

Inspection of Shrewsbury Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Information about this provider

Shrewsbury Colleges Group is a designated sixth-form college providing tertiary education and covering a large, mostly rural geographical area across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, and the Welsh borders. There are currently around 3,800 young people aged 16 to 19 on academic or vocational education programmes. This includes around 200 students with high needs. A small number of students aged between 19 and 24 have complex needs and study with a subcontractor based on site. There are around 1,300 adults studying a range of courses, including a small number on distance learning courses. Approximately 600 apprentices study courses from level 2 to level 4. A large proportion of apprentices follow engineering, construction or business-related apprenticeships.

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

Students work very well together in a safe, inclusive and supportive environment. They show high levels of respect for each other, and for staff and visiting adults. Students enjoy being at college with their peers following the disruption to their previous education and lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Younger students participate well in a wide range of opportunities available to them, such as sports, music, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and volunteering.

Students gain in confidence due to the good support and teaching they receive from college staff. They settle into life at college quickly, attend courses well, and feel able to be themselves. They feel part of a welcoming community. Staff provide appropriate and timely help to students who may need additional support. The student services team works with external agencies to provide guidance to students across a range of areas, including mental health, preparation for independent living and finance.

Students gain valuable knowledge and skills in their subjects in high-quality facilities. They are rightly proud of the work they produce. They develop useful wider skills, such as working independently and being part of a team. These skills prepare them well for moving on to employment or for studying courses at higher levels. Younger and adult students particularly benefit from comprehensive careers advice and guidance that help them identify what they want to do after they have completed their courses. A high proportion of students achieve their qualifications.

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

Leaders and managers, including governors, have used their extensive links with a range of stakeholders, including local schools, other colleges and employers, well to develop and deliver a broad and rich curriculum. Staff ensure that regional employers' needs are considered in the design of vocational courses, apprenticeships and adult programmes. Consequently, the curriculum meets the needs of students, apprentices, employers and local communities very well. Students benefit from good or better facilities. For example, because of their close association with the local enterprise partnership and employers, leaders secured funding for a new automotive centre that opened recently.

Leaders provide highly relevant courses for apprentices and adults that allow these students to move on to higher level qualifications in skills that employers value, or to secure permanent employment. For example, adults studying for accountancy qualifications can move from a level 2 course to a level 3 in bookkeeping. Adults without the qualifications they need improve their English and mathematical skills on the 'second chance' programme. Younger students select from a very wide range of A-level or vocational courses that help them go on to study at university or move into employment or apprenticeships. Students with high needs are supported well to follow similar academic or vocational courses as their peers. Students – including

some with education, health and care plans – who are not yet ready for level 2 and 3 courses study on the 'college-ready pathway' and develop the skills they need.

Governance has strengthened since the previous inspection. New governors have specialist skills and knowledge that help them hold senior leaders to account. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development at the college and work well with senior leaders to make improvements.

Teachers teach students and apprentices the content of the curriculum well. They sequence topics and concepts in a logical order that helps most students and apprentices to build on what they know and to develop new skills and knowledge effectively. For example, biology A-level students learn about the structure and function of cell organelles and the role that macro-molecules, such as proteins and lipids, play in cell biology. Teachers ensure that students and apprentices understand fundamental principles of their subjects and have lots of practice before moving to more complex concepts. Level 2 motor vehicle students learn welding and engineering principles to develop their industry skills.

Teachers provide particularly effective support for apprentices to develop their practical skills. For example, level 2 carpentry and joinery apprentices learn to use hand tools and refine their skills before moving on to use machine tools. Staff support students and apprentices well to develop their independent study skills, and most improve their English and mathematical skills.

Most teachers check students' and apprentices' understanding in the classroom effectively. They help students to secure their knowledge and understanding through the effective support they provide in lessons. For example, teachers on the trade union studies courses challenge students to deepen their knowledge through thought-provoking questions and links to workplace examples. Consequently, students gain valuable knowledge about employment law and health and safety. Adult students in mathematics now feel able to help their grandchildren with their homework and personal financial budgeting. Teachers quickly identify, and help, students and apprentices who do not understand concepts being taught.

Despite this, there is inconsistency in the quality of some teachers' and assessors' assessment practices. The quality and usefulness of feedback that teachers provide to young people and apprentices are varied. Consequently, many students, including those with education, health and care plans enrolled on college-ready programmes, and apprentices, are not always aware of their specific individual areas for development. Apprentices know the requirements of their final external assessments, when these might be, and what grades they could achieve.

Teachers help students and apprentices secure their knowledge through recapping and revisiting previous learning frequently, particularly with students with high needs. On performing arts courses, teachers regularly revisit the use of beat in dance and acting. Students and apprentices build on their knowledge and skills throughout their time at the college and apply what they have learned to meet

industry standards. As a result, most students and apprentices develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. A high proportion of younger students, those with high needs and apprentices move into higher education (including Russell Group universities) or further training or employment when they complete their learning.

Teachers and assessors identify students' existing skills and knowledge at the start of their courses effectively. Most teachers use this information usefully to inform their plans for the curriculum, including the development of English and mathematics. This is particularly effective during the initial weeks of learning. Staff identify students with special educational needs and/or disabilities promptly. Teachers of young people recognise that students have bigger gaps in their knowledge than they have seen for previous cohorts because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have implemented more in-depth assessments during the first few weeks to identify what these gaps are and how they can address them. For example, teachers have provided more practical experiments for A-level chemistry and biology students at the beginning of their courses to give them plenty of practice in using equipment and following necessary instructions safely. Initial auditions in performing arts explored how students can reduce body tension, which students later practise in further sessions.

