

# Northampton College

General further education college

## Inspection dates

30 October–2 November 2018

| 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                        | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for learners                        | Good | Provision for learners with high needs | Outstanding          |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection |      |  | Requires improvement |

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Provision for students with high needs is outstanding. These students make exceptional progress with their independent living skills and with their achievement of qualifications.
- Provision for students on study programmes has improved and is now good.
- Teachers' and managers' actions have improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is now good. Most teaching enables students and apprentices to develop good standards of practical skills rapidly.
- Governors and leaders have established systems for monitoring students' progress and have intervened rapidly to ensure that the large majority of them make good progress.
- Leaders and managers have increased the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications. They hold subject managers to account when students' achievements are not good enough.
- Leaders and managers have used their good links with employers and the local community to ensure that the courses they offer meet local and regional skills needs.
- Students improve their skills in English well. They quickly learn to use vocational and technical terminology precisely and confidently.
- Students and apprentices make good progress in improving their mathematics. They carry out relevant mathematical calculations accurately and interpret the results confidently.
- Leaders' and managers' actions to improve the quality of apprenticeship provision have not yet had sufficient impact. Too many apprentices, especially those on electrical installation, do not achieve within the planned timeframe and too many do not finish the course.
- Too many students and apprentices do not understand the dangers specific to their subject or the local area, from those who hold extremist views.
- In a few cases, mostly in theory lessons, teaching activities are dull and do not inspire or motivate students.
- Apprentices do not get enough help to improve their written English skills. In too many cases, they spell technical and specialist terms incorrectly.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Northampton College is a large general further education college that has three sites, two in Northampton and a smaller site in Daventry. Most of the students and apprentices who attend the college live in Northamptonshire. The college offers courses in 14 of the 15 sector subject areas, predominantly from entry level to level 3 and with a small provision at levels 4 and 5, including higher level apprenticeships. The largest areas are arts, media, and health and social care. The college works with one subcontractor.
- Young people in Northamptonshire leave school having made slightly less progress than those nationally. Their achievements in GCSE examinations are broadly in line with the national rates. Rates of unemployment in the local area are lower than those nationally, but the proportion of the working population qualified to level 3 or above is lower than the national rate. Key industries in the region include construction, care, leisure, retail and engineering.

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

- Train teachers to design and implement teaching and learning activities, particularly in theory lessons, that inspire and motivate students.
- Ensure that teachers use the information they have about students' prior achievements and progress to teach lessons that enable students to fulfil their potential and excel.
- Help teachers understand fully the potential dangers, relevant to the local area and the subject they teach, that students and apprentices face from those who hold extremist views. Ensure that they use this information to develop students' and apprentices' understanding, so that they can keep themselves safe.
- Increase the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualification within the planned timescale by:
  - making sure that assessors plan learning programmes for apprentices that consider their prior knowledge and potential
  - planning sufficiently frequent assessor visits so that apprentices receive training, assessment, feedback and targets to help them make rapid progress, and ensure that employers know what it is that apprentices need to improve so that they can support them at work
  - checking that managers and assessors monitor apprentices' progress frequently and that they intervene rapidly when apprentices' progress slows
  - helping apprentices to improve their written English by correcting spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors and giving apprentices strategies to help them improve these skills.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Governors and senior managers have achieved all but one of the recommendations from the previous inspection report. Their actions have led to improvement in the provision for students with high needs, which is now outstanding, and have improved the quality of study programmes to good. However, leaders' actions have not improved the quality of apprenticeship provision sufficiently or swiftly enough. Managers have not monitored the progress of apprentices effectively and intervened where their performance has declined.
- Leaders and governors have developed a clear vision and purpose for the college. They have high ambitions for their learners and for the communities in which they live. Senior managers ensure that through the range of courses offered, students and apprentices can move through the levels and into employment or higher education. They use their good links with employers and the local community to inform their decisions.
- Senior managers develop the curriculum well to reflect the needs of local and national employers and the local enterprise partnership. They recognise and respond to the key changes locally that are emerging within the construction, footwear and creative industries. For example, senior leaders have recently introduced courses in civil engineering, construction skills and tattoo design.
- Leaders and managers have taken the difficult decision to withdraw A-level provision, having considered the choices that students were making and the availability of alternative provision.
- Senior leaders have been successful in strengthening the financial position of the college, while improving the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications. Senior leaders have invested in new, high-quality teaching and practical facilities, such as the new advanced construction and engineering centre.
- Senior managers use the findings from their self-assessment and quality improvement monitoring well to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They monitor progress frequently and produce helpful reports for colleagues and governors. As a result, students' and apprentices' outcomes have continued to improve for all provision types.
- Senior managers are effective in improving performance at course level through half-termly curriculum monitoring meetings. In the majority of cases, the agreed actions from these meetings lead to improvements in students' progress, attendance and achievements.
- Senior leaders and managers set challenging targets for students and most apprentices. Where students' progress slows, managers intervene rapidly and effectively. Senior leaders have improved the process for monitoring the progress of students and apprentices. They use this information well to hold subject and department managers to account for the progress of students and apprentices.
- Senior leaders have strengthened the process for reviewing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers report on, and identify, key strengths and areas for improvement accurately. They use these areas for improvement as the basis of training for all teachers, and for development actions within individual teachers' reviews. This has

