

Inspection of Birmingham Metropolitan College

Inspection dates:

7–10 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

At the time of inspection, 4,465 learners were on education programmes for young people, 3,468 learners on adult learning programmes, 757 apprentices following frameworks and standards, and 88 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 70% of the learners on study programmes at level 3 and below. Over 85% of apprentices were on level 3 apprenticeships or above. The college subcontracts a small amount of teaching to a few local specialist community providers.

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

The quality of the learners' experience is too dependent on the subjects they study, and where they study across the college sites. Learners on adult learning programmes and learners who have high needs do not get as good an experience as those learners on education programmes for young people, or on apprenticeships.

Learners and apprentices work in calm and orderly classroom environments. Most learning settings have a culture of professionalism and commitment. As such, learners work diligently and with drive, displaying the behaviours and disciplines required at work. Learners are keen to contribute to learning sessions. They are comfortable communicating with each other and do so respectfully. At the time of the inspection, attendance for younger learners and adults was below that of the college target. Managers' strategies to improve learners' attendance are in their infancy and have yet to have the required impact. A small minority of learners do not arrive on time and are therefore not ready to learn. Apprentices attend their learning sessions routinely.

Most learners benefit from a comprehensive tutorial programme. They develop a good understanding of life in modern Britain. They demonstrate respect and a good understanding of each other's needs at college and in their communities.

Learners receive relevant and useful information to help them make informed decisions about their future careers. As a result, most learners study courses that help them to realise their ambitions. Apprentices do not receive sufficiently useful information to understand fully the careers opportunities outside their current employment.

Learners and apprentices develop the necessary work-related skills and experience for their future success in education, employment or training. For example, learners on business courses access a range of opportunities to gain insight from the world of work; this includes the college's professional services academy.

Learners develop their character, resilience, confidence and independence as a result of a wide range of activities at college and in the community. For example, many learners take part in volunteering events, such as fundraising and charitable work. Most learners and apprentices know how to keep physically and mentally healthy because of additional services, such as anxiety workshops.

Leaders, managers, teachers and learners do not accept bullying, harassment or discrimination. Learners feel that managers have been swift to resolve any issues or concerns when these types of incidence have occurred.

Teachers, leaders and managers have created a culture of safety. As such, learners feel safe in the college and know how to raise concerns.

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

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders and governors have changed the structure and focus of the college significantly. They have reduced the number of college sites and reformed the curriculum to meet the needs of learners, employers and stakeholders in Birmingham. Consequently, leaders and governors have now resolved the college's long-term structural and financial issues.

The recently appointed principal has acted quickly to develop a comprehensive understanding of the college and of the local area to move the college strategy forward. Although there have been clear improvements in the quality of curriculum – particularly in education programmes for young people – leaders have yet to ensure that the curriculum is consistently good in all subjects and at all campuses.

Senior leaders have ensured that the governing body now has the experience and skills to challenge leaders' strategy and actions. Members of the governing body use their extensive expertise gained in the further education sector to review leaders' key strengths and areas for college improvement. They clearly understand the curriculum areas in need of improvement and question leaders about their progress towards swift improvement. Governors accept, however, that recent structural and financial issues have drawn their focus from the quality of education and reduced their effectiveness in holding leaders to account.

Leaders and managers have developed strong relationships with employers and stakeholders. They work closely with the West Midlands Combined Authority, chambers of commerce and local enterprise partnerships to plan programmes to meet the skills needs of the region. Leaders and managers review the college curriculum through 'state of the nation' meetings, using labour market information thoroughly to identify emerging markets. For example, leaders have refined the green, energy-related construction and A-level life sciences and technology offer, responding quickly to the growing sustainability sector. In apprenticeships, managers – with employers' staff – have developed a highly successful 'on-site' engineering apprenticeship programme at an international automotive employer. Despite meeting with local combined authority expectations, which includes a high proportion of learners moving into employment, adult short employability courses in subjects such as customer service do not give learners sufficient time for them to remember new knowledge long term. To meet the qualification requirements in the time available, learners spend most of their time completing assessment workbooks. Consequently, teachers do not have sufficient time to close specific gaps in learners' customer service skills. As a result, learners do not consolidate new knowledge or rectify fully weaknesses in their skills.

Leaders and managers ensure that most learners and apprentices follow a curriculum that helps them to achieve their qualifications and move on to their next steps. Learners in applied science are well prepared for further learning in the aviation industry and biomedical science. Apprentices develop the skills and knowledge for the automotive and food manufacturing industry. However, too few

adult programmes, and those for learners who have high needs, prepare them well enough for their futures. Also, learners studying the same subject at different campuses in subjects such as health and social care and business studies do not always receive an equally effective learning experience, thereby limiting their progress.

Teachers and assessors carefully determine learners' starting points and identify their knowledge gaps. Most use the information effectively to adapt their teaching to meet learners' needs. For example, teachers ensure that learners who have recently entered the country, and have a strong knowledge of mathematics, make rapid progress through these qualifications. Teachers of learners on courses for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and for those who have high needs do not use this information well enough to adapt their teaching or monitor learners' progress from their starting points effectively. As a result, these teachers do not ensure that learners make the progress of which they are capable.

Teachers and assessors plan the curriculum sequentially so that learners and apprentices develop core knowledge and skills which help them move on to more advanced levels of learning. For example, during their foundation year, apprentices in engineering and food and drink maintenance learn essential hand tool skills. They use these to move on to more advanced skills, such as turning and milling, and can produce manufactured components to fine tolerances. In a few cases, for example in business studies, teachers do not order topics well enough to ensure that learners understand and retain new knowledge over time.