Teachers of students on the college-ready pathway and staff involved in teaching or assessing apprenticeships or adult students of English and mathematics do not consistently use the information available to them effectively to inform the content of their learning programmes. Often staff on these programmes focus on completing units rather than the specific new knowledge and skills that students and apprentices need.

Teachers, tutors and assessors have high levels of subject expertise and experience. Leaders and managers ensure that staff maintain their currency in their subjects by good use of industry and research days, when staff spend time in relevant sectors. For example, motor vehicle teachers are trained on hybrid and electric vehicles. Teachers on health and social care courses still work in their sector and share their current knowledge and skills with students in the classroom. Staff working with students with high needs, including teaching assistants, have good levels of expertise and experience of working with these students, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Leaders provide teachers with frequent and useful training to help them improve their teaching and pastoral skills. Teachers and assessors are more confident to discuss topics such as healthy relationships, consent and sexual violence with their students and apprentices because of the training they have received.

Staff design apprenticeship and adult learning programmes well and ensure that these are flexible to meet the requirements of employers. A range of engineering apprenticeships suit the various specialist requirements of regional employers, such as a shortage of skilled maintenance technicians. A wide range of different sectors – including construction companies and local schools – recognise the value of training business administration apprentices. Employers of adult students, such as those on

trade union or accountancy programmes, are supported well by college staff to monitor their employee's progress.

Leaders provide useful careers information and guidance, including for work experience, to most students and apprentices. An internal team, known as 'The Agency', provides good support for full-time students and students with high needs. As a result, these students and their families are receiving the information they need to inform their choices for their next steps. Well-informed teachers and assessors provide students and assessors with useful insight and advice on working within their sectors. Although apprentices receive useful careers guidance from their assessors, many are not fully aware of the wide range of options available to them once they complete their apprenticeships.

During their time at college, students and apprentices rapidly improve their self-confidence. Younger students new to the college were supported very well by staff to make the transition from school, and, despite the disruption to their education because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most are now thriving. Staff set very clear expectations of their new students from the outset and have identified effective strategies to address any early behaviour or non-attendance that did not meet these expectations. As a result, students quickly developed a very good understanding of working, supporting and respecting other students and staff. Classes and communal spaces are calm and welcoming, and attendance is mostly high. Most students improve their awareness of, and support for, the diverse population of students who attend college. For example, students who identify as gay, transgender or non-binary have been supported well by staff and other students and feel an accepted part of the college community.

Most students are motivated to do well in their studies and often seek additional ways to improve their skills and knowledge. For example, adult students on functional skills courses in English and mathematics were keen to take extra work home so that they improved their understanding of percentages following their mathematics sessions. Most apprentices quickly develop a strong work ethic. They develop mature attitudes to their work and training.

Leaders and managers provide a wide range of enrichment opportunities for younger students. During the COVID-19 restrictions, activities such as debating groups were provided online, as was work experience, as leaders strived to continue to provide such broadening opportunities. As restrictions are eased, more activities are becoming available as and when it becomes safe to offer them. Younger students are now participating in large numbers in activities such as volunteering with the NHS, singing in choirs and playing in sports teams. These students also benefit from additional activities related to their studies, such as peat-bog sampling in a local area for biology A level and playing in flute quartets for music A level. Students on level 2 motor vehicle courses visit vehicle manufacturers and trade shows. While there are opportunities for some apprentices to participate in WorldSkills Competitions, there are few other appropriate additional opportunities for adults and apprentices to develop wider personal or professional skills or awareness.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have worked diligently since the previous inspection – and in collaboration with new governors with specialist skills, external agencies and partners – to implement a range of effective measures to keep students safe. They have created an inclusive culture where students, apprentices and staff feel safe and welcome.

Leaders use comprehensive assessments to identify possible risks to students at each campus and have developed appropriate actions, policies and systems to mitigate these. Managers keep detailed records of any safeguarding concerns, refer these swiftly to relevant agencies if necessary, and make sure that students are supported well if they need help.

Employers, teachers and staff work together well to provide students and apprentices with a good understanding of health and safety standards. Students and apprentices apply these well to adhere to safe working practices in laboratories, workshops and workplaces.

Students and apprentices are very aware of how to raise safeguarding concerns. Most understand the potential risks of extremism and radicalisation, and of sexual harm, and know how to keep themselves safe online.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Use all available information about previous learning for students on college-ready programmes, and for adults and apprentices, to develop specific, individual knowledge and skills. Monitor closely the progress that students and apprentices make in developing these knowledge and skills.
- Develop the assessment of students' and apprentices' knowledge and skills to ensure that young people, including those with education, health and care plans on college-ready programmes, and apprentices, know what progress they have made and what they still need to master.
- Improve the usefulness of the feedback that teachers provide to young people and apprentices on their work, so they know what they need to do better.
- Develop additional appropriate enrichment opportunities and careers advice and guidance for adults and apprentices, so that they have an improved understanding of their chosen sectors and opportunities for employment and further and higher education in these sectors, or more widely in their communities.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130800
Address	Priory Road Shrewsbury Shropshire SY1 1RX
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Website	www.scg.ac.uk
Principal	James Staniforth
Provider type	Sixth-form college
Date of previous inspection	26 to 29 November 2019
Main subcontractors	Severndale Academy

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal for 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 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

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