been effective in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Senior managers identify teachers' underperformance swiftly and take action to support them to improve. When this is not successful, teachers leave the organisation.
- Senior leaders ensure the effective management of subcontractors. They meet the terms of contract in terms of volume and quality. Senior managers agree the terms of the contract and the nature of the due diligence procedures with governors.
- Subject and department managers do not use their self-assessment judgements and subsequent action plans effectively enough. They do not update or monitor their progress thoroughly. As a result, the improvement in a few subjects and in apprenticeships has not been sufficiently rapid. Senior leaders have not held managers to account when improvements have been too slow.

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

- Governors provide a major contribution to the formulation of the college's strategy. They understand this clearly.
- Governors have a good understanding of the key strengths and areas for development for the college. They provide relevant and specific challenge and support for the senior team. They use the key performance indicators, which they helped devise, well to hold senior managers to account.
- Governors possess an appropriate range of skills that enable them to support the senior team in all main aspects of the college's activities.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established appropriate staffing, policies and procedures to ensure that students and apprentices are safe and learn to keep themselves safe. Managers provide excellent support for those who are vulnerable and for those in care.
- Managers ensure that all staff receive appropriate training for their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff use this training effectively to support carefully any student or apprentice who has concerns.
- Leaders and managers have established strong links with external advisory bodies, the local authority designated officer and the police. They use these links effectively to get the most appropriate help for students or apprentices in need.
- Managers produce comprehensive reports on safeguarding for governors, which they review each term. Managers implement stringent processes for the recruitment of staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people.
- Managers ensure that appropriate health and safety risk assessments are in place. They report any incidents to governors.

**Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Since the previous inspection, teachers, leaders and managers have improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers use evidence from their observations of teaching and learning to ensure that teachers receive relevant training to improve their skills. As a result, most students and apprentices receive a good standard of teaching that helps them make at least the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers and assessors are well qualified and most have current vocational and industry experience. In most cases, they use their experience and the college's high-quality practical resources to spark students' and apprentices' interest in the subject. Teachers and assessors make good links between theory and practice. Students in particular make rapid progress in developing practical skills at college. Students and apprentices enjoy their learning and most produce work of a high standard.
- Students develop the study skills and skills for work necessary for them to move on to their next stage. For example, in a music performance, students were challenged to think about how they would market their music successfully in the age of social media and streaming services. Teachers on access to science and health courses develop students' analytical skills well, through interesting research activities that assess the impact of antibiotic resistance.
- Most teachers use the information they have about students' starting points effectively. They make sure that teaching enables them to make rapid progress early in their course and to produce work of a high standard quickly. For example, level 2 catering students produce food suitable for serving in the college's training restaurant in the first weeks of their course. Teachers of GCSE English and mathematics identify successfully the gaps in students' knowledge. As a result, teaching enables students to master their skills and understand their shortcomings.
- Teachers of students who have high needs make thorough use of the information they collect on students' starting points. This ensures that they have clear and demanding targets to develop their skills. As a result, almost all students develop their independent living and communication skills rapidly and to a high standard. Students who have high needs make exceptionally good progress in English and mathematics.
- Most teachers and assessors check students' and apprentices' progress frequently and accurately in lessons, in assignments and at work. Teachers direct questions skilfully to students to check and deepen their understanding. They develop their confidence in using technical and often complex terminology correctly and fluently. Teachers' feedback helps students to know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Most teachers plan students' assessment effectively and ensure that students receive good preparation for external examinations.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students. They agree challenging targets and grades for them to achieve. Teachers monitor closely students' progress towards their targets and provide them with helpful feedback that helps them to improve. Almost all students are aware of their targets and grades and most produce work that meets or exceeds these.
- Teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) provide students with very effective extra help in lessons. Teachers work well with LSAs so that they can support individuals quickly. LSAs use coaching particularly skilfully to help students understand and complete learning activities at least as well as other students. Adult students receive particularly effective

extra help in lessons to help them improve their English and mathematics.

