

Inspection of Telford College

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 February 2022

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|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 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 | Requires improvement |
| Provision for learners with high needs | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this provider

Telford College is a general further education college based in Telford, Shropshire. This is the first full inspection of the college since the merger of two former colleges in December 2017. At the time of inspection, 1,569 learners were studying education programmes for young people and 1,094 learners were studying adult learning programmes. There were 579 apprentices, the large majority of which were following standards-based apprenticeships, and 133 learners were in receipt of high needs funding. The college offers almost all subject areas, with the largest being business, creative arts, engineering and social sciences. Courses range from entry level to level 5, with around 60% of learners following study programmes at level 3, 65% of apprentices studying at level 3 or above and the large majority of adults studying at level 2. The college currently works with one subcontractor to deliver security-related qualifications to adults, which accounted for 37 learners. This subcontract will come to an end after this group of learners complete their studies. A small number of adults were engaged in 'skills boot camps' which were not in scope for this inspection.

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

Most students and apprentices display positive attitudes to their learning. They are proud to be a part of the college and are highly motivated to achieve. They highly value the teaching they receive and identify how teachers have high expectations, which encourages them to achieve. However, in a few cases, mostly in apprenticeships, they are less positive about their learning experience, and this is often reflected in poor attendance.

Staff create inclusive environments that meet the needs of learners. This is achieved by experienced teachers and support staff who take time to understand individual learners' needs. They use effective techniques and additional support mechanisms which support learners well in their learning.

Learners identify how their course helps them to develop their confidence and self-belief through effective encouragement and support from college staff. As a result, learners develop their character, resilience and confidence. Learners discuss how they are developing skills that build confidence and feel prepared for their next steps. For example, learners on access to higher education courses discuss how they have gained enough confidence to share their own opinion and justify it in a group situation, which they would previously not have felt confident enough to do.

Leaders have developed effective arrangements with a local multi-academy trust to support learners to make successful transitions from school to the college. This extends to ensure that learners continue to be supported after joining the college, focusing on those learners most at risk of withdrawing from their studies. As a result, the number of these learners who withdraw after the transition has declined significantly.

Most learners achieve their qualifications and move on into further education or employment, and they can identify how their courses are helping to prepare them for the future. For example, the number of A-level students successfully progressing to university from the college has improved significantly over the last three years, and a consistently high number of students studying uniformed public service courses move into posts within the armed forces or the police.

Staff work effectively to develop learners' understanding of the importance of healthy relationships, including learners in receipt of high needs funding. Most learners demonstrate appropriate knowledge of topics related to sexual abuse, harassment and positive and healthy relationships. For example, learners talk with confidence about how they would keep themselves safe in relation to topics such as gangs and child sexual exploitation.

Learners feel safe. They value the security arrangements at the college and feel confident, should they have any concerns, that these would be promptly addressed. Visits from the local police force help students to understand better criminal exploitation of young people in the local area and to develop their understanding of the risks they may encounter.

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

Leaders and managers have worked well since the merger to ensure that the curriculum offered by the college, including for learners who have high needs, closely reflects the skills needs of the local, regional and national economies. They work with key stakeholders and employers through 'employer hubs' in areas such as health, digital and engineering to understand the changing skills needs in the local and national context. They use this information well to tailor the curriculum to respond swiftly to these needs. For example, in response to the need for a significant number of lorry drivers post-Brexit, the college offers qualifications and license upgrade opportunities to adult learners who wish to enter the profession through its sector work academy programmes.

Leaders have refocused college priorities effectively to improve the quality of education the college offers. Quality improvement measures have been implemented which reduce the focus on achievement rates and instead focus sharply on teaching designed to enable learners and apprentices to achieve their potential. However, at the time of inspection, leaders' actions had not yet led to sufficient and sustained improvements in all courses. As a result, learners and apprentices on a significant minority of subjects, such as in the level 3 early years educator and level 3 business administration apprenticeships and in the level 2 vehicle maintenance education programme for young people, were not in receipt of high-quality education and training.

Leaders and managers have not focused sharply enough on the quality of education that all apprentices receive. While some programmes have been designed effectively to ensure that apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours over time, such as in level 3 engineering, too many apprentices following other apprenticeship programmes are unclear about the skills they are developing or the progress they are making. Leaders had identified this and, at the time of inspection, were in the process of taking steps to address these issues. However, it is too soon to judge the impact.

Leaders and managers ensure that teachers and support staff benefit from a range of professional development opportunities, including updating their vocational knowledge, enrolling in higher-level study and management development. Staff value these opportunities, and, through regular meetings, they share what they have learned and develop their collective knowledge. As a result, the teaching that learners and apprentices receive is up to date with relevant industry and vocational developments.

For most learners and apprentices, the curriculum they follow is well designed and structured in a logical order to enable them to build new knowledge, skills and behaviours over the course of their study. Leaders and teachers ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently ambitious to provide the appropriate level of challenge to most learners and apprentices to encourage them to do their best. However, in a

few cases in apprenticeships and education programmes for young people, the work that teachers give to learners is not demanding enough to ensure that learners build knowledge and acquire skills, improving on what they already know and can do. As a result, not all learners and apprentices make the progress throughout their courses of which they are capable.

Senior leaders and governors have worked well to ensure the corporation has the skills to provide appropriate support and challenge to senior leaders. Governors' backgrounds include finance, business, education and chambers of commerce. They use their skills well to support the college in the development of the strategic plan to meet local and national skills needs and to plan the college's next steps. These include the addition of a new site closer to the town centre which will be more accessible for learners from the south of the town. However, reports provided by senior leaders on safeguarding do not provide governors with sufficient information to challenge the college's arrangements.

