefit from learning venues near home where they develop skills in subjects such as ICT, watercolour painting, cake decoration, modern foreign languages or animal management. Learners can clearly describe the benefits of learning in their supportive and friendly environment and progress well to other learning. They significantly improve their self-confidence and develop a range of creative and social skills. On the well-being and mindfulness courses, learners improve their mental health, self-esteem and resilience, and learn how to develop support networks and more positive relationships.
- Skilled and knowledgeable staff, with good technical and subject expertise, skilfully engage their learners in a range of interesting activities. Lessons are lively and challenging and use well-designed learning resources to good effect. Learners make good progress during lessons and reflect well on their achievements at the end. This helps them to focus on what they need to do next. On the work-readiness programmes, learners receive effective informal careers guidance to raise their aspirations.
- Learners benefit from good teaching that helps them to improve their subject knowledge and develop good English and mathematics skills. Teachers provide effective feedback and good individual coaching to help them to progress rapidly during lessons. In practical sessions, teachers give effective demonstrations and step-by-step instructions to help learners to build skills and independent learning. For example, in a cake decorating lesson, adults rapidly mastered excellent fondant decoration techniques, forming petals, assembling the flowers and adding leaves.
- Teachers promote learners' understanding of diversity well. Learners feel safe sharing opinions and ideas in their harmonious groups, for example during discussions on employees' rights and responsibilities on work-readiness courses. Adult learners improve their understanding of e-safety well, and learn to protect their privacy, data and personal information when buying or selling online.
- On community learning funded programmes, the identification and recording of learners' starting points and the setting of individual learning goals are not sufficiently effective to help learners focus closely on what they need to do to achieve their overall aim.
- In a small minority of lessons on full-cost programmes, teachers do not have high enough expectations of their learners, who get too little opportunity to extend their spoken contributions or writing skills. As a result, more-able learners in particular do not work to their full potential.
- In a few lessons teachers do not use ICT and the college online learning platform sufficiently well to support and enhance learning in and out of the classroom.

### **Apprenticeships**

#### require improvement

- The college offers apprenticeships to 300 apprentices in 11 subject areas including health and social care, motor vehicle, animal care and agriculture. Of these apprentices, 140 are at advanced level and are all over 19 years of age.
- Planning for learning and assessment in some areas does not sufficiently support progress and achievement. Apprentices in agriculture are not able to demonstrate the skills that they have developed in the workplace because the assessment is not arranged at the appropriate time in the farming year; instead they have to take part in a scenario-based assessment to prove their competence. Insufficient advanced planning for exam concessions for apprentices in health and social care unnecessarily increases the pressure on these apprentices.
- Despite recent improvements in the management of the apprenticeship programme, actions taken to improve apprentices' achievement of English and mathematics functional skills are insufficient and have had little impact. Apprentices do not always understand the relevance of functional skills to their employment because they are often left until the end of the programme. Attendance at timetabled functional skills sessions is too low, the monitoring of attendance is weak and apprentices do not make good use of an online learning resource designed to support their progress. As a result, too many apprentices are at risk of not achieving in the planned time.
- The development of apprentices' ICT skills is given insufficient focus in both training and assessment. Apprentices are not adequately using the online assessment and training tool and rely too frequently on assessors to upload work on their behalf, which does not encourage them to work independently. Apprentices are not encouraged to use ICT devices to record evidence of their skills development in the workplace, and therefore are not able to demonstrate the full range of their work activities.
- Target setting does not support well enough apprentices' progress through their programmes. This is particularly relevant for apprentices nearing the end of their programme. The improved monitoring of apprentices' progress is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure the achievement for all apprentices within the planned timeframe.
- Although assessors are knowledgeable, experienced in their sectors and are able to communicate the requirements of employment in each industry effectively, they do not link this sufficiently to the development of apprentices' skills. Feedback on assessment is too frequently linked to the achievement of a competence and does not provide enough detail to drive improvement in apprentices' skills and abilities. Written feedback on marked work does not support the improvement of English or professional skills sufficiently. It does not consistently highlight incorrect use of English or identify what the individual apprentice needs to do to demonstrate their understanding fully or develop their technical knowledge further.
- Apprentices produce work that is generally of a good standard and in customer services is often very good, demonstrating highly proficient skills in the production of customer record management systems. Health and social care apprentices can effectively apply their work activity during professional discussions. For example, they are able to speak fluently on the importance of the use of appropriate body language in the care of older people using work-related examples that clearly illustrate their skills development.
- Apprentices speak highly of their employers and gain good experience in the workplace, with apprentices employed in high-quality diverse farming operations and industry-leading care homes. They are valued by employers, demonstrate professional behaviours and are highly motivated with clear career goals. They contribute to their workplace by being able to practise a wide range of skills that they develop in off-the-job training, including well-developed skills in electrical diagnostics for motor vehicle apprentices and care of dementia patients for health and social care apprentices.

## **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

4,491

**Principal/CEO** 

Mrs Jackie Doodson

**Website address** 

www.nsc.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		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19	9+	16-18		19+	16-18		+	16-	18	19+
	275	457		525		298	621	164		3		26
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate			Advanced			d Hig		High	her		
	16-18		19+		16-18		19+		16-18		19+	
	67		92		0		140		0		0	
Number of traineeships	16-19			19+			Total					
	0			0			0					
Number of learners aged 14-16	none											
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency											
At the time of increation the	_											

At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:

- Fit4Training
- Shropshire Football Association Ltd

# Information about this inspection

### **Inspection team**

Nick Gadfield, lead inspector Her Majesty's Inspector

Victor Reid Her Majesty's Inspector Marinette Bazin

Ofsted Inspector Julia Gray

Rachael Hennigan Ofsted Inspector

Elizabeth Lamb Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the director of curriculum and quality, 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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