- Parents and carers of students on study programmes receive good information about their progress. Staff provide them with a wide range of information about the course, the standards they expect from students, and information about their attendance and progress. Staff contact parents and carers swiftly when students' performance or poor attendance cause them concern.
- Apprentices' assessors involve employers in the planning of apprentices' learning. When apprentices make good progress, assessors involve employers in reviews of apprentices' learning. However, in too many cases, reviews do not take place frequently enough and apprentices' progress is too slow.
- In a few lessons, teaching activities are dull and do not inspire or motivate students. These teachers rely heavily on presenting information and questioning to check that students understand. Most students take notes, but they become bored because they do not get an opportunity to use the new information. They do not debate or reflect on their understanding with their peers or apply their knowledge practically. In a level 3 sport lesson, students filled in gapped handouts, answering questions about their knowledge of sports injuries, but teachers did not give them the opportunity to explore the causes of injuries and the treatments sufficiently to deepen their knowledge.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not check students' understanding well enough. These teachers ask questions that the most able students answer quickly and that are too easy. The less able students do not get a chance to answer, since other students dominate the activity. For example, in a health and social care lesson, students had to identify pathogens and remedies. However, the teacher did not give them the opportunity to explore sufficiently the relationship between the over-use of antibiotics and their effectiveness.
- Teachers and assessors do not use information about apprentices' starting points well enough to improve sufficiently their English skills. For example, assessors do not correct apprentices' spelling mistakes or suggest ways that they could improve their spelling, particularly of vocationally specific or technical terms.
- In a few cases, teachers and assessors do not plan students' or apprentices' assessment coherently. Consequently, students struggle to achieve the grades of which they are capable. They do not receive adequate preparation for external examinations, or they have not had enough time to master the necessary skills. Managers have not remedied quickly enough the shortages in electrical installation assessors. Consequently, apprentices' assessment happens too infrequently and slows their progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

- Students and apprentices make good progress in developing their confidence, self-esteem and skills for work. This is as a result of the education and training they receive at college and the support from teachers, assessors and learning support staff. Students and apprentices have positive attitudes towards their learning, and so they turn up to lessons prepared and ready to learn.
- Students and apprentices are highly respectful of each other, their teachers and assessors and their college. They exemplify British values in their daily lives, showing tolerance to

each other, especially towards those who have differing views, opinions and lifestyles.

- Students and apprentices feel safe at college, on work experience placements and at work. They learn to work safely in the college's high-quality practical facilities and they comply readily with staff instructions to wear personal protective equipment. Students know whom to contact if they do not feel safe or have a concern about their welfare.
- Students with high needs benefit from learning in a highly inclusive environment. Students value and respect each other and staff. Highly effective support from staff enables students who have high needs to socialise with their peers at the college breakfast club and at lunchtimes in the college 'look-out'.
- Students have high rates of attendance. Most students apply themselves productively and positively to their learning. They work hard and produce high standards of work. Students' attendance at lessons in English and mathematics is slightly lower than their attendance at other lessons.
- Students on study programmes, those who have high needs and apprentices develop very good skills for work, such as teamwork, personal organisation, punctuality and communication skills.
- Adult students develop a wide range of skills appropriate to their learning goals. For example, those on employability skills courses develop skills in writing CVs and completing job application forms. They use these new skills to apply for jobs, and most are successful in obtaining employment. Adult students who have not previously achieved GCSE qualifications in English and/or mathematics achieve these and move on to access to higher education courses or to gain further responsibilities at work.
- Adult students increase their self-confidence and learn to believe in themselves. Their experiences at college help them to widen their horizons. For example, a student who joined the college wanting to be a chef has applied to university to study food science. A student who could not speak English when she enrolled on a course in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is now on a travel and tourism course and is applying for cabin crew vacancies.
- Leaders, managers and teachers have high aspirations for their students and apprentices. They set high standards for conduct and appearance. As a result, students are well behaved in lessons and in social spaces. The college sites are clean and free of litter. Staff maintain social spaces, learning areas and practical facilities very well. This reflects the high standards found in the industries in which students will eventually work.
- Students and apprentices receive good careers advice and guidance. They benefit from specialist careers staff helping them with job searches and writing CVs. They also gain from the expertise of teachers who are vocationally qualified and up to date with industry practices.
- A dedicated specialist adviser provides excellent careers guidance to students with high needs, in a format appropriate to their needs. As a result, almost all students move on to higher level qualifications. A few move on to employment or to apprenticeships.
- Students with high needs benefit from a highly effective National Citizenship Service residential programme. They gain significantly in confidence when they work as part of a team. They develop considerably the essential skills they need for independent living.
- Students have a basic understanding of the dangers they face from those who hold

