

City College Coventry

General further education college

Inspection dates

24–27 January 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Outcomes for learners, though improving, remain too low.
- Too few learners on classroom-based programmes successfully develop appropriate levels of skill in English and mathematics or achieve their qualifications in these subjects.
- Too few learners aged 16 to 19 benefit from significant external work experience.
- Too few teachers use information on learners' prior learning and attainment well enough to plan learning activities that enable learners to accelerate their knowledge and skills and make the swift progress of which many are capable.
- Teachers do not set and monitor learners' targets consistently well.
- The quality of teachers' feedback to learners does not consistently inform them of what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their learning further.
- Too few learners have a well-developed understanding of life in modern Britain and how to keep safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders' and managers' use of systems and processes to judge the effectiveness of improvement actions are not yet sufficiently sophisticated to give them a clear view of the progress that learners make.

The provider has the following strengths

- Under the direction of a new interim principal and experienced board, senior leaders have taken decisive action to bring about improvements that are beginning to raise standards in teaching, learning and assessment across most parts of the college including in apprenticeships.
- Leaders' strong focus on performance management is beginning to raise the expectations among staff for the achievement of their learners.
- The college has an inclusive environment; very positive relationships exist between learners and their teachers. Learners work well together, respecting differences in culture and ethnic heritage.
- Personal and pastoral help for learners is good; those who are vulnerable benefit from high levels of care and support.
- High-quality specialist accommodation and industry-standard resources that enhance learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

- City College Coventry is a medium-sized general further education college located on a single site in Hillfields near the centre of Coventry. The college has provision within 12 of the 15 subject areas. Coventry has two further education colleges, a number of schools with sixth forms and two nearby universities. Most learners are studying on 16 to 19 study programmes. Locally, the college is the largest provider of apprenticeship programmes in construction and motor vehicle.
- The proportion of pupils in Coventry who gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is below the national rate. The proportion of residents in the locality qualified at levels 1, 2 and 3 is lower than the national rate. The number of local residents that are unemployed and in receipt of benefits is similar to that across the West Midlands but higher than the national rate.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers routinely use information from initial and ongoing assessments to identify learners' initial starting points, to enable the more effective planning of individual learning and how planned activities will meet the needs of different groups of learners
 - teachers and assessors use challenging tasks and activities to quicken the pace of learning, maintain learners' interest and make better use of the time available in lessons, so that all learners and apprentices make good and rapid progress in their learning
 - teachers utilise a wider range of strategies to check learners' understanding in order to assess the progress they make in taught sessions and to plan further opportunities to extend their learning both within and outside the classroom
 - teachers provide clearer feedback to learners and apprentices about how to improve their work, and that all learners and apprentices are suitably challenged to respond to the guidance provided through regular feedback and marking
 - teachers and assessors provide more effective help and guidance for apprentices, particularly through more regular reviews of their progress, both at college and in the workplace, ensuring that assessors focus sharply on setting precise targets and on the rate at which apprentices are developing their technical knowledge, vocational skills and personal development, so that they achieve their qualifications successfully within their planned timescales
 - subject teachers take every opportunity to incorporate English and mathematics into planned learning activities, so that learners in GCSE, functional skills and vocational lessons are motivated to improve their English and mathematics skills
 - for learners aged 16 to 19, work experience is an integral part of their study programme; curriculum staff should use the developing links with local employers and voluntary organisations to increase the quantity of purposeful work experience and ensure that learners benefit from a detailed assessment of the skills and knowledge

gained from such activities.

- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan and develop more interesting and effective ways to integrate and deepen learners' understanding of life in modern Britain and the importance of the 'Prevent' duty, ensuring that all learners have a secure understanding of these aspects, how they apply to themselves as individuals and the wider communities in which they live and work.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders and managers set targets to improve performance that are sufficiently precise and that management reports focus more strongly on the impact of the actions they have taken.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The current interim principal, who joined the college shortly after the previous inspection has been successful in bringing about improvement across the college. Due to the principal's skilled actions and the increased capacity of the new leadership team, they have successfully commenced the process of improving the standard of education and training for learners and apprentices at the college. The pace of improvement is now beginning to accelerate and outcomes for learners are beginning to improve, but further improvement is still required.
- Senior leaders have established a clear set of high expectations and shared these well with both staff and learners. They communicate well a clear set of performance expectations for individual courses, teachers and assessors. Managers are now beginning to monitor performance against these targets more effectively, intervening where necessary. This is starting to have a positive impact on the performance and standards achieved by learners. However, leaders and managers do not set and monitor targets for learners' progress as consistently as other targets, such as those for attendance and attainment; as a result, leaders and governors do not have a precise enough understanding of how well current learners are performing against their learning targets.
- Leaders have taken robust action that has successfully addressed a number of significant, deep-rooted and long-standing quality and performance concerns. They have improved the quality of pre-enrolment advice and guidance, and this has resulted in a marked decrease in the number of learners withdrawing from their course or transferring to another programme part way through their studies. Leaders and managers now give sufficiently high priority to the importance of English and mathematics, particularly for learners on study programmes. Improved course timetabling arrangements ensure that these essential subjects are given priority in scheduling and timetabled more frequently, and at times that are more convenient to learners. As a result, learners' attendance has improved in these lessons, increasing their chances of successfully passing their qualifications.
- Senior leaders have successfully restructured the management of apprenticeship programmes to tackle the poor performance identified at the previous inspection. Recent actions, including the appointment of new staff and the more effective use of performance and tracking data, have resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of provision received by current apprentices. A majority of apprentices now make at least expected progress against challenging learning plan targets. Managers recognise that further improvement is still required, particularly in achieving greater consistency in the performance of all apprentices by level and across different vocational areas.
- Leaders have implemented much-improved quality assurance processes, including a more rigorous lesson observation scheme. Managers observed all members of teaching staff early in the autumn term through a series of short learning walks to identify quickly areas of concern and immediate training needs. These are followed up with a series of full lesson observations. In most cases, observations focus appropriately on learning and learners' progress and identify features of lessons that have the most impact on these aspects.

- Each observation results in a clear, individual development plan for the teacher; where common themes emerge, managers provide appropriate whole-college training interventions. Early indications are that this strategy is beginning to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Despite increased expectations, a range of effective actions and improved quality assurance processes, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet consistently good. A minority of observations focus too much on teachers' activities rather than learners' progress. Although managers are beginning to make better use of a range of data to support judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, this is not yet fully embedded in quality improvement processes. In addition, managers have yet to observe trainers and assessors involved in apprenticeship provision, an area of significant historical poor performance.
- Managers are beginning to make effective use of performance management processes, for example by holding staff to better account for the outcomes that learners achieve on the courses they teach. Managers are helping staff to become effective teachers through targeted professional development. Managers have substantially reduced the amount of staff absence and weak teaching; around 30 full-time staff have left the college since the previous inspection. It is still too early to judge the full impact of these actions across the college, particularly as outcomes are not yet consistently good.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the college's provision is broadly accurate. Managers have produced a self-assessment report and quality improvement plan that are realistic and self-critical. Inspectors agree with most of the strengths and areas for improvement identified in the report, but leaders and managers give too much emphasis to the progress made and actions taken from a low starting point. This means that they have understated the position of the college at the end of the last academic year and what needed to happen to bring about more rapid and consistent improvement.
- Managers have carefully considered the local context, including competition from schools, input from stakeholders and labour market information, when developing the college's strategic plan. This sets out carefully the future direction of the curriculum, but is yet to have a significant impact on the overall range of courses on offer at the college. Some staff have developed productive relationships with employers and these are beginning to provide useful opportunities for learners beyond the curriculum. For example, a partnership with one major information technology (IT) company has enabled learners to develop a virtual reality product as part of a national competition. However, other staff have not yet fully exploited links with local employers to ensure that all learners, particularly on study programmes, benefit from good work experience placements.
- College managers have worked hard to improve the financial position of the college and to ensure that it is in a position to provide sustainable, high-quality provision. They have successfully reversed a position of significant financial deficit to one in which the college is generating a small annual surplus. Governors and managers are actively considering plans for merger with another local provider to secure the long-term viability of existing provision and to meet the forecast post-16 skills needs across the city.

