

Inspection of Blackburn College

Inspection dates: 10 to 13 January 2022

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Blackburn College (the college) is a large general further education college situated in the centre of Blackburn. Blackburn with Darwen is an area of high economic and social deprivation. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) has identified the area as a priority for the promotion of social integration. The college is at the heart of its local, multiracial community and is a key partner in the local integration partnership. The college is pivotal in bringing local communities together and helping to develop positive relationships across the area that it serves.

The college offers further education courses for young people and adults in 14 sector-subject areas. It also provides apprenticeships, employer training and higher education programmes. The largest subject areas are in arts, building and construction, engineering, and health and social care. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,688 students on education programmes for young people and 2,133 students on adult learning programmes. There were 490 apprentices on programmes from level 2 to level 6 across a range of subjects, such as business, construction, hairdressing, and health and social care. Most apprentices were following apprenticeship standards. There were 131 students with education, health and care plans for whom the college received high-needs funding.

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

Leaders and managers have established a positive and inclusive culture where students, apprentices and staff feel valued. For example, adult students who have not experienced learning for some time are confident to ask questions and contribute to discussions. Students with high needs are integrated effectively into all aspects of college life.

Students and apprentices find the college an enjoyable and welcoming place to learn. Classrooms and workshops are calm and inviting. As a result, students and apprentices display positive attitudes to their learning. They settle into college life quickly and are highly motivated to achieve.

Most students and apprentices, including those with high needs, achieve on their courses. They successfully progress to the next stage of their learning or into employment. For example, almost all students on access to higher education courses progress to further study at university. Approximately a fifth of students on education programmes for young people are successful in gaining a place at prestigious universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.

Staff have high expectations of students' and apprentices' behaviour. They monitor behaviour rigorously and do not tolerate any bullying or harassment. On the rare occasions that these occur, staff deal with incidents promptly and effectively.

Leaders ensure that learning environments and workshops are well resourced with industry-standard equipment and appropriate technical support. Students and apprentices have an abundance of spaces to study in groups or on their own. Tutors use relevant, high-quality learning resources across most programmes. For example, in the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, tutors use resources that reflect the diversity in the local community.

Leaders and managers ensure that most students and apprentices have access to a broad range of additional activities. For example, through the Lancashire Engaging Apprentices Programme, apprentices learn how to handle difficult customers at work. Students wanting to progress to courses in medicine undertake work placements in pharmacies. Hair professional apprentices benefit from participating in annual hairdressing competitions. These activities successfully develop students' and apprentices' confidence, resilience and independence in preparation for their next steps.

Students and apprentices benefit from a range of professional student support services, such as qualified careers, finance and work-placement advisers, and pastoral support officers. They learn about equality of opportunity and diversity in their community through an effective tutorial programme. External speakers and theatre companies provide additional information on hate crime, healthy and abusive relationships and mental health issues to reinforce students' and apprentices' understanding of these challenging topics.

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

Leaders and managers design a curriculum that effectively reflects local, regional and national skills needs. They consult with employers frequently to ensure that the curriculum content meets the most up-to-date industry practices and standards, for example in dementia awareness training for health and social care students. Leaders and managers work closely with local agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and the local ESOL hub to ensure that teaching and training meet the needs of the local community.

Leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum prepares students and apprentices successfully for their next steps into further learning and employment, and to be active citizens in their local communities. In A-level subjects such as psychology, teachers include optional units in forensic psychology to help students to progress to science degrees at prestigious universities. Leaders develop programmes such as English lessons at the Asylum Seekers and Refugees Community hub to help asylum seekers, refugees and those furthest from the job market to develop the skills they need to successfully access the community and to secure employment.

Most tutors teach a curriculum that builds students' and apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviour incrementally. They ensure that the curriculum is planned and delivered in a logical order. For example, when studying security issues, A-level computing students learn about different types of viruses and malware before considering their wider implications on security breaches and loss of information. Over the course of their studies, ESOL students develop the necessary English-speaking skills to attend medical appointments on their own and to contact their children's schools to ask for help with their children. This has been recognised by the local community hub as helping to improve social cohesion.

Leaders have developed an effective and integrated curriculum to meet the needs of most students with high needs across all levels. The entry-level curriculum provides clear progression routes for students with high needs, for example into childcare, catering and motor vehicle studies. However, the 'carousel' approach at entry level 2 that provides students with experience of different subjects does not meet the needs of all students. For example, students who already know what subjects they want to progress to, such as hospitality, complete sport and craft alongside their peers. Consequently, they do not achieve their ambitions as quickly as they could.

Training advisers and assessors work closely with employers to plan and coordinate on- and off-the-job training effectively. For example, plumbing and heating apprentices learn about a wide range of building regulations and apply this knowledge practically, for example by fitting flues at the recommended distance from windows.

Leaders ensure that staff are well qualified and, where appropriate, have relevant industry knowledge. Substantial numbers of vocational staff are industry practitioners, for example in construction, hairdressing and nursing. Through regular discussions with staff, leaders ensure that the professional development programme includes subject-specific sessions to constantly build on tutors' expertise and to meet industry expectations. The majority of tutors ensure that they have up-to-date industry knowledge through membership of professional organisations.

Approximately half of the A-level tutors are external examiners. They use this knowledge and experience to prepare students for their examinations and to help them achieve higher grades. Staff who teach students with high needs undertake regular training on topics relating to students' diagnoses and medical conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder, diabetes, epilepsy and the use of adrenaline auto-injectors. This helps staff to plan learning effectively to take account of students' individual needs and to deal competently with emergency medical situations.