extremist views. They know the signs that might indicate that a friend or family member may be in danger of radicalisation. They know to whom they should report this. However, apprentices have a very poor understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Very few students are aware of the specific risks in their industries or in their local area.

## Outcomes for learners

**Good**

- Most students, including those aged 16 to 18 and adults, achieve their qualifications. They make good progress from their starting points. They develop very good practical skills, which they increase during their work experience placements. The few students on A-level courses make good progress and almost all of them pass their examinations. Almost half of them achieve grades A\* to B. A large minority of students on vocational study programmes achieve merit and distinction grades. These are higher grades than their prior achievement indicates they should achieve.
- Students for whom the college receives high-needs funding make exceptional progress. Those on full-time study programmes at levels 2 and 3 make very good progress from their starting points. Those on courses at foundation level achieve vocational, English and mathematics qualifications at high rates. They also make very significant progress towards independence. A very high proportion move on to further study or employment.
- Current students make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. They develop high standards of practical work and most produce written work of a standard at least at the level of their course.
- Students improve their English in vocational lessons. They learn to use new vocabulary and technical terminology confidently and accurately. Those on ESOL courses use their new skills to improve the quality of their daily lives. As a result of their learning, they help their children with their homework and communicate better with colleagues at work and with their employers. Students on level 3 study programmes do not receive enough help to improve their academic writing and to prepare them for university. Apprentices do not get enough help to improve their written English.
- Students and apprentices develop their mathematical skills very well in most subjects, many from very low starting points. They use the confidence they develop in their mathematics to help them achieve qualifications in this subject. Most students and apprentices use their mathematical skills to complete subject-specific calculations. For example, students on access to science courses interpret and analyse bar charts on antibiotic resistance in hospitals. They relate this to their chosen careers in nursing.
- Almost all students move on to positive destinations, such as employment, further education, higher education and apprenticeships, when they have achieved their qualifications.
- Too few apprentices, especially those studying electrical installation, achieve their qualifications. Leaders' and managers' actions to improve the proportion of apprentices who achieve within their planned timescales have not been sufficiently effective. Early indications show that the progress current apprentices make is improving.
- The small proportion of apprentices who study with a subcontractor make good progress and most achieve their qualifications within their planned timescale.

