

Derwentside College

General further education college

Inspection dates

26–29 April 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	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors and senior leaders have successfully implemented an ambitious strategy to be a major provider of apprenticeships across the region.
- Senior leaders have very effective partnerships with employers and subcontractors to develop and align programmes to address specific skills gaps resulting in high achievement rates for learners and apprentices.
- Apprentices develop very good work-related skills and knowledge through effective planning and liaison between staff and employers.
- The majority of learners make good progress in their studies, often from low starting points, and achieve their qualifications.
- High-quality teaching, learning and assessment helps the large majority of learners and apprentices achieve their learning goals.
- Staff provide very good personal support for learners and apprentices to enable them to achieve.
- High-quality work experience and work-related activities develop learners' confidence and employability skills well.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Too many teachers do not plan lessons sufficiently well to meet the individual needs of the most-able learners to ensure that they achieve their full potential.
- The systems that senior leaders use to monitor learner performance do not enable them to identify quickly enough when there are sudden and unexpected dips in performance.
- Not enough apprentices complete their programme within their planned timescales.
- Not enough students achieve their functional skills in English and mathematics and the proportion achieving high grades at GCSE level is too low.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Derwentside College is a small general further education college established in 1986, with one campus in Consett. It is a major provider of post-16 education and training in the semi-rural district of Derwentside in County Durham. A number of organisations also provide training and education to a significant number of learners and apprentices on behalf of the college across the north east of England. In 2014/15, around 9,000 learners studied at the college or at one of its partners. The college has significant provision in apprentices, as well as offering study programmes for young people, traineeships and adult learning programmes. These range from entry level to level 5.
- The college recruits a high proportion of its learners from areas of significant deprivation. A majority of learners starting this academic year do not have a GCSE in either English or mathematics. The unemployment rate is higher than that nationally. Derwentside has a very low proportion of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds, although the college has a larger proportion of learners from these groups due to its wider regional work.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Teachers should improve the way they plan lessons to meet the needs of learners of different abilities, and ensure that the most able are challenged to achieve their full potential.
- Review and refine the systems that senior managers use to review the progress of learners to ensure that swift action is taken where necessary to address underperformance.
- Improve the systems that staff use for tracking, monitoring and reporting on the progress of learners and apprentices so that they can intervene more quickly to ensure that more stay on their programme, and achieve qualifications within the planned timescales.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics so that the proportion of learners who achieve their English and mathematics qualifications, including high grades at GCSE level, is increased.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Governors and senior leaders have successfully implemented an ambitious strategy to be a major provider of apprenticeships across the region. Senior leaders and managers have worked very effectively with a group of subcontractors and employers to expand the number and range of apprenticeships since the previous inspection. At the same time, managers have maintained the good quality of the provision and improved outcomes, despite the challenges posed by absorbing into the college provision a large number of apprentices from a failing provider.
- The principal and senior managers energetically and successfully pursue the college's mission to develop the skills of their learners to enable them to secure sustainable employment. Managers work closely with employers to design programmes to address specific skills gaps identified by the local enterprise partnerships, such as the apprenticeship for clinical technicians in the health service, and the development of a higher apprenticeship for health care assistants.
- Managers rigorously monitor the provision delivered by subcontractors. Managers support providers effectively to improve and take decisive action if providers do not improve the provision for learners by no longer contracting with them. Managers treat subcontractors as partners, so they develop their staff effectively through giving them access to the college's professional development programme and sharing good practice across the provision.
- Managers accurately identify the strengths and areas of improvement of the college's provision through an inclusive and robust self-assessment process. Actions in the quality improvement plan are precise, are monitored by managers and bring about rapid improvement, such as an increase in the overall achievement of current apprentices. However, they have not been effective in improving the success rates or high passes on English and mathematics programmes.
- Performance management of staff at all levels at the college is rigorous but supportive. Managers conduct effective annual appraisals and mid-year reviews that enable staff to improve. Senior managers maintain the good standard of teaching, learning and assessment by not tolerating persistent poor performance.
- Arrangements for observing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are very effective. Observers focus on the impact of teaching and assessment on the progress of learners and apprentices. A recently appointed post of lead lecturer has strengthened the implementation of post-observation action plans. However, a significant minority of these actions lack specific detail about what needs to be changed and they are too open-ended to ensure that improvement is quick enough.
- There is a strong commitment by all staff to the promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity at the college, although current learners do not yet demonstrate a clear understanding of British values. Managers interrogate data on achievement gaps between groups of learners very thoroughly, enabling them to take effective actions to reduce any differences. Skilled mentors sensitively support groups of learners, such as transgender learners and those with high needs, to access college provision.
- Managers have instigated a strategy to improve the development of English and mathematics following a steep decline in functional skills success rates and the low take-up of English and mathematics GCSEs in 2014/15. However, this has not yet had sufficient impact on significantly increasing the numbers of learners who achieve qualifications in these subjects, nor improved the development of these skills across all curriculum areas.
- Senior and middle managers regularly track and monitor the progress of learners and apprentices. However, the systems they use are too cumbersome to enable them to intervene quickly enough when there are sudden and unexpected dips in performance, such as when the numbers of learners achieving functional skills qualifications declined sharply.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governors play a central role in setting the strategic direction of the college, and ensure that any new developments, such as the expansion of the apprenticeship programme or the commissioning of new subcontractors, align with these objectives.
 - Since the previous inspection, they have become more effective in holding managers to account for the outcomes of learners and the quality of provision, and have intensified their scrutiny of the large volume of subcontracted provision. They demonstrate a deep commitment to celebrating the achievements of their learners, for example by sponsoring the annual awards event.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Staff have undergone all the necessary checks and the single central record is up to date. New staff, learners and apprentices all receive thorough inductions into good safeguarding practices, including

