

Inspection of DN Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 March 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Education programmes for young people	Outstanding
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

DN Colleges Group was formed in November 2017 following the merger of Doncaster College and North Lindsey College. The college offers both further education and higher education at two main sites in Doncaster and Scunthorpe. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,082 learners studying education programmes for young people, 4,456 learners on adult programmes, 2,109 apprentices and 192 learners with high needs. The provider works with three subcontractors.

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

Learners and apprentices thoroughly enjoy studying courses and apprenticeships that prepare them effectively for their next steps to employment and further or higher education. Younger learners, including those with high needs and with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are very well supported by their tutors and are frequently encouraged to extend their aspirations beyond their expected targets. As a result, learners and apprentices benefit from education and training that develops their knowledge and skills beyond their main qualifications. For example, learners on level 1 and level 2 plumbing courses gain a sector-approved qualification and the necessary practical skills that enable them to progress to apprenticeships or higher-level training.

Learners and apprentices feel welcomed and respected by staff and peers at the college. They demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and behave well in lessons. Staff set high expectations of learners and apprentices to commit to their studies, and most learners arrive at lessons on time and are prepared to learn. However, attendance is not consistently high in all areas.

Learners and apprentices fully benefit from an extensive range of interesting and exciting enrichment activities, such as participating in sports, taking part in gaming competitions and accessing highly relevant work placements. The college is recognised as a WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, and staff actively promote and support participation in skills competitions. Learners clearly embrace the inclusive college culture and ethos and are able to access a wide range of additional opportunities which enhance their future career prospects.

Learners and apprentices safely study in supportive learning environments. They are provided with easy access to processes for reporting any instances of bullying, harassment or wider concerns and are confident that staff would take swift and prompt actions to address any issues raised. For example, through the 'Push the Button' system, learners, apprentices and staff can report issues at any time, including during out-of-college hours. Staff promote personal safety effectively and continuously, including online safety, and learners and apprentices know who the designated safeguarding leads are and how best to contact them in the event of a safeguarding concern.

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

Leaders have successfully created and realised a vision for DN Colleges Group to provide high-quality education that consistently meets local community and regional employment needs, particularly in areas where there is high economic and social deprivation. They have taken very positive steps to align the culture and sense of place of the group to their strategic aims and aspirations. Leaders engage extremely well with employers to understand their education and training needs and with sector representative bodies to gain an understanding of skills gaps in specific industries. They then closely align their curriculum to meet these needs and to

ensure that learners and apprentices gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours to become valuable and successful employees. Leaders and managers have successfully developed the curriculum to focus on regional employment priorities in areas such as manufacturing and engineering, and growth areas such as digital technologies and health and social care.

Leaders and managers have taken highly effective actions since the merger to consistently improve the quality of provision across the group. This means that most learners and apprentices benefit from high-quality teaching and training that often transforms their lives. Staff participate fully in a wide range of relevant professional development activities and increasingly feel more confident in taking risks in their planning of teaching. Because of the quality of their learning experience, most learners and apprentices progress into employment or higher education, including higher-level apprenticeships, in line with their aspirations.

Governors engage proactively with the work of the college and the curriculum. They provide a high level of challenge to senior leaders to ensure that learning programmes and apprenticeships meet the future needs of employers, learners and apprentices in their communities and regions.

Leaders subcontract specialist provision in sports and healthcare areas to organisations with relevant expertise. For example, one subcontractor provides courses for learners with specific career interests in areas such as football coaching, training and youth mentoring. This subcontractor delivers provision at specialist stadium facilities in Doncaster, and learners enjoy studying in purpose-built learning environments. Leaders have good oversight of subcontracted provision, and learners make positive progress.

Staff care for their learners and apprentices and carefully consider their needs and any barriers to learning. For example, adult learners studying courses in English for speakers of other languages can attend sessions that run throughout the day and evening. This means that these learners can attend at times that fit around their work and caring responsibilities.

Learners study in very well-resourced learning spaces and use high-quality specialist equipment and technologies. This helps them to develop relevant skills and knowledge and enhances their understanding of the industries that they aspire to work in. For example, learners studying health and social care programmes work with specialised assistive manikins which replicate humans in a real-life care suite. They work in situ on a mock ward, learning how best to respond to emergency situations, such as cardiac arrest, and how to care for patients on a ward.