## Types of provision

### 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- About 3,200 students are on study programmes at the college. Just under half study their main qualification at level 3. Students study in 14 out of 15 sector subject areas. The largest subject area is arts and media.
- Teachers have high expectations of students that help most of them make good progress and fulfil their potential. For example, in performing arts, students develop high-level dance skills quickly, enabling them to improve their spatial awareness around other dancers. In art, students work enthusiastically on a design brief to create an initial design for a museum interior, following an inspirational visit to three London museums.
- Teachers use a wide range of activities and give clear demonstrations and explanations to help develop students' practical skills and knowledge well. As a result, students develop good practical skills to industry standards quickly. Teachers are adept at relating skills learned in college to the workplace. For example, levels 1 and 2 joinery students made screens, to be used by a theatre group on tour, to a high standard from the brief provided by the theatre group's manager.
- Most teachers check students' learning frequently and thoroughly. This enables them to give extra help to students who are struggling and more challenging work to the most able. Teachers work skilfully to help students develop the skills to learn independently, by not providing answers readily or by providing too much help.
- Teachers provide helpful feedback to students, identifying accurately what they did well and where they need to improve. As a result, students produce written and practical work of a good standard and know what they need to do to improve. For example, travel and tourism students develop higher level analytical skills in a comparison of tourist attractions, following feedback from their teacher about how to improve these skills. Most students know their target grades and what they must do to achieve them.
- Students talk confidently about their learning and the progress they make. For example, level 3 health and social care students can explain, following individual research, the impact of learning difficulties on the individual. Students produce vibrant displays on topics such as foetal alcohol syndrome and fragile X syndrome to demonstrate their learning. The subsequent discussions about this work ensured that they produced written work that was awarded merit or distinction grades.
- Tutors and learning support staff work effectively together to make sure that students who need extra help receive it. They implement strategies that result in students who are receiving support making progress equivalent to their peers at all levels. Students value highly the support for learning they receive both in and out of lessons. For example, level 1 travel and tourism students completed an activity on locational geography after they had help to develop their research skills using maps, travel guides and the internet.
- Almost all students benefit from relevant, external work experience placements. They develop their practical skills. They use their experience at work to help them make informed choices about their future careers. Teachers skilfully use students' experience from work placements to illuminate teaching at college.

- Most teachers help students develop their English skills well. For example, entry level 3 and level 1 students learn to apply past and future tenses in written and spoken responses correctly. Level 3 public service students practise and improve their presentation skills for future interviews. Level 2 dance students speak enthusiastically about developing their subject terminology of dance moves, including 'rond de jambe', which they can explain clearly and demonstrate.
- Students develop their subject-specific mathematical skills confidently as a result of guidance and coaching from teachers. For example, level 1 electrical installation students measured, marked and cut trunking for an electrical circuit accurately and to industry standards.
- Most teachers adapt the work they set to students' differing abilities and skills well. They use their knowledge of what students achieved in previous lessons, and their target grades, to inform this. For example, in a GCSE mathematics lesson, students completed colour-coded assessment sheets of increasing difficulty.
- In a few cases, particularly in theory lessons, teachers do not take students' prior learning into account. They do not have high enough expectations of what students can achieve. Consequently, students find themselves repeating tasks or doing work that is too easy. In these cases, students become bored and do not make the progress of which they are capable. These teachers do not plan well to check students' learning and so only evaluate the learning of the most vocal students.

## Adult learning programmes

**Good**

- The college has about 1,700 adult students, most of whom study part time. The large majority follow ESOL, English, mathematics and information technology (IT) courses. Just over 100 students are on the access to higher education course in one of four pathways. These are science, health, humanities and social sciences.
- Students benefit from a wide range of courses that help them to develop skills and knowledge. They achieve short qualifications at entry level and level 1 and use these to move on to higher level and/or vocational courses to secure places in higher education or employment. For example, over half of the ESOL students returned this academic year to learn at a higher level. About a third of students who enrolled on the level 1 progression diploma in 2017/18 gained employment, while a fifth enrolled on full-time vocational courses at the college.
- Adult learning programmes meet the needs of students and the local community well. Leaders have developed good partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, employers and higher education providers to design relevant courses. For example, a short IT course for unemployed adults in the local area enabled students to develop the skills they need to take a more active role in their community. Over three quarters of the students referred from Jobcentre Plus move on to longer or higher level courses at the college.
- Most teachers use the information they have about their students to make sure that they make progress in their learning, and to develop their wider knowledge and skills to equip them for life after college. Teachers assess students' learning effectively through a range of methods, including question and answer, group activities and peer review. Teachers provide thorough feedback so that students know what they are doing well and what they

need to improve.

