

Inspection of Walsall College

Inspection dates: 3–6 March 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Walsall College is a large general further education college. In April 2018, it merged with Walsall Adult and Community College. The college has six sites and several community venues in and around Walsall and the West Midlands. Walsall is an area of high economic and social deprivation. The proportion of students in the region achieving a 9 to 4 pass in English and mathematics is well below average.

The college offers education for young people in 12 sector subject areas. It offers courses from entry level to level 6. The largest areas of provision are health, care and public services; construction; and engineering. At the time of the inspection, there were just under 4,000 young people on study programmes, with the vast majority studying at level 1 and level 2. Just over 3,000 students were studying on full- and part-time adult learning programmes. Most of the 1,600 apprentices were on standards-based apprenticeships. Around 160 students are in receipt of high-needs funding. The college has radically reduced its work with subcontractors and now works with four main ones.

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

Students enjoy learning at Walsall College. They are enthusiastic about their chosen subject and keen to learn more. They feel cared for and safe in the college environment. Students enjoy using the facilities in the college such as the learning hub, the workshops, the computers, and the open atrium where they gather each day.

The vast majority of students and apprentices achieve the qualifications they set out to. Many also develop additional skills and competencies through the many extra activities they have access to, such as competitions, fund-raising and employer masterclasses.

Staff know and care about their students. Students benefit from the support they receive from staff. They know that if they raise any concerns with staff, these will be resolved quickly. Students with additional learning needs receive good specialist support. Those with hearing impairments receive exceptional support.

Most students and apprentices, including those with special educational needs, develop good work-related skills. They rapidly develop their confidence and make a difference to their workplace.

Apprentices and students, including those with high needs, benefit from effective careers guidance at the start of their programme. They also receive good guidance about their next steps. As a result, most students and apprentices move on into further training, higher education or employment at the end of their course.

Adult students benefit from learning that is accessible to them. Courses are held in a range of community venues close to where they live, providing safe and welcoming learning environments. Courses provide good progression routes for adult students. Adult students also benefit from vocational courses that develop their skills and enable them to enhance their career prospects.

Most apprentices and students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.

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

The principal and senior leaders have a clear vision for the college. Leaders have established a student-centred ethos that permeates all aspects of the college. Staff actively support this. Leaders have high ambitions for students and apprentices. Governors contribute well to setting the strategic direction of the college. They hold senior leaders to account for meeting challenging performance targets.

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for the programmes they offer. For instance, they have designed courses for young people in business management, motor vehicle maintenance and hospitality to meet local skills priorities.

Apprenticeship programmes meet the needs of sector bodies and employers effectively. Adult courses, such as those for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), are taught in a broad range of community venues to meet the needs of local communities and to support community cohesion. Most courses have carefully thought out progression routes, which students benefit from.

Leaders and managers offer some programmes of an exceptional quality. The provision for students with high needs is outstanding. Leaders and managers use high-needs funding very effectively to plan a programme that prepares students well for further training, employment and life after college.

Tutors work closely with a range of agencies, including feeder schools, local authorities and specialist services. They identify students' starting points and put individual support resources in place. As a result, students are placed on appropriate programmes and settle into college quickly. Students who are on higher level vocational courses across the college make expected progress, or better progress than their peers.

Managers and staff provide excellent support for students with high needs. Learning mentors are highly skilled and cover a wide range of specialist areas. They have a particularly strong team of interpreters for people who are deaf. Support for students is designed to be reduced over time to build students' resilience. For example, tutors use behaviour support plans very effectively. The plans help students manage areas they find challenging, such as time management and appropriate communication. As a result, students begin to self-regulate, and the plans are withdrawn.

Students with high needs have access to a wide-ranging vocational curriculum to support their future choices. Where appropriate, they achieve a range of qualifications, which enables them to move towards their employment goals. Those students who move into supported internships develop the skills and knowledge necessary to enable a smooth transition into the workplace.

A few programmes for young people have outstanding features, particularly at level 3. For example, managers have designed a highly effective level 3 art and design course. The curriculum provides a clear structure for students to develop their individual ideas. Teachers plan sessions to ensure that all students develop higher level skills regardless of their starting points. As a result, students produce work of an exceptional quality. Those taking business management courses at level 3 have an excellent grasp and recall of their subject. They have a very good understanding of how businesses work. They achieve well and develop the knowledge and skills required to progress into employment or higher education.

ESOL programmes for adults are also very strong. Teachers carry out thorough identification of learners' starting points. They plan lessons carefully and give students frequent opportunities to practise their new language skills. This allows them to commit new learning to their long-term memory.

As a result, ESOL students develop highly effective speaking and listening skills, which helps them in their everyday lives.