how to keep safe online. All learners and apprentices know how, and to whom, to report safeguarding concerns. As a result, learners and apprentices feel safe when they are at college or in their workplace.

- Designated safeguarding officers and mentors develop particularly effective relationships with a range of agencies to protect the most vulnerable learners, such as children looked after by the local authority, from exposure to exploitation and keep them in learning.
- Staff are aware of their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty, and are confident about identifying the signs of radicalisation and extremism among their learners. Staff know how to refer them through the 'Channel' process. However, learners' understanding of modern British values is not yet consistent across the college.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all provision types is good. Teachers and assessors have good vocational knowledge and industrial experience in the subjects they teach. They apply their skills to good effect to aid learners' understanding and use their industrial knowledge to link theory to practice well. Staff expect high standards of behaviour in classroom sessions and in the workplace, which contributes to an inclusive and harmonious atmosphere throughout the college.
- The majority of learners make good progress in their studies from their often low starting points and achieve their qualifications. Teachers on adult learning programmes skilfully plan lessons to meet the diverse needs of learners, many of whom have been disengaged from learning for many years. Learners on employability courses enjoy learning and develop relevant presentation, communication and writing skills in preparation for employment in the retail sector.
- Assessment practice is good. Teachers and assessors use a diverse range of methods successfully to ensure that learning takes place in the classroom and the workplace. The majority of teachers have a clear understanding of the progress that learners make and provide effective verbal and written feedback on how they can improve their work or achieve higher grades.
- Apprentices make good progress and acquire highly relevant vocational skills, which employers value greatly, such as dementia training for health and social care apprentices. Apprentices benefit from an effective combination of off-the-job training, employer-centred mentoring and support by assessors in the workplace, who diligently plan learning and monitor progress.
- Learners receive good support from highly experienced and committed progression advisers, who identify and respond to their individual needs promptly and coordinate effective support at the college and in the workplace. Learning support assistants develop effective relationships to assist and guide learners in lessons to ensure that they make good progress on their courses and develop the skills needed to achieve their personal goals. Learners with high needs receive good-quality support throughout their course from highly skilled teachers and support staff, resulting in them improving their communication skills and independence in their personal lives.
- Managers have highly effective links with a range of multi-agency contacts to support learners in their personal lives including food banks, housing associations and local social services, which have had a demonstrable impact on helping learners continue to attend college and succeed.
- Teachers on study programmes do not sufficiently plan lessons to meet the individual needs of all learners. Teachers do not use the information collected at initial assessment to design individualised learning to meet the needs of a range of abilities. Consequently, teachers do not always challenge the most-able learners to achieve their potential.
- Teachers do not always check learners' work for spelling and grammatical errors. In a minority of tutorial and review documents at a range of levels, targets set by learners are sometimes illegible and teachers and support staff are not challenging them to improve.
- Learners and apprentices do not receive consistently aspirational targets to ensure they make rapid progress and further enhance their skills and knowledge beyond the minimum levels of their qualification. Consequently, the most-able learners do not develop their skills at a higher level.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are good

