

West Herts College

Further education and skills

Inspection dates

25–28 April 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers work effectively with employers and stakeholders to design courses and programmes that enable most students and apprentices to secure meaningful employment or further study at a higher level.
- Governance provides strong financial and strategic guidance that has enabled senior leaders to ensure the sustainability of provision and provide high-quality learning resources for students.
- Most teachers and assessors make good use of a broad range of techniques and approaches to improve students' and apprentices' work-related industry skills.
- Teachers and support staff provide high levels of pastoral and academic support that enable students and apprentices to thrive in an inclusive environment.
- The large majority of students and apprentices achieve their vocational qualifications. Most current apprentices and students make good progress and enjoy their courses.
- The majority of teachers and assessors deploy well-planned activities to enable students and apprentices to build on previous learning and enhance their knowledge and understanding of their subjects.
- A few teachers do not challenge a minority of students studying two-year study programmes at level 3 to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Too many younger and adult students do not make good progress in their English and mathematics GCSE qualifications.
- Attendance for students following study programmes is low, particularly in English and mathematics lessons.

Full report

Information about the provider

- West Herts College is a large provider with around 5,800 students and apprentices following study programmes, apprenticeships and adult and community learning courses. A small number of students with high needs study foundation, employability courses and study programmes. The college has three campuses located in Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Kings Langley. Students access the college from a wide geographical area that includes west Hertfordshire and parts of north London.
- The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics is higher in Hertfordshire than compared with that nationally. However, within a few localities that the college recruits its students, including Broxbourne and Dacorum, a much lower proportion of pupils achieve high grades than nationally. The proportion of people who are educated to level 3 and level 4 in Hertfordshire and Watford is higher than across England.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should rapidly improve students' attendance by setting high expectations of their staff to ensure that they apply more rigour in challenging students who do not attend.
- Ensure that teachers improve their skills in enabling students to accelerate their English and mathematics skills and make good progress.
- Ensure that teachers use a broad range of techniques and approaches to challenge students studying courses at level 3 to excel.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders communicate their values clearly to staff, students and apprentices and have established a positive learning environment throughout the college, founded upon tolerance and respect. As a result, a large majority of students and apprentices achieve their vocational qualifications and progress to purposeful employment or further study at a higher level.
- Leaders and managers research diligently a broad range of labour market information and the needs of local employers, communities and stakeholders and use this to provide an effective curriculum. For example, new computing courses have been introduced in collaboration with industry partners to meet the demand for workers in the region's gaming and virtual reality industries. Civil engineering courses were introduced in 2016 to enable the very large majority of engineering students to further their engineering careers by progressing to study at universities.
- Leaders have recently revised the apprenticeships provision to ensure that it meets the requirements of employers in West Hertfordshire; as a consequence, the volume of apprentices in the local area has increased threefold since 2014/15. Employers contribute well to the development and delivery of learning provision and provide students and apprentices with valuable experience of industry through placements, guest talks and visits to local companies.
- Most managers support and challenge their teachers to strive continually to improve their skills in teaching and their knowledge of their students and apprentices. However, a few managers do not set high enough standards of their staff to ensure that they tackle the widespread low attendance, particularly at English and mathematics lessons.
- Most managers align staff professional development to their strategic priorities for improvement. They place a good emphasis on improving teachers' skills following their robust judgements on their performance. Teachers who are new to teaching receive good support from a mentor and line managers. They receive helpful feedback on the quality of their teaching that enables them to improve their practice. Leaders provide teachers with good opportunities to develop their careers and most teachers attend training that improves the range of courses they can teach and/or their expertise in their subject.
- Leaders and governors monitor effectively the destinations of their students and apprentices. They ensure that staff work closely with students to enable the large majority of students and apprentices to progress to higher levels of study or purposeful employment; consequently, only a small proportion do not progress. Students completing courses at level 3 are particularly successful in gaining meaningful employment.
- Managers ensure that staff provide an effective tutorial programme that enables most students and apprentices to have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities, the rule of law and democracy.
- Leaders and managers are adept in identifying actions to secure improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, leaders and managers do not evaluate the quality of provision with sufficient rigour; their judgements about the quality of provision in their self-assessment reports do not make enough use of evidence to

support their judgements.