The governance of the provider

- Following the previous inspection, governors recognised their responsibility to provide better support and challenge to leaders. They took swift and decisive action to ensure that appropriate management arrangements were quickly put in place to sustain the

college. They now demand and receive better quality information. They use this well to support senior leaders and hold them to account more stringently. Governors now robustly challenge managers when they consider that the information and reports they receive are insufficiently detailed.

- Governors understand the strengths and weakness of the college and focus their efforts accordingly. They recognise the continuing challenges facing the college and are working to ensure the sustainability of appropriate provision within the city.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and managers take all aspects of their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. They follow safer recruitment practice and undertake appropriate pre-employment checks on all members of staff, and record-keeping is both accurate and up to date.
- Effective relationships exist with outside agencies, such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), the multi-agency safeguarding hub, the police, and children and adolescent mental health services to ensure that safeguarding concerns can be reported and dealt with where this is necessary.
- Informative and helpful guidelines are in place to cover all aspects of safeguarding including the 'Prevent' duty. These include policies and procedures for child protection, vetting of visiting speakers and monitoring and filtering of IT systems. Staff follow these consistently. All staff have received appropriate training, and this is updated on an annual basis.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has improved but is not yet consistently good or better across all provision. A majority of teachers in classroom sessions spend long periods presenting information, leaving insufficient opportunity for learners to share ideas with each other, or discuss and debate topics so as to extend their knowledge and understanding. Teachers do not sufficiently consolidate key learning points for learners arising from planned learning activities. They move too quickly to the next planned topic, resulting in learners not being clear what they have learned and how it relates to the overall learning outcomes of the lesson.
- Teachers make insufficient use of the results arising from both initial and diagnostic assessments to inform the planning and sequencing of learning activities to provide appropriate levels of challenge and enable all learners to reach their full potential. As a result, learners often complete the same task, regardless of their ability and prior experience. Some learners struggle with allocated tasks because they do not yet possess the requisite skills to cope with the demands of the allocated task, while for the most able learners, planned learning activities lack sufficient pace and challenge.
- Assessment of learning is not sufficiently rigorous across the college. Too often, particularly for those learners on study programmes, teachers do not check thoroughly or effectively learners' knowledge and understanding before the introduction of a new topic or task. Learners do not make the progress of which they are capable because they are not ready for the next step. Teachers use too narrow a range of approaches to check on and confirm the extent of the learning taking place. For example, they rely too heavily on

questions that only the more confident learners in the group respond to, or accept superficial answers that do not encourage learners to think more deeply about the topics they are learning. In contrast, on adult learning and apprenticeship courses, most teachers use their subject and occupational knowledge well to plan a wide range of activities that interest and motivate learners and apprentices. They are skilled at using follow-up questions to ensure that learners and apprentices have understood the teaching, to generate interesting class discussions and extend learning and progress.

