

Inspection of Strode College

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 October 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Strode College (SC) comprises one main campus in Street, Somerset. The college provides a range of academic, vocational, and higher education courses, and apprenticeships, from pre-entry level to level 3. At the time of inspection, around 1400 learners aged 16 to 18 years old, 270 apprentices, 240 adult learners, and 100 learners in receipt of high needs funding were studying at the college.

Most 16- to 18-year-old learners study level 3 academic or vocational programmes. The majority of apprentices study on courses related to childcare or hospitality. Adults study counselling or functional skills English and mathematics courses. At the time of the inspection, the college worked with two subcontractors, who mostly provide apprenticeships in early years. However, in 2022/23, all subcontracting provision will be phased out, because of a change in strategic direction taken by college leaders.

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

Learners feel proud to be part of the SC community. Staff build highly positive and nurturing relationships with learners and apprentices, who feel valued. Teachers ensure that learners feel comfortable to express themselves, without fear of prejudice. As a result, learners are highly considerate of each other. They are polite, respectful and often highly articulate. Learners develop their confidence over time and believe strongly that they can achieve their ambitions and be successful in their chosen next steps.

Staff have high expectations of learners and apprentices, which they model effectively. They establish a calm and scholarly atmosphere in the classroom and workshops, supporting learners and apprentices to focus effectively on their learning.

Most learners and apprentices recognise that they are learning important new skills and knowledge from teachers who have high levels of specialist experience. Learners enjoy the richness that teachers bring to their training by using their experiences to present new learning in context. Apprentices particularly value the specialism of their teachers. As a result, they learn relevant skills, taking on additional responsibilities in their workplaces, and becoming more valuable employees.

Adults enjoy and value their learning. They particularly appreciate the high levels of respect that staff demonstrate. They feel confident to ask questions and discuss emotive topics, which extends their knowledge. Adults studying counselling courses identify a positive culture of respect and sensitivity to cultural identities and faith, which they also integrate into their professional practice.

Most learners receive effective academic and pastoral support from their teachers and tutors. However, staff do not provide all learners who have high needs with the necessary support and learning opportunities to achieve fully their personal goals. While these learners grow in confidence because of studying the curriculum, they are not always supported to develop fully the skills and knowledge that they need for their future.

Teachers teach learners a wide range of topics relating to life in modern Britain, including the signs of and the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. However, in too many instances, learners have not developed, retained or deepened their understanding of these topics. As a result, learners' knowledge is often superficial.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a limited contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders do not yet ensure that they identify the full range of employer and stakeholder needs, in order to make a sufficient contribution to meeting these in a

way that benefits the locality and region. SC's governors have only recently published a new skills strategy for the college. Leaders' plans to transform SC into a community college are at an early stage, having only been initiated in June 2022. The leadership team is now embarking on a year-long consultation with local stakeholders to determine carefully what the community needs and wants from the college. Consequently, the impact of leaders' development actions cannot yet be seen, because while much is planned, most actions have yet to be implemented.

A new English and mathematics functional skills curriculum has been developed to enable staff at Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to gain the skills and qualifications they need to move to more senior roles. Skills gaps in existing manufacturing, digital, construction, electro-technical and transportation businesses are starting to be identified, but actions to tackle these and to meet the needs of employers in these sectors are yet to have an impact.

Leaders' recent consultation with the community is being done at a time of potential change in Somerset. Leaders are well informed about the many major capital projects underway or planned in the county and are now considering how they might best contribute. They have already ensured that the college plays a role in the £23.5 million Glastonbury new deal regeneration project. Here, the college will provide a range of training programmes, including courses for those who have little or no history of formal education or training.

College leaders and staff do ensure that most learners develop their skills well through the curriculum and in their courses, but managers do not involve employers and other relevant stakeholders sufficiently in the design and implementation of the curriculum in all areas.

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

Leaders and managers have created a culture in which staff, learners and apprentices can be themselves and take pride in their differences. As a result, learners and apprentices study in an inclusive environment where their differences are embraced and celebrated.

