

Inspection of Central Bedfordshire College

Inspection dates:

25–28 January 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

Central Bedfordshire College is a general further education college with a main site in Dunstable. There are three additional sites, one that specialises in the built environment, a specialist centre for young learners and those with high needs, and another in Leighton Buzzard. It also provides training in community venues in the local area. Most learners are from the most deprived areas of Central Bedfordshire and Luton. Over half of young learners are required to retake English and mathematics qualifications as part of their study programme.

There are approximately 1,600 learners aged 16 to 18 years. Almost half of young learners are enrolled on a level 3 programme. 157 learners are in receipt of high needs funding. There are around 1,500 adult learners, of which 470 are on community learning programmes. The college has 137 apprentices, most of which are over 19 years old. Leaders work with two specialist subcontractors to provide courses for hard-to-reach young people and adults.

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

Learners and apprentices, including those with high needs, learn in an inclusive, calm and caring environment at the college. They feel, and are, safe in all college sites, community settings and workplaces. Learners respect the importance of safe working practices. In construction and motor vehicle workshops, learners work safely with a variety of tools. In beauty, learners consider the safe working practices associated with the treatments they provide.

Learners and apprentices benefit greatly from their experiences. Most young learners and adults hone their skills in meaningful work experience placements. Apprentices maximise their opportunities for learning while at work, which enables them to gain crucial new skills. However, too few young learners and apprentices improve the essential English and mathematics skills needed for success in their future employment.

Young learners, including learners with high needs, and adults value highly the new skills they gain, and the way staff encourage them to explore their interests and talents. Learners focus in class and listen carefully to teachers' advice and guidance. Most learners quickly develop their practical abilities, which enables them to contribute effectively in their work settings. For example, learners in early years successfully manage the development of the young children in their care.

Learners quickly gain increased confidence and motivation. Adults access learning in the community, which enables many to return to education after long periods of not being in formal learning. Adult learners benefit from excellent staff role models who were previous adult learners at the college. They make good progress in developing new skills and knowledge and go on to higher level learning and employment because of their success at college.

Apprentices often spend significantly longer periods in learning than they expect to. This is because apprentices are not supported effectively to learn and progress beyond the requirements of their qualifications. They do not extend their knowledge through meaningful discussions with assessors on their performance at work. This inhibits their progress.

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

Governors and leaders have not taken effective action to remedy the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection in the quality of apprenticeships provision, which has further declined, and in English and mathematics. Leaders do not monitor effectively the small proportion of subcontracted adult provision.

Leaders focus on raising the aspirations of learners from disadvantaged and deprived communities. They have established a well-informed vocational curriculum for young learners, and a large, effective community-based offer for adults. Leaders

work closely with strategic and economic boards locally, and Job Centre Plus, to ensure that the provision offered meets the needs of local businesses and national priorities.

Teachers' use of assessment varies too much in effectiveness between subjects. Too many apprentices and adults on online learning programmes have long delays between submitting work and receiving feedback. Assessors' feedback does not help apprentices to improve their work or consider their subjects more deeply. Similarly, in hairdressing and beauty therapy teachers do not help young learners understand how to make improvements. Whereas, in early years, sports and construction, useful feedback is provided so young learners know how and what to improve.

Managers and assessors have failed to ensure that apprentices complete and achieve their apprenticeship. Too few apprentices benefit from useful reviews of their progress with their employer and assessor. Too many apprentices make very slow progress in their learning, are beyond their expected end date and have fallen significantly behind in completing their apprenticeship work. There is much inconsistency between the progress of apprentices by pathway and by subject area. Apprentices on level 3 and level 5 apprenticeship standards do not develop sufficient academic skills such as analysis, evaluation and referencing. The small proportion of apprentices who have completed their final examinations have passed, and around a third have achieved high grades.

Teachers present information clearly in lessons. They ensure that learners' errors are identified and corrected. Teachers use focused questioning and useful recapping activities to ensure that learners retain and can recall what they have learned. Most learners quickly understand key concepts. In sport, for example, learners' good grasp of anatomy and physiology enables them to understand how to get the best fitness results for their clients.