Tutors check students' and apprentices' understanding and acquisition of knowledge frequently. They use a range of effective assessment methods to ensure that students and apprentices understand and can fluently recall the knowledge and skills that they learn. For example, in A-level psychology, tutors complete learning checks at the start of each lesson to ensure that students remember what they learned in the previous week. In plumbing, tutors use end-of-topic assessments such as quizzes and learning games to check apprentices' knowledge and understanding before moving on to the next topic.

On most courses, tutors use the results of students' and apprentices' starting points accurately to identify gaps in their knowledge and skills. In a minority of subjects, such as level 2 business, students already have knowledge in a few topics before starting their programmes. They complete the same tasks as their peers. Consequently, they are not sufficiently challenged to make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

Students and apprentices receive additional, individual support from academic skills coaches to help them to structure assignments correctly and to obtain help with revision and examination techniques. Students find these sessions particularly helpful following the results of mock examinations when they have not achieved as successfully as they could.

Most tutors set students and apprentices challenging targets that help them to achieve and often exceed their expectations. However, a minority of tutors do not set targets that help students to make better progress in their learning and training. For example, on access to higher education courses, tutors do not set aspirational targets that would help students to achieve the higher grades that they need in order to gain a place at a university that would better suit their abilities and ambitions.

Tutors develop students' and apprentices' English and mathematical skills effectively. For example, A-level students learn how to structure essays skilfully. In early years,

apprentices correctly weigh and prepare formula milk for the babies in their care. They develop their written English skills to accurately complete feeding charts. Early years apprentices develop their oracy skills through speaking to parents and carers about their children.

Students and apprentices value the support they receive from their tutors and support staff. This helps them to make good progress in their learning and training over time. Learning support assistants (LSAs) prompt students appropriately when needed and intervene only when necessary. Leaders and managers use the funding they receive for students with high needs effectively to ensure that students receive the specialist support and, where appropriate, the assistive technologies that they need to participate fully in learning. LSAs ensure that they reduce support for students with high needs gradually over time to help them to develop and maintain greater independence in preparation for their next steps.

Students' and apprentices' work is mostly of a high standard. They develop and improve their technical vocabulary over time. Most tutors provide students with useful feedback that helps them to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Students do not always know how to use tutors' feedback to improve the quality of their work. A few students, such as those on ESOL programmes, do not receive tutors' feedback quickly enough and this hinders their progress.

Attendance is not consistently high across the college. Low attendance is often linked to students' personal health issues, for example for those on foundation learning and a few adult learning programmes. Staff provide effective support for those who are absent to help them to catch up.

Most students and apprentices receive an effective, impartial careers information, advice and guidance programme. Students and apprentices receive further guidance from their tutors and employers and through their work-experience placements. In health and social care, students on the cadet programme benefit from high-quality work placements with a range of employers. These students aspire to apply for paramedic and childcare nursing degrees across the north-west region as a result of these placements.

Students and apprentices develop a good understanding of life in modern Britain. They benefit from a tutorial programme that covers a range of topics, such as British values, online safety and healthy relationships. During induction, ESOL students develop a good understanding of what it means to live and study in the United Kingdom. Health and social care students understand fully how the law protects vulnerable adults in relation to their deprivation of liberty. They discuss current topics such as the successful use of a pig's heart in a human transplant operation and how this procedure may affect those of different religious beliefs.

Since the previous inspection, the principal, senior leaders and governors have successfully changed the culture of the college. They have developed an ethos of high expectations, tolerance and respect. Leaders and managers monitor sensitively

staff workload and well-being. A range of quality improvement strategies have had a positive impact on raising standards and improving the quality of education across most subject areas.

The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of a new chair and other governors who have significant experience in further education. Governors now have a suitable range of specialist skills and expertise to carry out their roles effectively. They are passionate about the college and are aspirational for their students and apprentices. Governors regularly hold senior leaders to account for the quality of the provision, based on the accurate information they receive at board meetings.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers ensure that the safeguarding and well-being of students and apprentices are a high priority. All members of the safeguarding team have the appropriate training and experience to carry out their roles effectively. They use their well-developed links to external agencies effectively to protect and support students and apprentices, and to maintain up-to-date knowledge of local safeguarding issues.

Staff benefit from annual update training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. They have recently had further training on specific aspects to raise awareness of issues such as sexual violence, consent and peer-on-peer abuse, and mental health.

Most students and apprentices have a thorough understanding of safeguarding and feel confident in knowing how to keep themselves safe. A small minority of students do not always know how the risks relating to radicalisation and extremism apply to their daily lives. For example, they do not know the risks in their local area.

Leaders ensure that they carry out appropriate pre-employment checks before staff start work at the college.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that the quality of education in the few subject areas that need improving meets the same high standards as other subjects across the college.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all students and apprentices understand how to use tutors' feedback to improve so that they achieve their potential.
- Leaders and managers should provide targeted support to ensure that students with low attendance attend their college courses regularly.

- Leaders and managers must ensure that all students and apprentices understand how the risks relating to radicalisation and extremism in the areas where they live and work apply to their daily lives.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130736
Address	Blackburn College Harrison Centre Feilden Street Blackburn Lancashire BB2 1LH
Contact number	01254 55144
Website	www.blackburn.ac.uk
Principal	Dr Fazal Dad
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	11 to 14 December 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant 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

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Machell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alison Humphreys	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alex Lang	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alison Cameron Brandwood	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kim Bleasdale	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Suzanne Horner	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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