

# Inspection of South Staffordshire College

Inspection dates: 2–5 November 2021

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

## Information about this provider

South Staffordshire College is a medium-sized further education college. The college has four main campuses and a satellite centre, all located in the south of Staffordshire. There are also a number of outreach community learning venues. At the time of the inspection, 2,522 learners were on education programmes for young people, 1,399 learners on adult learning programmes, 675 apprentices following frameworks and standards, and 247 learners in receipt of high needs funding. The college offers courses in all sector areas. Courses range from entry level to level 5 with around 50% of the learners on study programmes at level 3 and below. Over 60% of apprentices were on level 3 apprenticeships. The college does not subcontract any teaching.

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

Leaders and teachers have high expectations of learners and apprentices. They have created inviting and well-resourced environments where they learn and practise their skills. As a result, learners work well together – their conduct reflecting the calm and orderly behaviours expected in the workplace. In a few sessions, not all learners and apprentices show an equal commitment to learning and the professional standards expected of them.

Most learners attend their courses and arrive on time ready to learn. During lessons, they are attentive, engage purposefully when set tasks, and respect each other – listening carefully to each other's views. As a result, staff and learners work together constructively in and around the various college sites.

Teachers know their learners very well and work closely with support staff to meet their individual needs. For example, teachers devise specific approaches to support learners who have learning needs, such as dyslexia, or those who miss lessons due to medical or emotional challenges. As a result, learners who have an identified support need achieve as well as their peers.

Learners and apprentices benefit from tutorial and review sessions where they explore and debate British values, such as individual liberty, tolerance and the rule of law. These sessions also inform them about other activities to help improve their health and well-being. Apprentices review their conditions of employment and tutors ensure that they get their full entitlements at work.

As a result of well-planned and productive work-experience placements, learners on study programmes develop a good understanding of the world of work. Also, many take part in charitable work to support the wider community. Learners who have high needs participate in meaningful social action projects, such as maintaining a nature walkway along a local reservoir. As a result, learners are better able to integrate and prosper within their local communities.

Most learners and apprentices achieve their courses and move into the next level of learning or employment. Although learners who follow study programmes and learners who have high needs receive effective careers information, advice, and guidance, adults do not always get the information to help them make informed decisions about their future careers.

Teachers, leaders, and managers have created a culture of safety; therefore, learners feel safe in the college and know how to raise concerns. They are keenly aware of the risks from extremist groups and how to stay safe online. Staff and learners do not accept – and challenge immediately – any incidence of bullying, harassment or discrimination.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all learners and apprentices and use information about their progress and achievements effectively to identify weaknesses in provision. They have a comprehensive plan to improve provision that they monitor closely to assess the effectiveness of their actions. As a result, leaders have improved most of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. Leaders accept that, although the pandemic has hindered their efforts to improve apprenticeship provision, they have been too slow to ensure all apprentices make the progress they should – particularly for those requiring English and mathematics.

Leaders have endeavoured to improve communication and build productive relations with their staff. They consider sensitively teachers' workload and general well-being. As a result, staff enjoy their work and feel supported to do their best for learners and apprentices.

Governors receive comprehensive information about learners' and apprentices' progress and achievements. They scrutinise leaders' actions, questioning the authenticity, relevance, and accuracy of the information they receive. Link governors triangulate their findings by talking to learners when visiting different groups on campus. As a result, they know well the areas of concern – including in apprenticeships – and challenge leaders and managers to ensure that their actions improve provision swiftly.

Leaders have developed effective relationships with and secured investment from their local enterprise partnerships and local authority. Consequently, they know the skills needs of the Staffordshire and West Midlands regions well. Leaders have invested significantly in a range of projects to teach the skills in most demand. These include digital hubs across the college and an engineering / electrical centre at the Cannock campus. As a result, learners and apprentices develop their digital literacy in coding, motion capture, alternative and virtual reality, plus traditional and specialist engineering skills – including the use of '3D' printing and 'virtual' computerised numerical control programming.

Most teachers and tutors effectively identify learners' and apprentices' prior knowledge and practical skills. They use this information to plan the curriculum incrementally – building the complexity of specific knowledge and skills over time. For example, in accountancy, tutors move sequentially from manual book-keeping skills to specialist accounting software. In public services, teachers teach a health and fitness unit at the start, so that learners can train to achieve the fitness level needed for entry into their chosen service by the end of the course.

Most teachers are well qualified with many years of vocational experience. They draw on their expertise to plan interesting activities and to present new information. This often involves practical demonstrations, topical examples and opportunities to apply theory into practice. Teachers simplify and clearly

communicate difficult concepts to help learners understand. For example, during a practical activity, health and social care learners explored the digestive system, using broken crackers, orange juice and fabric – illustrating how food passes through the system. Teachers of learners who have high needs, use assistive technology, such as reading pens, reading rulers and wipe boards imaginatively, so that these help most learners to participate productively in activities. However, in a few cases, support assistants do not resolve learners' needs well enough, slowing their progress.

