

Inspection of Shrewsbury Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 26–29 November 2019 and 26 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for students with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

On 31 July 2016, Shrewsbury College merged with Shrewsbury Sixth Form College to become Shrewsbury Colleges Group. The college is now a designated sixth form college providing tertiary education covering Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, and the Welsh borders.

At the time of inspection, the college provided education and training to 3,352 young people, 1,469 adult students, 386 apprentices and 165 students with high needs. Leaders offer a wide range of advanced level and vocational qualifications across many subject areas. As of 2018/19 the college works with three subcontracted partners.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Not all students feel safe in the college. Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient steps to help ensure the safety of students.

Students develop confidence and take pride in their work. Students understand what they need to do to learn well. They are confident in completing individual tasks but also benefit from supporting and learning from each other. Students particularly benefit from the opportunity to make new friends and meet new people. They like working independently, which helps prepare them for employment or further study.

Students and apprentices benefit from a broad range of initial information and advice, which enables them to make informed choices about their course and the level of study. Specialist staff support vulnerable students well to make relevant educational choices, and then support them in a seamless transition into college.

Students receive high-quality, professional support that enables them to settle quickly into college life. Staff in student services have developed strong relationships with a range of external agencies that help to ensure that students receive appropriate help and support promptly. These include services for health and well-being, finance and debt management, and housing.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers are clearly focused on delivering a wide-ranging curriculum that is available to all and meets the needs of students and apprentices, including those who have high needs. They work effectively with local schools, employers and other stakeholders to ensure that the curriculum offer is broad enough to meet the identified local and regional skills shortages. The offer includes, for example, a specific curriculum to meet the local skills shortages in the NHS and an increasing demand for construction skills – particularly in bricklaying – to address an identified need for additional housing.

Leaders and managers have not set high enough expectations for all students and apprentices. The large majority of students achieve their qualifications, but this is not consistently the case for apprentices and adult students. Leaders and managers do not set high enough aspirations for apprentices on standards. They do not communicate effectively enough the arrangements for end-point assessment. As a result, apprentices are unaware of how to gain a pass, merit or distinction grade, and how to meet their potential.

Most students and apprentices benefit from detailed and wide-ranging careers advice and guidance that meet their different needs well and relate closely to their next steps in learning and to future careers.

Managers and teachers effectively plan the teaching of the curriculum to support skills development. For example, in biology, mathematics and English language, teachers consistently reinforce year-one learning through classroom activity and assessment. As a result, students can recall and apply this knowledge to help them understand new areas of study and are well prepared for their next stages.

Teachers are appropriately qualified and liven up lessons by expertly sharing their technical experience and academic expertise. For example, they provide challenging information and technology problems for students to solve such as enabling students to use and apply confidently different filters and layering techniques when manipulating a graphical image for use on a website.

Students on advanced level and academic programmes benefit from an extensive programme of activities that support their academic and vocational needs and interests. These include competitions, field trips and visits to higher education fairs, attending university open days, and hearing talks by former students. As a result, most students on level 3 programmes, with an intention to move into higher education, are successful in securing their first-choice offer. Many students on academic programmes are not aware of what is available to them by way of work experience. As a result, too few students take up this entitlement.

Managers have not made sure that attendance on A-level programmes is consistently high across all subject areas. Teachers and tutors are not always clear of the actions being taken by managers to support students with low attendance, or students who are identified as being at risk. In some areas, communication between pastoral teams and teaching teams is not sufficiently effective to ensure that students who are not attending are identified.

Adult students value the support they receive from their teachers and assessors. They value how their teachers and assessors respond quickly, both online and in lessons. For example, when students on a distance learning programme struggled with a particular question about legislation, the teacher emailed to rephrase the question and signpost where students might find relevant information. However, some teachers do not use feedback effectively to reinforce key learning points that would enable students to recall information at a later date.

Adult students develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours that enhance their employability. Where students are already employed, they apply their new learning to improve their performance in the workplace. For example, Trades Union representatives provide improved support for their members.

Managers, teachers and trainers plan delivery of apprenticeships in a logical order, which helps to build the knowledge and skills apprentices require for employment. For example, apprentices on an engineering apprenticeship could confidently relate how the skills and knowledge gained in previous years support the skills they are developing in the workplace. However, targets set for apprentices are based on the achievement of qualifications and not the wider development of knowledge, skills and behaviours. Apprentices who score below their employer's expectation in areas

of behaviour are not set targets in relation to these concerns. Apprentices are not always clear about the extent of their development and are unable to articulate their overall progress against expectations such as behaviour.

A few apprentices also benefit from exposure to the World Skills competitions, receiving excellent employer support. Working with skilled operatives from their workplace, they develop a range of higher technical skills, such as computer-aided design, welding and turning, along with interpersonal skills such as teamwork and communication. As a result, a few apprentices won gold and silver medals at the World Skills UK competition this year. They now have the opportunity to represent the UK at the international event in 2021.

Programmes for students with high needs are developed well to promote independence, communication skills, and to prepare students for their next steps in life. Students are on courses appropriate to their individual needs, whether they are learning alongside peers who do not have high needs or on programmes specifically designed for students with high needs.

Students with high needs make progress in line with expectations as a result of effective and coherent programme planning. Students develop skills relevant for adult life or move into more academic routes.

Governors are experienced and have appropriate backgrounds, including areas such as education and finance. Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college and demonstrate a strong desire for continuous improvement. They have a detailed understanding of the issues currently faced by the college and articulate clearly the areas on which they hold leaders and managers to account. However, they do not ensure that college leaders take appropriate action quickly enough to improve provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Students and apprentices do not benefit from a culture of effective safeguarding practice. Leaders have not taken enough account of the known risks to students to devise strategic, clear and consistent expectations and procedures to mitigate and reduce those risks. These risks relate to access to the campus sites and the potential for students to be exploited.

A small number of vulnerable students described not feeling safe and feeling intimidated around the college. Staff have received training related to managing students' behaviours. Despite this, some staff reported that they did not feel equipped to deal with challenges they may face when interacting with students and learners.

Health and safety practices are not consistently applied in work-related areas. A small number of students and learners do not have a good understanding of how

to keep themselves safe online, of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, or threats posed in their local communities.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must develop as a matter of urgency a sufficiently detailed and effective safeguarding risk assessment to cover the college's estates; they should review these risks regularly to ensure that effective controls are in place and vulnerable students feel safer.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that communication between themselves, pastoral and teaching teams is effective. They must identify quickly those students who have poor attendance and who are at risk of not achieving or are vulnerable, and be sure to put the appropriate support mechanisms place.
- Leaders should ensure that all students on study programmes know about their entitlement to work experience and so can take up this opportunity.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that apprentices and employers understand the process of end-point assessment and how to achieve pass, merit or distinction grades to enable apprentices to achieve their potential.
- Leaders and managers should develop target setting in apprenticeships to ensure that all apprentices are supported to develop in all areas of the apprenticeship, including their behaviours.
- Leaders and managers need to speed up improvements to make sure that a greater proportion of apprentices' and adult students' achievements is constantly high.
- Governors should make sure that senior leaders are making identified quality improvements quickly enough.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130800
Address	Priory Road Shrewsbury Shropshire SY1 1RX
Contact number	01743 235491
Website	www.scg.ac.uk/
Principal/CEO	James Staniforth
Provider type	Further education
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	JCA Ltd ESP Ltd Severndale Specialist Academy

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the group vice principal, quality and curriculum management, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including observing learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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