

Inspection of East Sussex College Group

Inspection dates: 23–26 November 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

East Sussex College Group comprises five college campuses: Hastings Plaza and Ore Valley (formerly Sussex Coast College), Eastbourne, Lewes and Newhaven (formerly Sussex Downs College). The college group was created in 2018 with the merger of the two colleges.

Sussex Downs College received a full inspection in October 2017, at which time inspectors judged the provision to require improvement. Sussex Coast College received a full inspection in November 2017, and inspectors judged the provision to be good. Since merging, the college group has received two monitoring visits where inspectors found that leaders and managers had made significant progress in three themes and reasonable progress in two themes.

The merged college group provides a range of vocational, further and higher education courses, as well as apprenticeships from pre-entry to level 5 and provision for students with high needs. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,333 16-to 18-year-old students on academic and vocational programmes, 1702 adult students

and 1634 apprentices. There were approximately 110 students in receipt of high needs funding.

The college works with 14 main subcontractors that deliver mostly apprenticeships in niche sectors, such as window fitting and agricultural subjects.

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

Students and apprentices benefit from a strong culture of mutual respect and tolerance that leaders, managers and staff have created. They work together well despite their different backgrounds, interests and abilities.

Students and apprentices respect and support each other in the classroom. They encourage each other during discussions and share ideas. This helps them to learn from each other and build their confidence and resilience. For example, younger students develop their confidence and become more independent and responsible as they progress through their courses. Business administration apprentices improve their communication skills, which helps them to provide better customer service.

Students and apprentices enjoy attending the college. Teachers have high expectations of all students and apprentices, including those with high needs. Teachers' high expectations motivate students and apprentices to achieve their best. Apprentices enjoy their training and work, take pride in what they do and, as a result, take on more responsibility at work. Students and apprentices speak very positively of the support they receive from their teachers, who, they say, 'make you believe in yourself, because they believe in you'.

Students and apprentices recognise the importance of consistently high rates of attendance and punctuality. Teachers support students effectively in order to catch up if they do miss lessons. In the few courses where students' attendance is lower, leaders, managers and teachers take appropriate action to remedy this.

Almost all students and apprentices display good behaviour. Students collaborate together to achieve tasks set by their teachers. Apprentices working in early years role model this good behaviour at work, providing a positive example for children in their care.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college and at their workplaces. Most students and apprentices know how to keep themselves safe, and that they can report any concerns about their safety to college staff. Students and apprentices are safe at work. They learn and adopt safe working practices and know how to assess the risk that activities could cause. However, students at Lewes campus are not as aware of how prevalent the wider risks are that they may face outside, such as radicalisation and grooming, in their community. As a result, they are not so readily able to identify the signs of these risks.

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

Leaders have a sensible strategy and rationale for the courses and training they offer which are informed well by the needs of their local community. They have developed and changed the curriculum offer appropriately to meet local needs successfully. For example,

leaders identified the need to grow their A-level provision in Eastbourne to better meet the needs of students in the town.

Leaders have formed strong links with local and regional partners that help them understand and meet the needs of people in Sussex and beyond. For example, they worked closely with members of Team East Sussex to develop engineering and construction courses to improve people's life chances in Newhaven and Hastings. Leaders also work with partners, such as Job Centre Plus, and have developed useful courses to counter unemployment in Newhaven, Hastings and Lewes.

Leaders, managers and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. They focus effectively on improving teaching and training. For example, leaders recognised the need to improve the ways that teachers structured learning and worked closely and successfully with staff to improve this.

Leaders benefit from strong governance, with highly experienced and knowledgeable governors. After recognising that the executive team needed strengthening, governors sensibly appointed a range of new senior leaders to focus on improving the quality of education that students and apprentices receive.

Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and committed to their roles. They use their extensive knowledge, skills and experience effectively in order to inspire students and apprentices and help them to develop their knowledge and skills. In subjects such as construction, hair and beauty, sports massage and creative media, students benefit from highly qualified teachers whose extensive up-to-date subject knowledge prepares students thoroughly for work.

Most teachers and support staff work effectively with students with high needs. Support staff are adept at motivating and encouraging their students, and they work closely with teachers. Staff know their students' personal and development needs and plan their education carefully to meet these needs accordingly. Staff work closely with community partners, such as local schools, local authorities, employers and parents, to ensure that the provision meets the needs of these students. These students benefit from an extensive range of well-planned courses which help them achieve their goals and move on to higher levels of learning at the college or to employment and independent living. The few students on high-level courses achieve as well or better than their peers.