- Targets set for the majority of learners are often too broad and generic, focusing on the completion of assignments or whole units. As a result, many learners do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers do not routinely and systematically make a formal record of detailed discussions with learners during planned tutorials to monitor their progress. As a result, a significant minority of learners are unsure about their individual strengths and weaknesses or their current targets to help them improve.
- Written feedback to learners, particularly those following apprenticeship courses and for learners with high needs, is too brief and does not routinely provide sufficiently detailed information to extend their understanding and improve their performance. Teachers often annotate learners' work to identify technical errors, including errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, but they provide too little guidance to learners about how to correct their work or to help them remember basic rules, for example with aspects of written language.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics skills is insufficient, with too few learners making secure progress in these essential skills. Following the previous inspection, managers have worked hard to implement new strategies to improve the teaching of discrete English and mathematics lessons and to equip vocational staff with the skills to embed successfully literacy and numeracy skills into a range of vocational contexts. The impact of these improvements is not yet fully evident across the college, but learners are beginning to improve their confidence in English and mathematics; in a few lessons learners now make good progress towards their functional skills and GCSE qualifications.
- A minority of teachers make learning stimulating and include different activities that maintain learners' interests well. For example, in a practical session, level 2 and level 3 construction apprentices enjoyed working on a wide variety of brickwork tasks, including constructing foundations, blockwork and using a variety of bonds to develop the practical skills they require to be successful in their jobs for a local construction company. Staff use their good knowledge and expertise to bring learning to life, deepen learners' understanding and make learning relevant and interesting. Learners work productively together and respond enthusiastically, requiring minimum supervision to complete vocational tasks and produce work of a high standard.
- Learners benefit from consistently good support from a wide range of college staff including teachers, assessors, achievement coaches, learning support assistants and staff from teams providing information, advice and guidance and student services. This has led to much improved levels of attendance, more learners staying on, and enhanced rates of learner satisfaction, both with the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and with the impact of the more frequent and targeted support they now receive.
- Apprentices work in high-quality workplaces in a wide range of industries, including transport, telecommunications, construction and engineering. Employers take a keen

interest in their apprentices' learning programme. They support the planning of on-the-job training and job-related activities with the assessor, providing opportunities in the workplace that support well the development of apprentices' vocational knowledge, understanding and practical skills.

- Teachers create harmonious working relationships in sessions between diverse groups of learners, making them feel secure and more able to focus on their studies. Learners from varied backgrounds show high levels of respect for teachers and their peers; they have a good grasp of the importance of the values of diversity, inclusion and respect. Learners work enthusiastically together to complete tasks and demonstrate tolerance and understanding when members of the group express their opinions in discussions and debates. For example, in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), learners develop their speaking and listening skills as they discuss cultural differences in how to find life-long partners and the importance of marriage.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Learners' attendance at lessons, though much improved and now in line with the revised college target, is still too low.
- The development of learners' skills in English and mathematics is not sufficiently effective across all courses. Communication between vocational and English and mathematics staff is not frequent or effective enough; consequently, too few teachers consistently challenge learners to extend their English and mathematics skills.
- Too few learners on study programmes have undertaken significant work experience. While managers have detailed plans in place for learners to participate in work experience activities, most learners are unsure when this will occur. In contrast, the significant minority of learners who have completed a work placement report it to be very beneficial. In a few cases, learners have secured paid employment as a result of such activities.
- In a very small minority of lessons, learners are not working to commercial standards and therefore not developing core employability skills and behaviours. While classroom-based learners have the opportunity to benefit from a range of enrichment activities that enhance their personal, social and employment-related skills, participation rates are generally low.
- Learners on all provision types do not have a detailed enough understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism or the importance of British values. While the college ensures that all learners and apprentices receive training on these matters at induction, most do not have a precise understanding of the characteristics that underpin British values or of how they can identify, and protect themselves from, the dangers associated with various forms of extremism.
- Most learners and apprentices develop an appropriate range of vocational and technical skills, which improves their employability skills. Many are able to work independently and take pride in their work and their achievements. For example, learners in performing arts demonstrate their creative skills by performing in choreographed presentations at an annual end of year show, while others act as college ambassadors, guiding visitors at college open events. Learners in art and design take great pride in having examples of their work exhibited at the Herbert Gallery. A college apprentice recently received the City

of Coventry 'Apprentice of the Year' award.