Most teachers and assessors use their expertise to help learners and apprentices to remember new knowledge and recall complex content. They modify teaching activities skilfully, building on learners' existing knowledge, increasing the difficulty of tasks as learners progress. For example, tutors on accounts courses set simple gap-filling exercises at the start of sessions, building towards learners carrying out more complicated accounting calculations by the end. As a result, learners can clearly explain and apply what they have learned, making links between new and old content. However, in a few cases, teachers do not adopt appropriate teaching strategies to help learners acquire new knowledge. Instead, they require learners to complete overly complex activities that overload their working memory and limit the information they can retain.

Most learners and apprentices benefit from a range of online resources which support them to continue their learning outside taught sessions. For example, learners in Access to Higher Education use these routinely to revise and gain confidence in retrieval of knowledge in preparation for external assessments.

Teachers advance learners' and apprentices' practical skills routinely. For example, food manufacturing apprentices demonstrate very well how to dismantle a gearbox. Apprentices also develop effective approaches to the learning and retention of knowledge, such as a detailed process plan that includes photos of the various build stages. As a result, apprentices can practise the task and reassemble the gearbox accurately. Teachers and tutors provide helpful oral feedback that helps learners and

apprentices to hone their abilities and to identify improvements they can apply to problems in the workplace.

Most learners and apprentices receive constructive written and oral feedback to help them improve their work. Teachers on adult plumbing programmes provide prompt and developmental comments that enable learners to improve the standard of their work over time. Apprentices receive routine and useful reviews of their progress from their tutors and employers. Feedback from teachers of customer service and ESOL adult programmes and for learners who have high needs is not consistently precise and informative. Too few teachers in these areas set learners clear targets to address gaps in their knowledge. Consequently, not all learners progress as quickly as they could. Where given, written feedback for younger learners on academic and vocational provision is not always helpful enough for them to know how to improve their work.

Where needed, learners and apprentices receive the appropriate learning support to enable them to complete their studies and overcome barriers such as dyslexia and dyscalculia. For learners who have high needs, most work at their own pace, receiving help when needed. However, too often, support workers do not allow learners sufficient time to complete their work before intervening and providing additional support, thereby hindering the development of learners' independence, character and resilience.

Although younger learners on academic and vocational courses continue to develop their English and mathematics skills, teachers and assessors do not systematically develop apprentices' English writing and presentation skills to support them with the next stages of their career. Also, tutors do not develop pharmacy apprentices' skills in these subjects beyond level 2. Teachers develop engineering apprentices' mathematical skills to a high standard.

The large majority of learners and apprentices complete and achieve their qualifications and move on to their planned next steps. Most learners on A-level courses achieve at least as well as expected, and an increasing proportion of learners achieve improved grades in their English and mathematics GCSE qualifications. The standard of work from learners who have high needs is similar to that produced by their peers.

Leaders manage subcontracted provision effectively. Leaders identify partners who offer specialist services to enhance both their own provision and to widen access to learning in the community. For example, one partner teaches a specialist certificate to college learners so they can work in the rail industry. Another provides community enrichment activities at a local premier league football club.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have appropriate policies, procedures and teams to support learners and apprentices. As a result, learners and apprentices operate in inclusive learning environments, where staff quickly tackle concerns regarding bullying and harassment when/if it occurs.

Managers and staff take the appropriate action to support learners who have mental health issues, and where there are concerns regarding self-harm.

Since the previous inspection, leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), have introduced a new system for staff to record and raise safeguarding concerns. Staff know how to use the system and consequently there has been an increase in concerns. Managers use this information to identify the categories of concerns and continue to make sure that staff record accurately the identification and reporting of incidents to ensure the safety and well-being of learners.

Leaders ensure that the DSL and safeguarding staff are well trained. Teachers receive extensive training in relation to safeguarding and as a result, feel confident in teaching topics related to potentially difficult subjects, for example consent, sexual abuse and harassment.

Most learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have. They demonstrate a good understanding of the college's 'ready, respectful and safe' approach to safeguarding. A few adult learners have a superficial understanding of some safeguarding topics, such as how to stay safe when working online. Apprentices on pharmacy programmes do not have sufficient awareness of the risks posed by extremist behaviour, particularly in the areas in which they live and work.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that teachers identify accurately the starting points of learners who have high needs and use the information to ensure that they receive the appropriate teaching and support to help them achieve their best.
- Governors must ensure that leaders identify precisely the weaknesses in all curriculum areas, including courses for adults and programmes for learners who have high needs, and that their actions result in their swift improvement.
- Leaders must ensure that, where academic and vocational provision is delivered on more than one campus, learners receive a consistently good learning experience.
- Leaders should ensure that adult employability courses meet learners' needs effectively, as well as the demands of stakeholders, such as the local combined authority and employers.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that learners receive the appropriate teaching to help them understand incrementally and remember long term new knowledge and skills.

- Leaders and managers must ensure that all learners receive consistently constructive and helpful feedback (oral and/or written) on their work to help them improve and achieve their potential.
- Managers must ensure that learners who have high needs receive the appropriate support, so that they can make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices following pharmacy courses develop their English and mathematics skills beyond level 2.
- Leaders must ensure that adult learners and apprentices know how to stay safe online and know the risks posed by extremist behaviour, particularly in the areas in which they live and work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130466
Address	Jennens Road Birmingham West Midlands B4 7PS
Contact number	0121 446 4545
Website	www.bmet.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Pat Carvalho
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	16–19 October 2018
Main subcontractors	KHFC Ed Limited JBC Skills Training Limited Oxford Brookes University Aston Athletics Basketball Club Community Interest Company Siemens Mobility Limited The Albion Foundation Birmingham City University Skern Lodge Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal of curriculum and quality, 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
Andrea Dill-Russell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rebecca Gater	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Parton	Ofsted Inspector
Beth Selwood	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Kinghorn	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Collett	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Sykes	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Higgins	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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