- Managers have been too slow in recognising that too many students enrolled on level 3 courses did not make the progress of which they are capable in 2015/16 and, until recently, have not taken swift action to prevent the sharp decline in students' attendance at lessons since 2016. Managers' recent remedial actions are bringing about improvement; however, attendance at the time of inspection was low, particularly at English and mathematics lessons.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a good range of relevant skills and expertise. They oversee a stringent and effective management of finances that has facilitated the successful development of college estates and provision of high-quality resources for students, apprentices and staff. Governors have recently strengthened the board by increasing the representation of local employers.
- Governors monitor effectively key indicators of quality, including the effectiveness of leaders' and managers' work with local employers. Governors have a good understanding of the areas for improvement, for example, the priority to improve the proportion of students who achieve the grades of which they are capable. They monitor students' and apprentices' progress assiduously throughout the year. However, in a few instances, governors do not hold leaders and managers to account sufficiently for the rigour and timeliness of the actions taken to maintain and improve the quality of provision.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff ensure that students and apprentices understand how to stay safe, including when online, and know how, and to whom, to report any concerns about safety.
- Managers conduct appropriate recruitment checks on all staff. Managers take appropriate, swift action to full resolution regarding any safeguarding concerns and work productively with external agencies and the local authority to ensure that students and apprentices are safe.
- Staff are trained appropriately in their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty and how to promote modern British values; as a result, most students and apprentices have a good understanding of the importance of British values and the risks of extremism. Accountable staff work effectively with the police and other relevant agencies when there are any concerns about whether a student or apprentice is at risk of radicalisation or extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The large majority of students and apprentices participate enthusiastically in lessons. Most teachers deploy well-planned activities that are highly relevant to students' and apprentices' needs. As a result, the large majority of students and apprentices work collaboratively with their peers to analyse critically how theoretical concepts relate to their subjects and practical skills development in industries they aspire to work in. For example, students studying in a public services lesson extracted successfully key aspects of

information from a series of complex court cases and synthesised their findings on the rule of law and presented assuredly to one another.

- The large majority of teachers and assessors maximise robust information on students' and apprentices' starting points to plan and execute good teaching, learning and assessment. As a consequence, the large majority of students and apprentices make good progress.
- The majority of teachers and assessors enable students and apprentices to build on previous learning, extend their understanding of topics, master complex concepts and apply these confidently. For example, in a biology lesson students working at level 3 demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of skeletal muscle action structures and applied proficiently this theoretical knowledge in subsequent research experiments.
- Students who have high needs benefit from creative learning methods that stimulate and inspire them to achieve. For example, in a mathematics lesson students created 'smoothies' drinks in order to enhance their understanding of ratios, weights and measurements and to develop skills in team working, independence and negotiation.
- The majority of teachers enable most students to improve their knowledge of the technical terminology intrinsic to their vocational subjects and apply it competently in their written work and when communicating with their peers. The majority of teachers empower students to produce high-quality, industry-specific work. For example, students studying photography courses develop high-level critical skills that enable them to evaluate incisively their peers' work and propose improvements that, in turn, enable them to become more self-critical and reflective. However, a minority of teachers do not develop apprentices' understanding and use of technical terminology sufficiently.
- Most teachers and assessors make good use of probing questions to challenge and deepen students' and apprentices' understanding and improve their practical skills. For example, a teacher deployed a broad range of questioning techniques to facilitate a group of level 2 motor vehicle maintenance students to consider risks and demonstrate confidently the importance of loosening and tightening bolts in a specific order when taking an engine apart.
- However, in a few lessons teachers do not adopt teaching approaches that meet their students' abilities, knowledge and skills. Students do not make sufficient progress in these lessons because they find the work too easy and/or they do not necessarily understand the topic. In a minority of level 3 qualifications, teachers do not challenge students to enable them to deepen their knowledge and understanding and excel in their subjects; consequently, these students do not reach their full potential in lessons.
- Most teachers and assessors monitor students' and apprentices' progress regularly in their achievement of units and assessments. Teachers are now more proficient than the previous year in ensuring that students make the progress of which they are capable in relation to their starting points and in challenging students to achieve high grades. Assessors and employers work productively to review and assess the standards of apprentices' performance. As a result, apprentices develop good vocational skills in their on- and off-the-job training.
- The majority of teachers and assessors utilise effective methods in their teaching of vocational subjects to enhance students' English and mathematical skills. For example, students and apprentices following construction courses estimate accurately material

requirements, timescales and pricing in order to improve their efficiency. In a sports lesson, a teacher ensured that students understood fully the meaning of 'implicit' and 'explicit' in a quantitative research project. However, in English and mathematics GCSE lessons too few students make good progress or achieve their qualifications. Not enough teachers and assessors ensure that apprentices improve their written English skills.