Most teachers ensure that learners acquire secure knowledge and skills in their vocational subjects. Teachers cover basic principles, ensuring learners apply these confidently in practical tasks, and then can move on to more challenging concepts. As a result, learners gain the vocational knowledge and skills required to progress to the next level of study or into employment. Learners in construction, for example, adeptly complete an electrical circuit before adding cables and then testing the circuit.

In the specialist high needs provision, staff have developed an effective curriculum. Teachers use information from accurate assessments of learners' abilities to plan appropriate support. Effective arrangements when learners first start college enable learners to settle quickly and focus on their learning. Teachers successfully incorporate activities that improve learners' skills in English and mathematics. Learners participate in individually tailored learning programmes that lead to paid or voluntary employment, or further study.

Too many teachers of study programmes do not apply the training they receive to support the learners with high needs that are in their classes. Teachers do not

ensure that learners make progress in all aspects of their education, health and care (EHC) plans because too few teachers know or use the targets set for learners. Teachers do not use this information to plan or adapt their teaching.

Teachers and assessors do not help learners and apprentices understand the importance of English and mathematics skills for their future employment. Teachers of functional skills English and mathematics qualifications are not suitably experienced or trained to effectively teach these subjects. Too few young learners attend their English and mathematics lessons, and they make slow progress in improving their skills. Too few apprentices who require English and mathematics qualifications as part of their apprenticeship have yet to start this learning.

Learners from a variety of backgrounds work together harmoniously. Staff ensure that the college culture is one of mutual respect and tolerance. The small proportion of learners who engage with social groups and clubs at the college value them. Learners with high needs, including those at the specialist site, feel part of the college and have access to the full range of extracurricular opportunities on offer. Learners gain useful additional skills through curriculum enrichment. In sport, the team spirit and sense of competition ensure that learners develop strong peer relationships. Learners in public services develop the confidence to take charge of their peers in problem-solving activities.

Learners and apprentices receive impartial ongoing careers advice and guidance. Learners work directly with employers for targeted careers advice, supplemented by masterclasses and visits to major employer sites in the region. Learners with high needs receive suitable careers advice in conjunction with the local authority.

Governors do not recognise the full extent of the weaknesses at the college. They, along with leaders, have not acted swiftly enough to remedy them. They do, however, provide effective challenge to leaders on the vocational subjects offered and on financial matters. Governors have a broad range of appropriate skills. They use opportunities to attend the college and visit lessons to check their understanding of information provided in committee papers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The college has a well-established culture of safeguarding. The college welfare team proactively supports learners with any safeguarding or welfare concern. The welfare team maintains a strong network of support, including highly effective communication with external agencies in order to safeguard children looked after and unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Staff are well sighted on risks to learners that are pertinent to the local area, including the rise of 'incel' incidents, local gang activity and the low-level antisocial behaviours on public transport. Information is effectively cascaded to staff to ensure they are well informed and support learners effectively.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that the quality of education in apprenticeships rapidly improves. Assessors must work with apprentices' employers to help apprentices make swift progress in all aspects of their apprenticeship, both at work and when at college.
- Leaders must ensure that young learners and apprentices make good progress in improving their English and mathematics skills. They must ensure that teachers of functional skills are appropriately trained to teach these subjects. Teachers and assessors need to promote the importance of English and mathematics skills so that learners and apprentices value this learning and attend lessons more frequently.
- Leaders must provide training for teachers of study programmes to enable them to meet the needs of learners with EHC plans. Leaders need to ensure that teachers use the targets set in EHC plans to plan and review the appropriateness of the education and training they provide for individual learners.
- Leaders must ensure that they take action to remedy the weaknesses identified in the subcontracted adult provision. They must ensure that it is of the same high standard as the remainder of the adult curriculum.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 130598 |
| Address | Kingsway Dunstable Bedfordshire LU5 4HG |
| Contact number | 01582 477 776 |
| Website | www.centralbeds.ac.uk |
| Principal/CEO | Ali Hadawi |
| Provider type | GFE College |
| Dates of previous inspection | 15–18 May 2018 |
| Main subcontractors | SSG Services (Est 2003) Limited Diverse FM |

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 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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