- Learners and apprentices develop their self-confidence in work and in their personal lives. As a result, they are well prepared for their next step to further study or employment. For example, adults who have been long-term unemployed develop the confidence to apply for jobs through the support teachers provide.
- Learners and apprentices benefit from good impartial advice before joining the college and, as a result, the majority make good choices which meet their individual needs and aspirations well. Learners continue to receive good careers guidance throughout their course, which directs them to achieve the necessary vocational and employability skills to meet the needs of their chosen career.
- Learners on study programmes participate in a variety of good-quality activities to prepare them for work, including external work placements, interview practice, careers fairs, and enterprise challenges.
- The vast majority of learners progress to further study, higher education or employment when they leave the college. Progression onto apprenticeships from traineeships and from apprenticeships to sustained employment is very good. Apprentices improve the personal skills and confidence that they need in their job roles to enable them to progress to positions with higher levels of responsibility.
- There is a strong culture of valuing the individual; learners and apprentices respect each other and their teachers and assessors. All learners are supported to achieve their personal learning goals.
- Learners feel safe and are fully aware of how to report any concerns they may have about possible risks to themselves or to others. They receive helpful information and support about risks related to radicalisation, bullying and all forms of abuse. When learners raise concerns, managers investigate and deal with them appropriately and sensitively.
- Teachers and assessors have only recently started to develop learners' understanding of life in Britain. They are beginning to develop their understanding of how to respect and consider cultural values and differences in their workplace. Assessors promote apprentices' general understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace effectively.
- Attendance, particularly on adult programmes and in English and mathematics subjects is too low. Managers recognise this, and actions to improve attendance are in place but have not yet had sufficient impact.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their learning goals in English and mathematics is too low. The majority of teachers do not challenge their learners sufficiently to make good progress in the development of these skills.
- The most-able learners do not always achieve their full potential. Teachers are not fully maximising the information that they collect at enrolment to ensure that they plan learning to meet the needs of all learners.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- The college provides study programmes across a range of vocational subject areas for learners aged 16 to 19 and adult programmes, including Jobcentre Plus. The majority of learners are on apprenticeship programmes at intermediate, advanced and higher levels. A significant number of learners access learning through subcontractors for study programmes, traineeships, apprenticeships and high needs.
- Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve underperforming vocational courses and apprenticeships. Managers closely monitor learners' overall progress. As a result, most current learners' progress is now good. Apprenticeship achievement rates have improved significantly since last year and are now high, particularly at intermediate level. The proportion of apprentices who complete within their planned timescales is slightly higher than that of similar providers. Apprenticeship achievement rates for subcontracted provision are also high because college managers monitor the provision effectively. Achievement rates for adults are high. Pass rates are high in the majority of subject areas, although a minority of subjects require improvement, for example on health and care courses. Learners gain confidence and self-esteem through participating in learning and this often results in transformative changes in their lives.
- Retention rates for learners on the very large majority of programmes have improved in the current year and fewer learners leave the college after one year. A much higher proportion are now continuing onto further study at the college. Learners develop a range of skills they need for employment such as

customer service skills, communication and technical skills.