- The majority of students and apprentices receive timely and beneficial feedback on how to improve their standards of work. The majority of students and apprentices rectify swiftly their mistakes and most make good progress. However, a minority of teachers and assessors do not provide students and apprentices with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve key errors in their written work, for example, how to structure a formal business letter or the correct use of punctuation and terminology. A small minority of adult students' progress is impeded because they do not receive feedback on their work in sufficient time to enable them to improve it.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- The large majority of students and apprentices exhibit high levels of respect and tolerance. Most students and apprentices enhance their levels of confidence as a result of good coaching and mentoring from staff and employers. They produce good standards of work and develop valuable work-related skills. For example, higher level apprentices in business management demonstrated high levels of confidence when presenting findings from their analyses of customer data to senior managers.
- Adult students, apprentices and students with high needs attend their lessons frequently. However, too many students following study programmes do not attend their lessons, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Most staff promote students' and apprentices' independent study skills through effective mentoring and tutoring within learning resource centres and through a range of online learning tools. This support builds on effective classroom teaching and enables the large majority of students and apprentices to make good progress in the vocational subjects they study.
- The majority of employers value the contributions apprentices make to the workplace. Most assessors link theoretical concepts adeptly to the workplace to broaden apprentices' skills and knowledge to good effect. A few apprentices enrolled on electrical and information and communication technology (ICT) courses take additional qualifications to extend their skills and knowledge beyond the requirements of their programmes.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the very large majority of students take part in meaningful work-related activity through lessons, work experience and supported internships. The highly successful 'GAP' programme provides bespoke work experience opportunities that are well matched to students' abilities and future career aspirations. For example, younger students following study programmes in art and design worked with local care homes to decorate corridors for dementia patients to a very high standard. Prior to completing their work experience, all students completed successfully a course in understanding the symptoms and effects of dementia and how to work effectively alongside patients with dementia.
- Most younger students receive meaningful and helpful impartial advice and guidance

about pertinent opportunities for further study at a higher level or pathways to employment in industries related to their course. Teachers and staff within the college's advice centres make available useful impartial careers advice to adult students and apprentices that they use effectively to gain meaningful employment or to progress to higher levels of study. The vast majority of students and apprentices who require additional help with their studies receive high-quality in-class support. As a result, these students make rapid progress and achieve their qualifications.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The large majority of students across all provision types make good progress in their subjects. Most students passed their qualifications in 2015/16. However, while most students passed their qualifications, too few gained the higher grades of which they were capable.
- There are very few gaps in achievement between different groups of younger students. Students with a declared learning difficulty and/or disability make good progress and their achievement rates exceed those without. However, adult students who declare a learning difficulty and/or disability do not fare as well as their peers, particularly for those studying construction, art, media and publishing. Leaders have secured improvements in reducing the achievement gap between male and female students and students who are in receipt of free school meals or have experience of local authority care.
- Almost all students with high needs achieved their qualifications in 2015/16. Current students are making good progress and develop a good range of social independence skills. Students with high needs develop good work-related skills. A small proportion follow a supported internship of which the majority make good progress and secure employment.
- Currently, the large majority of apprentices are on track to complete their qualification within the agreed planned timescale. Most apprentices make good progress through the duration of their programmes and develop a wide array of industry-related skills to support their progression and internal promotions.
- The proportion of younger students who achieved A* to C grade passes at English and mathematics GCSE in 2015/16 was just above the low national average but well below for adult students. Too many of these students studying GCSE courses make slow progress in improving their English and mathematics skills because they do not attend their lessons regularly.
- A high proportion of students in 2015/16 passed their qualifications. Current students and apprentices following entry level and level 1 English and mathematics functional skills qualifications, which comprise the vast majority, make good progress.
- The large majority of students and apprentices progress into purposeful employment, onto the next level of study or higher education. The majority of students enrolled on study programmes secure a place to study at their first choice of university.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- There are currently around 3,800 students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on vocational study programmes; around six tenths are following level 3 programmes; a quarter study at level 2, with the remainder following entry and level 1 programmes.
- The majority of students make good progress in achieving their vocational qualifications and develop good practical and work-related skills. The large majority of students following study programmes achieve their aspirations to move to a higher level of study and/or employment in their chosen career.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the principles of the study programme meet funding requirements. Teachers and staff maintain good links with employers to provide high standards of relevant work-related activities, work placements and enrichment programmes for almost all students. Teachers assign meaningful community and internal projects that improve students' confidence and skills.
- The majority of teachers deploy effective teaching to empower most students to take control of their learning and become independent; this enables them to thrive in both their practical and theoretical studies. Most students understand fully how theory relates to the demands of the sector in which they wish to work. For example, students studying health and social care qualifications at level 3 speak assuredly about the principles of care including dignity, respect and equality and how these relate to their contributions within care homes and in hospital settings.
- Almost all students are aware of the target grades they must achieve to realise their next steps and career aspirations. Most teachers set students challenging targets to enable them to fulfil their potential and gain the grades expected of them. Teachers regularly review students' targets and routinely measure their progress effectively to ensure that they make good progress. However, teachers do not routinely set high enough expectations or challenging targets on the progress students make in their English and mathematics GCSE qualifications and as a result, students do not value these important work-related skills.
- A minority of teachers do not plan activities successfully, particularly at level 3, to motivate and challenge students to reach their potential; in such lessons teaching is not sufficiently stimulating and results in students losing interest and not making the progress of which they are capable.
- Most students following vocational qualifications develop a good range of pertinent technical skills that they apply skilfully in workshops and in practical sessions. For example, students following level 2 electrical engineering courses demonstrate confidently the importance of testing continuity on electrical circuits. Most students have a thorough understanding of how to ensure their own and others' safety when working in workshops.
- Too many teachers and staff do not set high expectations of the importance of attending regularly and on time to lessons; as a result, attendance to lessons, particularly English and mathematics lessons, is often low.