- The best teachers are skilled at deepening students' learning and understanding by developing activities that grow in complexity and application to more difficult situations. For example, GCSE mathematics students progress from calculating percentages to calculating the percentage increase and decrease between two amounts, and applying this to the pricing of goods. ESOL students develop more complex sentence structures using conjunctives and adjectives, through a range of group activities.
- Access to higher education students benefit from sessions on structuring essays, referencing and study skills. These enable them to produce work that will help them achieve merit and distinction grades. They receive good preparation for the standards required by university courses.
- Students understand the importance of improving their English skills, and work hard to do this. Most teachers provide them with good support to use and understand technical terminology. For example, in level 3 beauty lessons, students learn quickly the correct terms when completing electrical muscle stimulation treatments. Access to higher education students develop scientific styles of writing on the science pathway.
- Most teachers help students develop their mathematical skills well. They emphasise the application of mathematics in vocational areas and explain the possible links to future employment.
- Adults, particularly those on English and mathematics courses, benefit from the English and mathematics laboratories. They visit them frequently to obtain extra help and to reinforce what they have learned in lessons. They value the quiet, dedicated space to practise the skills they are learning and to complete homework.
- Teachers use the high-quality practical facilities effectively to help students improve their practical skills quickly. They ensure that students are well presented, wear appropriate uniforms and protective equipment, and communicate clearly with external clients.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of their students. The work they set is too easy for the most able and too difficult for the least able. As a result, some students finish the work quickly and have nothing further to do, whereas others struggle to complete the tasks in the time allowed.
- A few teachers do not check students' understanding and progress thoroughly. In too many cases, they rely on questions that the more confident or vocal students repeatedly answer, so excluding the less confident. As a result, teachers do not know what progress students make in the lesson and cannot plan learning accurately.

## Apprenticeships

## Requires improvement

- The college has 765 apprentices, about half of whom are aged 16 to 18. Most apprentices study at level 3. A quarter of apprentices work in electrical installation, a further quarter in mechanical and motor vehicle engineering and the remainder across a wide range of other subjects. The college subcontracts the delivery of around 50 apprenticeships to the local NHS trust.
- Leaders' and managers' actions to improve the poor performance of apprentices have yet to have sufficient impact. Too few apprentices complete their apprenticeships within planned timescales. Leaders and managers have been slow to recognise and resolve the

long-standing poor performance of the largest apprentice group, electrical installation. While leaders and managers have recently instigated changes to improve performance, their impact on apprentices' achievement has yet to be fully realised.

- Too many electrical installation apprentices have not received sufficiently frequent reviews with their assessors. As a result, neither they nor their employers know what progress they are making and what they need to do to improve.
- Too many teachers and assessors do not have high enough expectations of what their apprentices can achieve. As a result, too many of the targets for development they set are too easy, and do not enable apprentices to maximise their progress. For example, an apprentice had a target to 'gather evidence' without specifying the purpose. Another had a target to 'revise hard for exam'. Assessors set few targets to improve apprentices' skills or behaviours. As a result, apprentices' progress is too slow.
- Staff assess new apprentices' existing skills, knowledge and behaviours thoroughly at the start of the course, but too many assessors do not make use of this information to evaluate the progress apprentices make.
- Staff plan apprenticeships well to meet framework requirements. Managers have worked with local employers to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the new apprenticeship standards.
- Most apprentices develop relevant practical skills to industry standards quickly, enabling them to play meaningful roles within their businesses. For example, shoe manufacturing apprentices benefit from high-quality training by highly skilled staff within the workplace. They also gain from off-the-job training that employers and college staff plan jointly. Engineering apprentices have developed skills in 'lean manufacturing' at college and apply these skills in the workplace to increase efficiency. Employers are right to value the contributions their apprentices make to their businesses.
- Assessors give apprentices good-quality feedback on their work, which helps them to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. They plan the majority of the off-the-job assessment well and it is accurate and timely. This helps apprentices improve their work and make good progress. The best assessors use a wide range of methods to measure apprentices' skills, knowledge and behaviours. For example, assessors use effective questioning to explore fully apprentices' understanding of theoretical concepts and how these relate to practical tasks.
- Apprentices learn to work safely at college and while at work. They are respectful of each other and know whom to speak to if they are concerned about their safety or well-being. Apprentices know correct accident reporting procedures and the locations of first-aid stations and responsible persons at work. For example, during a review, an apprentice was able to describe accurately how to report a 'near-miss' incident and why it is important to do this.
- Engineering apprentices develop particularly good mathematical skills. Electrical installation apprentices measure the location of, and accurately position, cables, junction boxes and switches in lighting circuits. They move quickly on to calculating and comparing voltage drops in copper wire and aluminium cable, so that they use appropriate materials in their installations. Motor vehicle apprentices rapidly learn to calculate resistance in vehicle circuitry, and percentage wear on tyres. These skills enhance apprentices' confidence to achieve functional skills mathematics qualifications.

- Apprentices who learn with the college's subcontractor make particularly effective and rapid progress as a result of frequent and accurate monitoring of their progress. Assessors set challenging targets for apprentices' development of skills, knowledge and behaviours. They achieve these within the planned timescale due to good support from their employer.