Teachers help learners to practise what they have learned so that they develop fluency and consistency to achieve professional standards. For example, public service learners practise basic drill techniques until they become 'second nature' – in readiness to demonstrate their remembrance service duties. Animal care students follow the same strict sequence each time they handle and carry out health checks on different species of animal to ensure their safety and comfort.

Teachers apply different teaching tools and strategies including worksheets, videos, software applications, and peer review to help learners consolidate their understanding. For example, in level 2 beauty therapy, learners peer-review their practical work at the end of sessions, providing each other with open, honest, and supportive feedback. This helps them to improve their technique, customer service and choice of treatments for individual clients. As a result, learners recall previous learning and can apply it to different contexts.

Teachers assess routinely what learners and apprentices know and can do. They question learners frequently to check their understanding and rectify any misconceptions – helping learners to make links to new knowledge and ideas. In a few sessions, teachers allow more vocal learners to dominate discussions and do not check all learners' understanding well enough. Teachers do not always use the results from their assessment activities to ensure that all learners bridge the gaps in their knowledge.

Where teachers provide written feedback on learners' and apprentices' work, the information is precise and helps them to improve. Learners reflect and act on this feedback consistently. As a result, most learners improve the standard of their work. Teachers' feedback on work from electrical installation learners does not always show where learners need to improve.

Apprentices who have exemptions for English and mathematics continue to develop these skills in their course. For example, tutors of accountancy apprentices emphasise the importance of professional writing to clients and challenge routinely grammatical errors in apprentices' work. During tutorials, learners use a software application to develop their English and mathematics skills. However, teachers do not always ensure that learners – including adults – close specific gaps in these subjects to ensure that they make the progress that they should. English and mathematics provision is not well designed or well taught for apprentices for whom English and mathematics is a requirement of their qualification. Consequently, too few apprentices achieve these qualifications.

Leaders ensure that staff receive the training to help them extend their subject knowledge and use of new technical equipment such as, digital devices. However, leaders have yet to ensure that all teachers use skilfully the information on learners' starting points, so that all learners close gaps in their knowledge and are therefore able to make the progress of which they are capable.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise the safety of their learners and apprentices. They ensure that staff know college policies and procedures and how to implement them, so that learners feel safe and work safely.

Staff respond quickly to learners' concerns and take the appropriate action to ensure that they receive the support necessary to protect them. Learner records demonstrate that the designated safeguarding lead and their team work effectively with agencies, such as the police and local authorities. For example, they update their knowledge of changes to local authority referral processes to ensure learners access the most helpful agencies and support.

Leaders follow strict safer recruitment processes and ensure that all staff have the required clearances to work with young children and vulnerable adults. All staff undertake mandatory health and safety and safeguarding training in addition to specific subject-related courses in areas, such as electrical installation, construction, and land-based activities. As a result, learners and apprentices know how to work safely in various learning and work environments.

Learners receive safeguarding and health and safety training. They also follow a comprehensive tutorial programme where they explore wider topics, including respect, consent and sexual abuse. As a result, most learners have a good understanding of the potential threats to their safety, including those from online predators. In a few cases, learners and apprentices have only a narrow understanding of the potential threats from extremist activity in their communities.

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

- Leaders must ensure that all apprentices who require English and mathematics as part of their course receive high-quality teaching to help them develop these skills swiftly and achieve the qualifications within the planned time frame.
- Leaders must ensure that teachers identify swiftly the gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge – including in English and mathematics – and use this

information to plan teaching, so that learners catch up and make the progress that they should.

- Leaders must ensure that adult learners receive helpful information and guidance about their next steps to ensure that they are able to make informed decisions about their future careers.
- Ensure that all learners who have high needs receive the individual support to enable them to flourish.
- Leaders must ensure that, where provided, teachers' written feedback is sufficiently helpful to enable learners to improve their work.
- Leaders must ensure that all learners and apprentices have the knowledge to protect themselves from extremist activity in their local communities.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135658
<b>Address</b>	Rodbaston Drive Penkridge Stafford ST19 5PH
<b>Contact number</b>	01785 712209
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.southstaffs.ac.uk">www.southstaffs.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Claire Boliver
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15–18 May 2018
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Deputy Chief Executive, 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Richard Deane, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stuart Collett	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Thompson	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Parton	Ofsted Inspector
Beth Selwood	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Maria Navarro	Her Majesty's Inspector
Megan Dauksta	Ofsted Inspector
Allan Shaw	Ofsted Inspector
Sharon Dowling	Her Majesty's Inspector



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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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