For most programmes across the college, teachers, trainers and assessors bring high levels of specialist knowledge, qualifications and expertise. Most use their extensive experience of industry to plan learning well. Leaders support this with targeted professional development to improve their teaching practice.

In lessons, the majority of teachers use students' starting points well to build on and check their knowledge and understanding. Staff order learning activities well to ensure that students develop secure knowledge and skills. As a result, students can remember what they have learned and identify key concepts well. For example, adult students learn the four rules of number – addition, subtraction, multiplication and division – before moving on to more complex concepts such as fractions. Young people studying plumbing are challenged to learn about types of bends in pipes before practising on joining low-carbon steel, copper and plastic pipes. Business administration apprentices learn theories such as 'PESTLE' early, so they can begin to use the model to analyse their workplace.

Teachers use learning resources well to enhance learning. For example, level 3 art and design students use digital tablets to develop their free-drawing skills and create cartoons of a high quality. Hospitality students benefit from an award-winning, highly commended commercial restaurant.

Apprentices benefit from well-planned lessons and high-quality resources. This enables them to practise new techniques on up-to-date equipment, which they then apply at work. Most apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours and make a positive contribution to their workplace. For example, pharmacy apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of medications used for people with Parkinson's disease. By applying their learning at work, they rapidly become valued employees.

Most teachers, trainers and assessors use assessment well. They provide students with helpful written and verbal feedback that helps them improve their work. For example, in ESOL classes, teachers check learning frequently, which helps students learn quickly. Most apprentices benefit from useful progress reviews with helpful feedback from assessors. This enables them to reflect on the new skills and knowledge they are learning. Employers contribute valuable feedback at reviews. As a result, apprentices make an increasing impact in their workplace.

Leaders and managers prepare students well for their next steps through work placements, careers advice, volunteering, links with employers and work-related projects. For example, in hospitality, students develop valuable skills to support them on their vocational programme but also to support them to work in industry.

In a few aspects of the curriculum across a small number of areas, the quality of education is not consistently good. Teaching is not consistently effective in all areas. In adult functional skills mathematics lessons, teachers do not challenge students

enough. They do not encourage them to think deeply about their topics and provide detailed answers to questions. For adults on a few non-accredited courses, and a few apprentices, feedback is too vague to be helpful. Teachers and trainers do not set clear enough targets to help them plan and improve their work. In a few instances on access to higher education courses, teachers do not use assessment strategies well enough to identify and correct students' misconceptions.

Leaders and managers have rightly identified the need to improve attendance. In a minority of programmes, attendance is too low. Attendance is particularly low in a small minority of vocational programmes, in a few English and mathematics GCSE classes, and in functional skills mathematics for adults.

Managers are also aware of the need to improve aspects of English and mathematics across the college. Many students on study programmes start with lower than average grades in English and mathematics. Over the last three years, staff have worked hard and have steadily improved the number of students who achieve high grades. They have also helped students improve their English and mathematical skills. Nevertheless, the proportion who achieve high grades remains low. Too few adults achieve their functional skills mathematics qualification. Apprentices often start with the required English and mathematics qualifications. However, a few trainers and assessors do not sufficiently develop apprentices' mathematical or English skills beyond the minimum required by their programme.

Managers have identified the need to improve the number of students on study programmes undertaking work experience. However, despite some improvement, too few students on education programmes for young people complete external work placements. The quality of students' reflections on their work placements is too variable.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have developed a culture of safeguarding. Designated safeguarding leads work with a range of strategic partners to inform their understanding of current local threats and concerns. As a result, they shape and review the college's safeguarding plans to keep the college community safe. Staff and governors complete regular and appropriate safeguarding training. Leaders have developed an informative and detailed 'Prevent' duty action plan.

Staff respond quickly and appropriately to any safeguarding concerns raised by students and apprentices. They keep detailed records of actions they take and regularly monitor these against agreed timescales. Students also receive ongoing training on keeping themselves and others safe.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should continue to improve the teaching of GCSE English and mathematics for learners aged 16 to 18 and of functional skills mathematics for adults, so that a higher proportion of learners achieve. They should also ensure that apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills beyond the level of their qualifications on entry.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that the number of young people who undertake high-quality external work experience improves. They have rightly encouraged students to reflect on their work placement and they should ensure that the quality of reflection is consistently high.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that the quality of teaching – particularly the checking of learning and levels of challenge for all students – is consistently good across all provision.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that attendance across the college consistently meets the college target.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130483
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Contact number	01922 657022
Website	www.walsallcollege.ac.uk
Principal	Jatinder Sharma
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	11 February 2013
Main subcontractors	Intequal Risual Environmental Excellence Education Fairway

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal quality and higher education, 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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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