## Provision for learners with high needs

## Outstanding

- The college has 236 students who have high needs. The majority are on vocational courses across the college at levels 1, 2 and 3. The remainder follow programmes at entry level known as 'supported learning'.
- Leaders, managers and governors have very high aspirations for students. They use high-needs funding very effectively to provide challenging and highly effective individualised learning. This builds on students' prior attainment and prepares them for future employment and greater independence in their everyday lives. Students make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Staff manage students' transition from school to college very well. Their assessment of students' starting points is very thorough. Teachers work with school staff, the local authority and therapy specialists to prepare detailed personalised learning and support plans. As a result, students settle into college quickly and make exceptional progress with their studies. Almost all students achieve their qualifications.
- Staff use the information they gather at the start of a student's course very effectively to set clear and precise targets for students' personal and social development. Teachers and staff check students' progress very carefully. Teachers' feedback is extremely thorough and detailed. It helps students to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding and to aim higher.
- Managers put in place highly effective specialist support, such as speech and language therapy. They invest in specialist equipment, including adaptive technology and communication aids. For example, managers have provided a specialist word processor and smart device for students with visually impairment that converts Braille notes into a text document that teachers can read and mark. Students routinely use smart devices and tablets confidently to do research and look up unfamiliar words. As a result, students gain significantly in confidence and quickly become more independent in lessons.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary. They are respectful and polite. Staff provide students with highly effective strategies to manage their anxiety, including 'time-out' and 'quiet time'. As a result, students make significant progress in increasing their self-esteem and overcoming their anxieties.
- Teachers and support staff work very well together to support students in lessons. They provide highly effective support that is proportionate to students' needs. They use specialist skills very effectively, such as signing, to aid students' understanding. Consequently, students become more self-assured and confident to speak in small groups and to offer their opinions.
- Students have high rates of attendance at college, and they are punctual to their lessons. In supported learning lessons, teachers use a range of activities that maintain students' interests well. They are particularly adept at breaking down information so that students

can understand clearly what they need to do to succeed. They provide work that is more difficult for the most able students. As a result, students receive challenges to achieve their full potential. Students speak clearly about the skills they develop. They know what they need to do to improve their work.

- Students on vocational courses develop highly effective practical skills quickly. Childcare students develop role play and problem solving in the workplace when supporting young children with the early stages of their development. Motor vehicle students work safely. They remove and replace brakes from vehicles, clean discs and refit wheels to industry standards. As a result, students develop valuable work-related skills.
- All students with high needs benefit from work experience opportunities. The large majority gain from meaningful external work placements with employers. Others work confidently in the college's commercial environments, such as the restaurant, 'The Lanes', and the hairdressing salon. As a result, they gain the skills they need to have jobs, such as teamworking and customer service skills. Managers are currently re-evaluating a recently introduced supported internship programme to enhance opportunities for employment.
- For a few students, teachers do not set work that is difficult enough. As a result, they do not always make the progress they should.

## Provider details

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|---|--|
| Unique reference number   | 130769   |
| Type of provider  | General further education college  |
| Age range of learners   | 16+  |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 6,786  |
| Principal   | Mrs Pat Brennan-Barrett  |
| Telephone number  | 01604 734200   |
| Website   | <a href="http://www.northamptoncollege.ac.uk">www.northamptoncollege.ac.uk</a> |

## 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+ |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)                                     | 806                                       | 1,021 | 1,133    | 351 | 1,770   | 240 | 0                | 0   |
| Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age                                    | Intermediate                              |       | Advanced |     | Higher  |     |                  |     |
|  | 16–18                                     | 19+   | 16–18    | 19+ | 16–18   | 19+ |                  |     |
|  | 200                                       | 127   | 161      | 243 | 1       | 33  |                  |     |
| 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                    | 236                                       |       |          |     |         |     |                  |     |
| At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors | Northampton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust |       |          |     |         |     |                  |     |

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-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

|                                |                         |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Richard Pemble, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Martin Ward                    | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Richard Deane                  | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Janet Cannon                   | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Maggie Fobister                | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Ian Norris                     | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Tracey Greenaway-Jones         | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Allan Shaw                     | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Ralph Brompton                 | Ofsted Inspector        |

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### **Employer View**

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to [www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

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