Adult learning programmes

Good

- The provision of adult learning comprises accredited courses, non-accredited courses and employability programmes. Around three tenths of adults follow employability

programmes, English as an additional language and family learning courses. Just over one tenth of adults are enrolled on study programmes in a broad range of vocational qualifications. A small proportion of adults take up counselling, access to nursing and accounting courses.

- Leaders and managers provide a broad range of short programmes to enable adult students to develop the skills and knowledge to enable them to progress to higher levels of study. Just over half of adults enrolled on qualifications in 2015/16 progressed to a higher level the following year.
- Staff work closely with the local family learning service, local community organisations and the Jobcentre Plus to ensure that programmes are well suited to enable students to develop essential work-related skills and/or further learning at a higher level. For example, students following employability programmes become self-assured and grow in confidence to apply for jobs locally and a high proportion progress onto further learning at a higher level and a minority gain employment.
- Teachers provide good pastoral support and mentoring to enhance adult students' confidence and help them to become more self-assured. Teachers and support staff provide one-to-one additional support sessions to enable students to develop good study skills, including improving their ICT skills involving internet research and the effective manipulation of multimedia programmes.
- Most teachers plan challenging tasks that improve students' knowledge of technical terms and practical skills. Students work collaboratively and challenge one another to think critically and provide helpful feedback on their performance during practical and group tasks. For example, students following business and ICT qualifications produced eye-catching animated banners and scrutinised assiduously their impact in advertising and selling.
- The majority of students studying English and mathematics functional skills courses make good progress in improving their skills. Teachers maintain good flexible working relationships with students and regularly organise additional study sessions for them. However, too few students make good progress on their English and mathematics GCSE courses because too many fail to attend their lessons. The majority of teachers promote effectively the English and mathematics skills that are pertinent to students' vocational qualifications. Most teachers use highly relevant resources integrated with English and mathematics tasks to ensure that students enhance these essential skills.
- Most students learning English as an additional language become confident in their speaking and listening skills. Most teachers' valuable encouragement and coaching ensure that these students improve their skills in reading, writing and speaking, for example, compiling letters to schools, engaging in debates to improve their spoken command of English and completing job application forms correctly. In a few lessons, teachers do not improve students' literacy skills, which hinders their ability to study independently.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not challenge students sufficiently to accelerate their learning through effective and suitably challenging tasks and activities. For example, a few students working at level 3 complete work that is more suited to lower levels of learning. A minority of teachers do not deploy a range of effective questioning techniques to probe students' critical thinking skills to enable them to solve problems and find solutions.

- Most teachers' feedback to students is helpful and allows students to rectify the errors they make and produce work of a higher standard; in a small minority of subjects feedback is not timely and slows students' progress.