- Learners who have a significant disability or high needs make steady progress in their learning and develop a wide range of practical, personal and employability skills that successfully help them to become more independent in their everyday lives.
- Learners aged 16 to 19 and adults benefit from effective careers guidance from teachers and a specialist careers guidance tutor. Learners value the drop-in careers support workshop and the advice and guidance that they receive. College staff use very well their extensive industry and commercial experience to help learners make informed decisions about their next steps in education, training or employment. However, progression to the next level of learning, particularly for adults, is low, at around a third.
- Learners enjoy their time at college; their behaviour around the college is good. Apprentices' behaviour in the workplace is also good. Learners and apprentices are respectful, courteous and considerate of the needs of others, including peers, college staff and visitors.
- Learners and apprentices feel safe at college, in the workplace and when online. Most know how to report any concerns they may have. They are confident that their concerns are taken seriously and followed through appropriately. Learners state that incidents of bullying or harassment are rare and quickly dealt with by college staff.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 and adult learners who successfully gain their qualifications, though improved since the previous inspection, still remains too low. However, as a result of the wide range of improvement actions implemented by leaders and managers following the previous inspection, more learners and apprentices are now staying on their courses and an increasing majority now make secure progress in line with their learning plans.
- Compared to their prior attainment, learners aged 16 to 19 on advanced-level courses achieve well. Outcomes for the small minority of learners aged 16 to 19 who were in receipt of free school meals have improved since the previous inspection. Similarly, achievement is high for the few learners who were formerly children looked after.
- The proportion of apprentices who successfully achieve their apprenticeship within the planned time remains too low. Data supplied by the college indicates that a significant majority of current apprentices are now making much better progress and are on target to complete within the planned times, including those studying for intermediate and advanced-level apprenticeships in engineering, construction and business administration.
- The proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who achieve GCSE English at grades A* to C is too low. Achievement in English and mathematics functional skills qualifications at levels 1 and 2 for both learners aged 16 to 19 and adult learners is low and requires improvement. Outcomes for the small minority of learners aged 16 to 19 and the few adults who undertake functional skills in English and mathematics at entry level is high and above the national rate.
- Achievement gaps between different learner groups, including those who have declared disabilities, by gender and different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, have increased since

the previous inspection.

- Based on the latest published college performance data, learners' achievements in different vocational subject areas and by level and age are too variable to be good. In response to this, managers have discontinued some poorly performing provision and reorganised other courses to provide learners with a more consistent and positive experience. However, this had an adverse effect on the proportion of learners who progress internally with the college, particularly for adults. Only around 30% progressed to the next level of learning. For learners aged 16 to 19, internal progression rates are much better, at 57%. Based on college data, just under 20% of all classroom-based learners progress to sustained employment, and a very small minority move on to higher education.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Currently, there are 1,681 learners enrolled on study programmes in 12 vocational areas, the largest being: health, public services and care; art, media and publishing; and construction. A majority of learners are studying at levels 1 and 2.
- The number of learners aged 16 to 19 who achieve their qualifications, though improving from the previous inspection, is still low and below the national rate. Too few learners achieve functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics or achieve GCSE grades A* to C as part of their course. Managers have implemented a number of strategies to improve learners' progress and performance in these essential skills, but the impact of recently implemented actions is not yet consistent in all vocational areas.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment, while improving, is not yet good. In more-effective lessons, teachers develop learners' practical and vocational skills well, confirming learners' knowledge and understanding through the use of directed and probing questions and using high-quality resources to challenge and extend their learning. In these lessons teachers are adept at planning a range of appropriate extension activities that successfully meet the needs of individual learners. As a result, learners enjoy their learning, acquire new knowledge and make good progress.
- Learners benefit from helpful and constructive feedback on their work that helps identify what they do well and where they need to improve.
- In less-effective lessons, the pace of learning planned by teachers is often insufficiently responsive to the wide range of abilities of learners in the class, who often complete the same task, irrespective of their initial starting points. Most-able learners are not given sufficient opportunity to explore ideas in depth or develop higher technical skills in line with their potential, whereas other learners find allocated tasks too difficult and become disengaged from learning.
- Resources to support learners in classrooms and practical areas are of a high standard. They enjoy learning through using technology and interesting online learning activities. Learners' use of the college's virtual learning environment to extend their learning outside of the classroom is underdeveloped. Learners benefit from regular access to up-to-date facilities in practical areas such as construction, engineering, motor vehicle, IT, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and performing arts to practise and consolidate their

vocational skills.