Most tutors and trainers sequence their teaching well to help learners and apprentices learn and recall key concepts. On education programmes for young people, tutors very carefully sequence training by aligning theory to practical contexts, which helps learners to understand concepts more easily and retain new knowledge. However, in a few instances, including on adult access to higher education programmes, tutors do not reinforce learning sufficiently to ensure that it

is remembered, and a few learners struggle to make connections and understand new concepts.

Tutors are very experienced in their respective fields and they use their knowledge and expertise well to plan interesting and engaging learning activities. Level 3 sports learners produce a careers guidance booklet for four different jobs in the sector as an early assignment in their course, and they use their tutors' expertise as one of their sources, informing their research with first-hand knowledge. On entry-level, 'multi-skills' study programmes, the teaching of different trades is delivered by tutors who are skilled in these trades and, as a result, learners benefit from specialist delivery.

Most tutors use assessment effectively to check learning and inform the planning of future training. For example, learners on GCSE English programmes use information from their assessments very well to identify what they have got right and the areas that they need to improve. However, in a few instances, particularly on apprenticeship provision, the quality of feedback is less strong and is often not recorded well enough to allow apprentices to revisit and understand what they need to do to improve.

Tutors successfully help learners and apprentices to extend and develop their knowledge and skills in English and mathematics. They link the development of English and mathematics skills to vocational learning effectively and help learners and apprentices to make sense of concepts by applying them to practical situations. For example, on level 3 fabrication and welding apprenticeships, apprentices correctly learn how to use the Pythagorean theorem to work out the lengths of struts needed across right-angled corners.

Tutors ensure that learners with high needs are provided with very effective support. Staff focus on ensuring that learners develop very relevant life skills and become increasingly resilient, independent and confident. For example, learners are taught to travel independently and develop social coping strategies, and they are strongly encouraged to work towards achieving their career goals.

Learners and apprentices benefit from very comprehensive and helpful careers advice and information. They are made aware of the many opportunities available to them and the next steps that they can take. They receive very effective support and guidance from the beginning of their programme from specialist staff who also support them with university and higher-level apprenticeship applications. However, a few adult learners do not receive enough information to help them understand how to achieve their longer-term career goals.

Leaders and managers have implemented an extensive, age-appropriate personal development programme for learners and apprentices that supports them in developing their knowledge, confidence and resilience. Learners and apprentices study a range of modules on topics such as fundamental British values, county lines and healthy living, and their understanding is reinforced through additional reading materials and quizzes. In addition, learners and apprentices enjoy visits from

external experts which help to inform their local knowledge of risks that they may be exposed to, such as extremist behaviours, gang activity and knife crime. Apprentices on level 5 adult care apprenticeships are explicitly made aware of modern slavery and exploitation within the care sector, which helps them to understand how to stay safe and keep others safe.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have highly effective systems in place to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The designated safeguarding lead and deputies are very experienced and have a secure oversight of safeguarding concerns. There is a zero-tolerance culture to sexual harassment, bullying and peer-on-peer abuse. Learners are highly confident that swift steps would be taken to address any safeguarding concerns.

Staff are extremely attuned to learners' and apprentices' safety and well-being, and there are extensive resources in place to support learners and apprentices in making positive choices to living well and safely. Leaders and staff are very active in promoting safe and respectful behaviours and are actively engaged in promoting positive practices, such as being champions of the White Ribbon Campaign.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that feedback is consistently effective for all learners and apprentices to help them improve.
- Ensure high levels of attendance across all programmes.
- Ensure that all tutors of adult learning programmes reinforce new learning so that adult learners retain information over time.
- Ensure that all adults understand how to achieve their long-term career goals.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130587
Address	Kingsway Scunthorpe DN17 1AJ
Contact number	01302 553553
Website	www.dncolleges.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Mick Lochran
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Club Doncaster Community Sports and Education Foundation Scunthorpe United FC Community Sports and Education Trust Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, quality of education, 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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