Apprenticeships

Good

- Current apprentices are enrolled onto programmes including: health and social care; supporting teaching and learning in schools; engineering; motor vehicle maintenance; business and administration; retail and commercial enterprises. There are currently 297 apprentices following intermediate programmes, 297 studying advanced programmes and 7 taking up higher apprenticeships. The large majority of apprentices make good progress in achieving their apprenticeship and most current apprentices are on track to achieve within their allocated time. In a minority of subjects, the proportion of apprentices who dropped out of learning has increased.
- Leaders and managers forge effective relationships with employers, local partners and stakeholders to plan high-quality industry-specific programmes. In particular, they have introduced new apprenticeships programmes within areas of employment growth such as engineering and technology. Managers design successfully the curriculum to meet local and economic priorities. For example, managers have recently introduced programmes including clean energy, welding and information technology to meet local needs.
- Managers demonstrate a coherent understanding of apprenticeships reforms and leaders represent the college on 'Trail Blazer' committees for new apprenticeship standards; as a result, they are well placed to meet the new expectations of providing apprenticeship standards. The large majority of teachers and assessors impart effectively their up-to-date skills and experiences to ensure that apprentices acquire industry-specific skills and knowledge.
- Most employers value the added contribution that apprentices make to their businesses. For example, management apprentices with a large employer successfully presented their findings on local market intelligence to several hundred delegates at a large international conference.
- Most apprentices produce high standards of practical and theoretical work. Construction and motor vehicle apprentices work accurately and with confidence; employers value them for their ability to work independently. An apprentice in health and social care has undertaken very high quality research using a rich variety of information sources in order to improve her employer's staff team's understanding of the needs of the clients in care homes; her employer valued her work immensely.
- Most apprentices are confident in their ability and well-motivated; the overwhelming majority enjoy their learning. The majority of apprentices progress to the next level of study, the very large majority secure sustained employment and a few secure university places. For example, an apprentice applied successfully for an overseas posting with significantly increased responsibilities.
- Staff provide good assistance for apprentices who require additional support. Most teachers and assessors routinely inspire apprentices to use mathematics in lessons and link it effectively to practical skills required in the workplace. However, too few teachers and assessors promote the importance of good written English skills and how to integrate

key technical terms used in trades and professions correctly and competently in their everyday work.

- A minority of assessors for apprentices following lower-level programmes focus too narrowly on qualification assessments and unit dates for completion. They do not place enough emphasis on apprentices' personal development, problem solving or industry-specific skills and as a result these apprentices do not deepen their skills beyond the requirements of the qualification.

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

- There are 73 students with high needs following employability courses, foundation studies and study programmes.
- Leaders and managers design the curriculum successfully in partnership with key stakeholders within the community. They ensure that students are studying on appropriate courses and at the right level. The programmes provided meet students' needs well. Staff maintain effective links with parents, carers and the local authority to inform them of students' progress and individual support requirements.
- Most teachers plan and execute effectively learning that builds on students' prior skills, knowledge and experience. However, a few teachers teaching study programmes do not make good use of information on students' starting points to ensure that they make the expected progress in lessons. Most teachers deploy motivational activities that extend students' English, mathematics and work-related skills. As a result, most students prepare well for future employment and gain greater independence in their everyday lives.
- The large majority of students make good progress in relation to their starting points and their achievement is high. Students following study programmes often achieve their full potential because of good teaching and coaching that is underpinned by valuable bespoke support from learning support assistants.
- A broad range of specialist support staff including speech and language therapists and physiotherapists work diligently with students to good effect. They enable students to overcome difficulties and develop skills to increase their independence; in particular, learners with communication difficulties respond to verbal questioning proficiently and take part in discussions assuredly.
- Most students present their work, including their written work, to a good standard. Teachers provide pertinent feedback with students to enable them to improve their work and they capture this progress effectively. Teachers set students challenging targets that clearly align to students' long-term aspirations and help ensure that the majority of learners progress to higher levels of study or employment.
- Most teachers and staff empower students to enhance effectively their personal, social and work-related skills through a broad range of challenging activities. The large majority of students who take up supported internships take part in meaningful opportunities with supportive employers that are well-matched to their intended careers. Managers work collaboratively with employers, who regularly contribute to students' targets to develop their skills in real-life situations at work. The large majority of students working on supported internships progress to meaningful employment.
- The large majority of students develop a good range of work-related skills in the

classroom that they apply regularly at work. For example, a student who acquired skills in number patterns applied these skills at work to match adeptly invoice numbers to delivered stock and price tags.

- Most students who previously required a large amount of supervision and support now work independently and assuredly. Teachers and staff ensure that students and employers adhere to health and safety requirements; for example, almost all students attend a thorough health and safety induction with their employer and as a result students feel safe and know how to keep safe at work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130720
Type of provider	General further education and skills
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	5,885
Principal/CEO	Gill Worgan
Telephone number	01923 812320
Website	www.westherts.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	445	385	933	396	2,305	276	0	21
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	111	186	81	216	0	7		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	73							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Performance Learning Group Hertfordshire County Council YMCA Bedford Prince's Trust							

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

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