- Learners benefit from good support and individual coaching. These contribute well to their learning and development. Learners receive prompt and supportive oral feedback. Too many learners receive insufficiently detailed written feedback to help them identify what they have done accurately and what they need to do to improve the standard of their work.
- Teachers do not consistently use the information from initial assessment activities to plan effectively for the needs of individual learners. Targets set for learners are generally focused around academic achievement and do not provide a strong focus on the development of wider skills, including skills in English and mathematics and readiness for work.
- Too few learners benefit from the opportunity to undertake relevant and valuable work experience which supports their learning and personal aspirations. Where learners do participate in work experience, they develop their employability skills well. Learners have access to a range of college enrichment activities that extend their confidence and social skills. However, too few take part.
- Initiatives to improve attendance rates are starting to have a positive impact on learners' attitudes to coming into college regularly. Attendance is now in line with the college target, but is not consistently high across all curriculum areas and so requires further improvement. Learners are generally punctual to lessons and understand the consequences of being late.
- Learners are polite and respectful of one another, they feel safe and know whom to contact should issues arise. Their understanding of British values and how to keep safe from the threat of extremism and radicalisation is less secure.

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Adult programmes account for just under half of the college's classroom-based provision. At the time of inspection, around 1,300 adult learners were enrolled at the college, over half of whom study in discrete adult provision.
- The largest group of learners study on ESOL courses or have progressed from these courses to adult English and mathematics studies, either in functional skills or at GCSE level. Smaller numbers of adult learners study on access to higher education courses. The remainder study on a wide range of vocational courses.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies considerably across the adult provision, and too little is good or better. Teachers do not regularly use targets well enough to motivate learners effectively and to measure accurately their progress. Where teachers do set weekly targets, for example in most ESOL lessons, learners benefit from immediate feedback from the teacher regarding their progress; this gives them encouragement, as well as clear guidance for improvement.
- Teaching of English and mathematics functional skills does not take into account the wide variation in learners' initial starting points. Staff assess learners' skills accurately at the start of their programme, but this makes little difference to how teachers plan and teach lessons. For example, in a functional skills English lesson, the teacher taught the topic of apostrophes in the same way to a group of learners with a wider range of prior

attainment from entry level to level 2, despite very different initial understanding and examination expectations. This approach left the learners at entry level confused.

- In too many cases, teachers do not have high enough expectations of their learners and are too willing to give solutions to questions they pose, rather than equipping learners with the independent learning skills to solve questions for themselves. For example, in a mathematics lesson on probability theory, a learner who had not fully grasped the concept sought help; the teacher gave the learner the correct answer rather than helping them to think more deeply about the topic and to explore different approaches to work out the right answer.
- In the majority of ESOL lessons teachers give insufficient emphasis to the development of learners' speaking skills, particularly the importance of correct pronunciation during oral work. Learners make good progress in developing reading, writing and listening skills, but they make less progress in developing their speaking skills.
- Teachers in ESOL and access to higher education courses plan learning well. This leads to learners making good progress. Teachers employ a range of well-structured learning activities which successfully stimulate and extend learners' knowledge and understanding of English and its application to a variety of everyday situations. For example, in one ESOL lesson, learners were required to match colourful images relating to a visit to the dentist with vocabulary cards. This then formed the basis of a group spelling quiz which learners enjoyed.
- Teachers mark assessed work accurately and in a timely manner. Learners benefit from detailed written and oral feedback on areas where they do well and on how they might do better. Teachers mark both classwork and homework before the next lesson, providing regular feedback to learners on their progress. As a result, teachers identify those learners at risk of not achieving, so that they may put into place quickly appropriate interventions. They use peer assessment effectively to help learners understand their strengths and weaknesses as they prepare for the assessment of their speaking skills.
- Teachers use IT effectively to develop learners' understanding and to engage them in interesting activities. For example, learners competed against each other in an interactive quiz to revise their understanding of modal verbs, while in a lesson on accountancy, the teacher skilfully demonstrated how payroll software is used to work out a variety of complex tax calculations.
- Teachers provide good support to learners in lessons to maximise their chances of success. They provide sensitive and thoughtful guidance where learners are unclear or need extra help. Those learners who lack confidence in learning, or who have personal circumstances which make study difficult, receive high levels of support, which enables them to progress well.
- Good initial advice and guidance and thorough assessment of learners' prior attainment ensure that the great majority of learners are placed on the level of course most suited to their needs, interests and future aspirations. Learners on the access to higher education programme receive particularly thorough advice to help them in their transition to university, including individual guidance from a specialist advisor, and comprehensive support with university applications.
- Leaders plan adult provision well to meet the needs of the community and the needs of learners seeking employment. Good collaborative arrangements with the local authority