- The majority of current apprentices make at least the progress expected and many make good progress taking into account their relatively low starting points. All learners and apprentices gain relevant and valuable personal and social skills that help them to grow in confidence and deal effectively with their colleagues and the clients with whom they work.
- Learners' work is often good and they develop skills that they can apply to their current study and future employment. Nearly three quarters of learners come to the college with low levels of prior attainment and aspirations and teachers support them very well to develop their confidence and employability skills. Teachers support learners with mental health conditions particularly well.
- The large majority of learners progress onto further study, employment or to apprenticeships. The large majority of learners who apply to higher education successfully obtain a place at university. The courses that they go on to study match well to their initial goals and ambitions. Learners benefit from the comprehensive and specialist guidance they receive from staff in helping them plan their next steps.
- The progression rates to employment for learners on traineeships are in line with that of similar providers. Seven out of ten learners now progress to employment.
- Overall achievement rates for young people on study programmes are in line with national rates. While the vast majority pass their vocational qualification, the proportion of learners who pass functional skills in English and mathematics remains low. The proportion of learners who achieve a high grade in English and mathematics is also low.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- The college provides study programmes for over 400 learners on vocational courses, covering construction, engineering, hospitality and catering, childcare, health and social care, hair and beauty and information technology from entry level to level 3. Managers ensure that subcontracted provision meets the needs of local employers and communities and complements the college provision. For example, they work well with a local Orthodox Jewish contractor and a large international motor manufacturer.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their learning goals in English and mathematics is too low. The majority of teachers do not challenge their learners sufficiently to make good progress in the development of these skills. In too many vocational lessons, learners receive insufficient support to improve their English skills. Learners' attendance at their English and mathematics lessons is too low.
- Too much teaching and learning does not respond sufficiently to the needs of all learners. Learners with a wide range of abilities often complete the same tasks in lessons. As a result, the most-able learners do not make the progress they are capable of achieving.
- Teachers do not set specific enough targets to help learners improve their skills and knowledge. For example, targets set in progress reviews are too general and do not focus on the areas where learners need to improve. Teachers do not review targets in a timely manner, with the result that learners are not able to reflect on their progress.
- Learners develop good technical and professional skills in vocational lessons, which prepare them well for progression and employment. For example, in hospitality and catering, teachers provide a strong focus on food preparation skills and as a result, learners acquire the technical skills required to enable them to produce complex dishes for restaurant service.
- A range of highly committed employers provide good-quality work experience placements that enable learners to develop a range of vocationally relevant skills; for example, hairdressing learners acquire good communication skills when dealing with clients. Teachers organise a good range of external events and visits that are relevant to their learners' next steps. For example, a local hotel allowed learners to use its beauty therapy salon for a day to enable learners to practice their beauty treatment skills on clients.
- Learners receive good quality impartial careers guidance that they value greatly. This prepares them well for their next steps; a very large proportion of learners progress to higher education, further study, apprenticeships or employment.
- Learners behave well and show respect for each other and their teachers. They demonstrate a good understanding of equality and diversity by valuing each other's contributions. They have a good attitude to learning and come to lessons well-prepared.

Adult learning programmes

are good

- The college provides a wide range of provision for adult learners including courses to prepare adults for work, vocational courses, a small community learning programme, an access to higher education programme, and courses in English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). There are currently nearly 400 adult learners at the college, with an additional 79 learners on the study programme. Overall, in the current year around 1,600 learners have studied at the college.
- The college works effectively with a wide range of partners, including employers, Jobcentre Plus, community organisations and universities. This ensures that the adult learning provision closely matches the needs of local industries, employers and learners intending to progress to employment or university. For example, the employability programme now includes progression routes to level 2 provision and an enhanced programme for learners who are furthest away from returning to the labour market. This year's ESOL workshops on hospital premises in Durham have been successful in improving the communication skills of 19 recently recruited Italian nurses in relation to removing the barriers of language to enable them to enter work.
- Teachers have high expectations for adult learners and act as positive role models so that learners, who have not always fully engaged in education, raise their aspirations. They provide a safe learning environment in which learners exchange ideas and viewpoints freely, build their sense of self-worth and surpass their own expectations. Learners take pride in their work and the majority achieve challenging deadlines, despite complex lives and childcare responsibilities.
- The very large majority of adult learners achieve their qualifications. Learners on employability programmes develop a wide range of useful skills and knowledge that increase their chances of gaining employment in sectors such as construction, health and social care, and customer care. Learners on vocational programmes increase their knowledge of occupationally relevant terminology. Learners on the access to higher education programme produce well-structured assignments, improve their research skills, and reference their written work and interpret data accurately.
- Teachers provide effective support so that learners complete work to the expected standards. They use their subject knowledge and a range of well-structured interactive and interesting activities set in vocational contexts, to sustain interest and aid progress. Learners enjoy their sessions and develop effective team-working skills. They benefit from constructive verbal feedback that helps them to build confidence and to restore self-belief. In the majority of sessions, teachers use the latest commercial products and information learning technology to enhance learning. For example, on construction courses, teachers introduced a newly available hybrid adhesive to ensure that learners develop and update their skills in plastering.
- Teachers assess learners' work accurately. Most teachers monitor learners' progress systematically during sessions and provide detailed written feedback that provides learners with sufficiently clear guidance about the specific improvements they need to make to their written work. However, teachers do not consistently set specific actions and deadlines to help learners to develop their vocational and study skills further. A significant minority of learners, who fail to attend regularly, do not always have specific targets to help them to improve their attendance.
- The majority of teachers develop adult learners' English and mathematics skills well. However, they do not always ensure that learners correct errors in their use of English during lessons and in assignments. Teachers do not systematically develop mathematical skills in lessons and although the proportion of learners who achieve grades A* to C in GCSE mathematics is higher than that for younger learners; it is still not high enough.
- Learners make informed choices for their next step to further study or employment because they receive good impartial careers guidance from staff. This ensures that learners enter relevant programmes at appropriate levels of learning and, as a result, the majority of learners progress to paid employment or higher levels of learning.