Teachers ensure that learners and apprentices develop an understanding of complex technical language and encourage them to use this language in their work. For example, learners studying English literature at A level understand and use sophisticated literary critical language appropriately in discussions, demonstrate how to critique a text and are able to use the language of literary analysis appropriately. Learners and apprentices develop valuable subject-specific vocabulary throughout their programmes.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the curriculum for learners who have complex needs who attend the college's specialist centre is well designed and supports learners in developing skills such as identifying large and small objects and telling the time. Teachers carefully design learners' programmes to meet their individual needs, and they benefit from one-to-one support in specialist individual rooms. As a result, learners are prepared well for their next steps, and teachers communicate effectively with social care colleagues to ensure that learners progress to their intended destinations. For example, a number of learners were due to move into a supported shared house and had already made a number of visits to familiarise themselves.

Most teachers identify the knowledge and skills of learners at the start of the course and use this information well to plan learners' programmes and ensure that learners make the progress of which they are capable. For example, in public services, at the start of their programme, students complete a subject-specific project against which teachers assess their level of skill using the qualification specification. Teachers also assess students' physical fitness levels at the start of the programme and reassess the progress that they make at frequent intervals. As a result, teachers provide effective support and challenge to learners, who consequently make good progress from their starting points.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that the college careers programme offers effective advice and guidance to all learners and apprentices consistently well. While many learners receive effective support to help them make decisions on their next

steps such as employment or further study, careers guidance in apprenticeships is not effective in supporting learners to make informed decisions about their future.

Most teachers use assessment well to understand the progress learners are making and, where necessary, to adjust learners' programmes to provide additional support or challenge. In creative media, teachers regularly use assessment methods such as observation of practical tasks, discussion and formal tests. They use the results of these well to adapt the curriculum to challenge students to achieve their best. For example, the most able students work on more complex projects that include advanced editing techniques and design videos to industry standards.

Most teachers use feedback effectively to deepen learners' understanding. As a result, most learners are clear on the improvements they need to make, and their work improves over time. For example, in adult learning programmes, written and oral feedback in the majority of cases is clear and tells learners what they need to do to improve. However, in a few cases, feedback does not always result in sufficiently precise targets. Therefore, it is not clear to learners what actions they need to take.

Attendance across the college is below the expectations of leaders. While attendance is particularly high in subjects such as public services and engineering, it is too low in early years and automotive courses. Leaders and managers have implemented strategies to improve attendance, including progress coaches who work with students to help them to improve their attendance. Teachers also provide booster sessions to help learners who have fallen behind with their studies to catch up. However, while there is evidence to suggest that attendance is slowly improving, this remains below the leaders' targets on too many courses.

Teachers do not always ensure that all learners and apprentices understand topics related to life in modern Britain well enough. Most learners can identify and explain some of the related topics in relation to their learning. For example, business students describe how the rule of law is important in the recruitment process and linked to legislation. However, this is not the case in all elements of the curriculum. Consequently, a small minority of learners cannot confidently articulate their understanding of British values, how the college promotes these and why they are of importance in their everyday lives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers place a high priority on the safety of their learners and apprentices and have put in place appropriate policies for safeguarding. During the inspection, leaders and managers acted swiftly to rectify a small number of issues with the accuracy of policies identified by inspectors.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSL have undertaken the training they need to ensure that learners and apprentices receive the appropriate

support. Other staff complete annual mandatory training in topics such as the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding and data protection. However, a few teachers on adult learning programmes have not yet received training on harmful sexual behaviours, sexual health and violence.

Managers and staff have put in place appropriate referral processes for identifying, tracking and monitoring most learners who require support for safeguarding. However, on a few occasions, staff have not yet ensured that incidents are recorded well enough to reflect the decisions made and support provided.

Leaders and managers maintain appropriate records of all employees, contractors, agency staff, governors and volunteers, and they undertake appropriate checks when new staff start at the college. Managers are in the process of updating disclosure records for staff that have worked at the college for a significant period of time and are updating policies to accurately reflect the specified frequency of these checks.

Engineering apprentices develop professional levels of understanding of health and safety in the environments in which they work, such as workshops. They apply this understanding to ensure they keep themselves and colleagues safe, for example in checking and isolating electrical current before working on electrical equipment.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that all apprenticeship programmes are designed to ensure that apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours over the course of their programmes and that their learning is linked well with their role in the workplace.
- Leaders must ensure the work that all learners and apprentices are given to complete is sufficiently demanding to provide them with the opportunity to achieve their best.
- Leaders must ensure that governors receive appropriately robust information on all incidents related to safeguarding to allow them to hold leaders to account effectively.
- Leaders must ensure that all learners' and apprentices' understanding of topics related to life in modern Britain is well developed and that they know how to protect themselves from extremist activity.
- Leaders must focus on tackling the below-target attendance across the college, with a sharp focus on the minority of courses where attendance is particularly low.
- Leaders must ensure that all learners and apprentices receive useful information on the potential careers available to them upon completion of their course to enable them to make an informed decision about their next steps.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 130796 |
| Address | Haybridge Road Wellington Telford Shropshire TF1 2NP |
| Contact number | 01952642200 |
| Website | www.telfordcollege.ac.uk |
| Principal | Graham Guest |
| Provider type | General further education college |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Main subcontractors | Mercury Training Services Ltd |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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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