lead to a coordinated approach to planning city-wide provision and facilitate well-considered progression arrangements for adults, including to higher education.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- There are currently 534 apprentices in training, of whom around half are aged 19 or above. Apprentices train in a range of occupational areas that meet local needs well, including engineering, motor vehicle, construction, health and social care, creative and digital media, customer service and business administration. There are similar numbers of apprentices on intermediate- and advanced-level apprenticeships, with a few studying for higher-level apprenticeships.
- Since the previous inspection, the numbers of apprentices successfully completing their programme and within agreed timescales remain too low. Recently appointed managers have conducted a detailed analysis of the reasons for historic poor performance and have taken appropriate actions to implement higher standards of training and assessment for current apprentices. Newly appointed trainers and assessors are now held to close account for the success of their learners. The majority of apprentices now make at least the progress expected of them and are on target to complete their apprenticeships within the expected timescale.
- Apprentices now display positive attitudes to their learning. Attendance and punctuality have both significantly improved. Much of apprentices' work reflects good professional standards. The vast majority of apprentices progress to sustained employment and a few gain more responsible and demanding roles at work. For example, in a large accountancy practice, an advanced business apprentice is successfully managing a complex caseload of key customer accounts.
- Recent improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have resulted in most current apprentices developing good vocational and employability skills that enhance their effectiveness within the workplace. In many sessions, learners now benefit from well-planned training in which highly relevant practical topics provide interest and motivation. Apprentices make good use of the industry-standard resources in the college to consolidate their learning and hone their practical skills well. However, in less-effective sessions, trainers and assessors do not sufficiently take into account apprentices' existing skills and experience or check their understanding enough. The impact of this is in slowing the progress apprentices make in their learning.
- Trainers and assessors make insufficient use of the results arising from initial assessment of apprentices' skills in English, mathematics and IT to inform the planning of learning. Consequently, apprentices do not consistently receive the right support for their individual needs in these essential skills.
- Assessment planning arrangements for apprentices are improving. Assessment in the workplace is now more frequent, well planned and undertaken by knowledgeable and experienced assessors. The involvement of employers in the apprenticeship programme is good, including the selection of optional units that best meet the needs of their employees and of the business. Most employers support apprentices well in the workplace. They ensure that apprentices undertake meaningful work and develop the required technical and professional skills for their vocational trade.