Apprenticeships

are good

- The college has 3,402 apprentices in eight subject areas, with the largest numbers in health and social care, engineering and business management and administration; 1,816 apprentices train with one of its subcontractors. The majority study at level 2. Apprentices either are new to their roles or require significant additional training to meet the demands of their jobs. Assessors design programmes effectively to meet the needs of employers and apprentices, and fulfil the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Managers have successfully implemented rigorous improvement strategies, which have been effective in improving success rates and the numbers achieving within their planned timescale. Managers effectively monitor detailed improvement action plans for each curriculum area. Regular meetings take place to

enable early interventions where concerns about an apprentice's performance arise. This has resulted in a significant improvement in the retention of current apprentices and the majority are now making expected or better progress.

- The college has very good partnership arrangements with its subcontractors and meets local and regional priorities well. The college and subcontractors work collaboratively and effectively in the best interests of apprentices and employers. Assessors consider the personal circumstances of apprentices when scheduling workplace visits to ensure that they make good progress. Assessors consider employer needs effectively; they ensure that they accommodate shift patterns and start times when planning sessions for apprentices.
- The vast majority of assessors have good technical ability and knowledge that they use skilfully to develop apprentices' practical skills. For example, apprentices on health and social care programmes learn how to use correct communication skills when working with individuals with profound learning difficulties. Apprentices develop good skills, which meet employers' needs well. For example, a level 2 engineering apprentice is making a valuable contribution to the increased efficiency of the organisation as a key member of the car manufacturing production team.
- Assessors provide apprentices with highly effective advice and guidance and, as a result, they are very aware of their next steps. Assessors plan programmes carefully to provide apprentices with a wide range of long-term career development opportunities. For example, a level 3 housing apprentice has gained promotion and increased his salary because of gaining his qualification. Almost all apprentices remain in employment or progress to higher level learning at the end of their programme.
- Apprentices are motivated and enjoy their programmes. Their standard of behaviour is good. They demonstrate respect for their assessors, peers and colleagues and have a good understanding of how to stay safe and adopt safe working practices. They have a clear understanding of equality and diversity, safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and radicalisation. They also know who to approach if they have any concerns. However, the majority of apprentices do not have a well-developed knowledge of modern British values.
- Most assessors plan sessions well and use a wide range of teaching and learning strategies. Teachers link theory and practice well with good examples from the workplace. Apprentices undertake a wide range of relevant learning activities and access good resources. However, assessors do not always set targets that focus sufficiently on deepening knowledge and understanding. As a result, this impedes the progress of the most-able apprentices.
- The majority of apprentices develop good English and mathematics skills and apply them effectively at work. A minority of assessors are not always prioritising English and mathematics. As a result, a minority of apprentices are not equipped to develop these skills and do not always see the relevance and importance of these skills throughout the programme and in the workplace.

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	9,086
Principal/CEO	Karen Redhead
Website address	www.derwentside.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+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	52	108	148	144	181	139	N/A	N/A
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	176	1,710	88	1,104	N/A	324		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	27		3		30			
Number of learners aged 14–16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)/Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AWITT ■ Brenikov Training ■ Group Horizon ■ KF Training ■ Learning 4 Ever ■ NAC Group ■ Real Choice College ■ The TTE Technical Training Group ■ Vision Training 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

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Paul Cocker	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bob Hamp	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Joyce Guthrie	Ofsted Inspector
Stella Owen	Ofsted Inspector
Joanna Stokes	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the vice principal – curriculum and quality, as nominee. 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 learners, apprentices 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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