In most subjects, teachers identify students' and apprentices' starting points accurately and use this information effectively to ensure that students and apprentices are on the right course.

Teachers plan their teaching carefully and logically so that students and apprentices initially develop the basic skills and knowledge they need before moving on to more complex work. For example, creative media students build their knowledge and understanding of media production in year one and learn how to use media equipment. In their second year, they deepen and build on their accumulated learning by learning complex skills, such as designing and presenting radio programmes or writing journal articles for specific audiences.

Most teachers present information clearly, which enables students and apprentices to understand key concepts. They use a range of tasks and activities, including group discussion, information technology, helpful strategies and tips, individual and pair work, to help students and apprentices to understand and retain information.

Teachers use questioning, repetition and assessment strategies thoughtfully to ensure that students and apprentices retain their knowledge and are able to apply this knowledge in practice. Teachers in most courses frequently revisit topics so that students and apprentices transfer their learning into long-term memory. For example, GCSE English teachers frequently check students' understanding to identify where they misunderstand or have gaps in their knowledge. Teachers adjust their lessons in light of this information to ensure that students continue to make progress.

Students and apprentices rapidly gain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful with their studies. For example, students on access to nursing courses quickly develop knowledge about the anatomy and physiology they need to prepare for higher level studies. Young students in business administration improve their communication skills early in their training, which helps them to respond to all ages of customer in a professional manner. Adult students on courses aimed at improving mental health have benefited greatly from learning how to stay calm and reduce stress from their lives. Art and design students can describe how their drawing has improved in year one, and they are able to use 3D design software with confidence in their second year. Apprentices studying carpentry develop the skills they need to design and construct flooring for old buildings.

In most subjects, students benefit from useful and developmental feedback on their work. This helps them to identify what they are doing well and what they could do better. However, several teachers do not give students and apprentices useful feedback or clear enough targets so that they can quickly identify what they need to do to improve. Students and apprentices do not understand in enough detail the steps they need to take to improve their work. As a result, these students and apprentices make slower progress.

Most students and apprentices receive impartial and helpful careers information, advice and guidance to help them prepare for their next steps. They benefit from a wide range of sessions where they hear from employers and academic institutions. For example, students on English for speakers of other languages courses have had career talks and a taster session about jobs in the travel and tourism industry. Apprentices complete a 'professional development plan' through discussions with their assessors, and they are well informed about and understand their next steps.

Staff have developed a comprehensive programme of personal development for all students and apprentices which is based on enrichment, tutorials and an online tool called 'my student life'. The programme helps students and apprentices to learn about topics such as sexual harassment, consent and risks to their safety. However, leaders do not review what students and apprentices learn from this and how many use the programme. As a result, leaders do not know the impact of this curriculum.

Leaders have a carefully considered plan to curtail a small number of subcontracted apprenticeships where apprentices' training is not good enough. Too many employers are not aware of the progress that apprentices make. As a result, they are not able to plan work activities to enhance the apprentices' learning. Although leaders closely monitor the progress these apprentices make, too many have made slower progress and have not been able to complete their training within the planned time.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Students and apprentices are safe at the college and know who to contact if they have a concern. Safeguarding staff have recently surveyed groups of students and apprentices to find out about their concerns regarding sexual harassment and abuse. As a result, staff have set up forums with students and apprentices to find out about the most appropriate ways of covering these topics to ensure that students will benefit from increased knowledge of these subjects.

Leaders have ensured that staff responsible for safeguarding are appropriately trained. They have established strong links with external agencies that they use to help support students or apprentices with safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding staff have effective processes for recording incidents, and they take appropriate action, involving external agencies when appropriate.

Leaders ensure that staff are recruited safely and follow safer recruitment procedures. All new staff receive appropriate training and frequent refresher training to ensure that their knowledge is current.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that apprentices studying with subcontractors receive the same high-quality training that those under the direct supervision of college staff benefit from. Managers should ensure that apprentices' employers know what progress their apprentices are making and what training they can provide at work.
- Teachers should ensure that students and apprentices know what specific steps they need to take to improve their work.
- Leaders should ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the impact of the personal development curriculum, and that they make changes where it is not effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130665
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Website	www.escg.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Rebecca Conroy
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Aire Vocational Training Ltd Albion in the Community All Dimensions Ltd Beats Learning Ltd Glass Fenestration Training Solutions Ltd James Education Ltd K S Training Ltd Mark Betts Hair Education Ltd Parenta Training Ltd Plumpton College Presidency London College Ltd Royal Borough of Greenwich Specialist Trade Courses Ltd Total Training Ltd

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. 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 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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