- Apprentices enjoy their learning and are well prepared for assessments. For example, in a large vehicle maintenance centre, the engineering manager ensured that the apprentices were undertaking practical tasks relevant to their college work, enabling the consolidation of off-the-job learning, as well as the collection of relevant evidence of work-based competency. In construction, a carpentry apprentice carefully prepared a working area, enabling him to successfully demonstrate to his assessor the technical competencies involved in accurately measuring out, cutting and installing a partition wall to the upper floor of a new dwelling.
- In a small number of cases, employers are not always routinely involved in progress reviews. As a result, they are not aware of the progress of their employees or are sufficiently aware of how they can support them to complete their qualifications within agreed timescales.
- Teachers provide good support to apprentices that helps them to understand the theoretical and technical concepts that underpin their practical work. They become more confident and able to relate their knowledge and skills to industry standards. However, too often, written feedback on apprentices' assessed work does not provide sufficient detail to help them identify how they can make better progress or provide them with a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve further the quality of their work.
- Apprentices feel safe and have a good understanding of how to protect themselves and others. They demonstrate a strong focus on health and safety, such as following safe working practices, and use specialist tools and equipment with confidence. They contribute effectively to health and safety practices within the workplace through relevant contributions to 'toolbox talks'.
- Apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity and British values is insufficiently secure. While such topics are discussed in lessons and during planned reviews in the workplace, apprentices' understanding of these important aspects is too basic and at a rudimentary level.

Provision for learners with high needs

Requires improvement

- The college currently has 47 learners receiving high-needs funding from two local authorities. The large majority of learners are taught within vocational areas across the college at level 2 and level 3. The remainder attend discrete courses at entry level or level 1.
- The development of learners' employability skills requires improvement. A small minority of learners develop good work-related skills in a range of settings. An entry-level group of motor vehicle learners work on a weekly basis at a local garage undertaking routine maintenance of vehicles for paying customers, or work on reception or in the learning resource centre at the college. However, too few learners benefit from such opportunities. For the large majority of learners on vocational courses, placements are not planned until much later in the year.
- Target-setting and monitoring of learners' progress are insufficiently effective. A team of support staff assess learners' needs thoroughly as part of their transition into college, but staff do not use this information effectively to set specific and measurable goals and targets to enable precise monitoring of progress over time. Targets set for learners often

link to the completion of tasks rather than focusing on critical personal skills development and are often too broad to be fully helpful.

- The development of learners' English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Learners are taught in diverse, mixed-ability groups, with teachers making little use of vocational examples to stimulate and reinforce learners' knowledge and understanding in these essential skills. Learners make some progress in sessions, such as in developing new vocabulary, in extending their skills in structuring sentences and in how to use mathematics to solve problems. However, teachers leave many errors uncorrected in marked work, and this is detrimental to their learning. The college has put initiatives in place, such as extra English and mathematics sessions specifically for learners with high needs, but it is too soon to see the full impact of these recent developments on their progress in the acquisition of these skills.
- Learners quickly develop independence and communication skills that will support them well in their future lives, for example learning how to create a good impression at a job interview, including the importance of personal presentation. They benefit from the social aspects of college life. They become more confident in speaking out, offering their opinion and making friends. Managers recognise that learners require a broader programme of learning in addition to their vocational qualifications and have introduced additional 'life skills' sessions to further support learners' confidence and progress towards independence.
- Learners make good progress in developing their practical skills and have high aspirations. They make at least comparable progress to their peers and this is reflected in the number who progress on to higher education, into paid employment or move onto the next level at college. Learners demonstrate good attitudes to learning, behave well and show high levels of respect to staff and their peers.
- Information and guidance that learners, carers and their families receive are good. Learners are placed onto appropriate courses that match their needs and interests. As a result, they quickly settle into life at the college. Learners benefit from regular tutorials and progress reviews and have a good understanding of the progress that they are making.
- Leaders and managers use high-needs funding effectively to meet learners' individual needs. A variety of support methods are in place that meet the requirements of education, health and care plans.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130473
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	3,593
Principal/CEO	Dr Elaine McMahon CBE
Telephone number	02476 791000
Website	www.covcollege.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 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	399	400	584	732	698	176	0	2
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	81	166	185	99	1		2	
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	47							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, 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 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.

Inspection team

Victor Reid, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Russ Henry	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Sykes	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Bramley	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Allan Shaw	Ofsted Inspector
Gillian Forrester	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector

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