Most teachers plan learning that successfully builds on previously taught knowledge. Learners value the clarity this brings them and take pride in developing a more detailed understanding of the key topics in the curriculum. For example, in level 3 creative media production, learners begin their course by producing a short video on their mobile phone. Over time, they develop their skills through projects such as creating a music video and an interactive media poster, thereby learning, and applying new editing techniques. Finally, learners reflect on their initial videos and feel proud of the specialist skills they have developed over time. Apprentices studying the early years educator course apply previously taught skills and knowledge to more complex tasks. For example, they develop knowledge and theory of structured play and different stages of socialisation. They apply such knowledge

skilfully to practice in areas such as room leadership and developing purposeful play for the children they look after.

Leaders and managers have designed some training courses for adults that support the needs of the local and regional community, and employers. However, they acknowledge there is more work to do. Learners studying counselling contribute positively to the community through their course placements. They provide hours of therapy to a range of counselling services, such as charities that support those with eating disorders, bereavement services and hospice care. In addition, teachers refresh frequently the counselling curriculum so that it is responsive to developments in professional practice. They now deal with the growth in mental health and anxiety related concerns, and with the movement towards more counselling services taking place online. However, in other curriculum areas, managers do not ensure that the training provided to adults is appropriately structured to fully meet their needs. Adults studying English and mathematics in an employer setting are not always able to attend lessons because of work commitments, and they too often miss valuable learning. As a result, their pace of learning is too slow.

Leaders and managers have devised apprenticeship curriculums that broadly meet employer and apprentice needs in the few curriculum areas where apprenticeship programmes are offered. Most apprentices receive the training time they are entitled to and have valuable opportunities to build on the new skills, knowledge and behaviours they develop, by applying them in their workplace. A minority of apprentices do not receive timely opportunities to deepen their knowledge in their workplace, and as a result, it takes them longer to master new skills. For example, a small number of commis chef apprentices who learned to cook fish-based dishes at college were not given opportunities to cook fish in their workplace kitchens.

Leaders plan the careers guidance for learners and apprentices appropriately. Suitably trained staff provide them with the guidance that they need to make informed decisions about their next steps. As a result, most learners and apprentices know the range of employment, further training and higher education options available to them when they finish studying their programmes.

In most instances, teachers use assessment and feedback well to support learners' development and to identify their areas for improvement. This enables learners to extend their knowledge. A few teachers provide apprentices with feedback that provides limited detail on how to improve. As a result, a minority of apprentices do not make the expected progress in improving their skills and knowledge over time.

Learners studying on academic and vocational programmes who have high needs do not always benefit from teaching that meets their individual requirements. Leaders and managers have not provided teachers with the training they need to implement the curriculum in a way that is accessible to all. They do not ensure that teachers or support staff always adopt effectively the support strategies recorded in the learners' education, health and care (EHC) plans. For example, when teaching learners who have high needs, teachers present information orally without the suggested visual

language aids or support for extended periods of time. They often ask questions to the whole class that do not allow for the processing time that some individuals require. Because of this, a minority of learners struggle to participate effectively in lessons, and their pace of learning is slow.

Managers of programmes specifically designed for learners who have high needs are highly aspirational and enthusiastic for their learners. They have made recent improvements in recognising and recording learners' starting points and the progress that they make over time. Staff are using this new information to plan a more aspirational curriculum. However, these improvements have been slowed by staff shortages. Consequently, it is too early to judge the impact on what learners know and can do as a result of studying the curriculum.

Leaders and managers recognise rightly the need to rapidly improve the quality of education and support in all provision areas for learners who have high needs, and to ensure that they receive the interventions and resources identified in their EHC plans. At the time of inspection, well-planned quality improvement actions were underway to improve the experience of all learners with high needs. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of the actions taken.

The majority of governors have relevant skills, knowledge and experience. Although they provide leaders and managers with appropriate challenge on many aspects of college performance, they do not prioritise sufficiently or focus well enough on how well teaching helps with the implementation of the curriculum, learning and support, and the learners' experiences. As a result, challenge from governors does not always help to improve the quality of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established an appropriate culture of safeguarding at the college. Staff do not tolerate the use of abusive or derogatory language. Learners receive appropriate curriculum content and teaching to develop their knowledge of safeguarding, staying safe online and healthy sexual relationships.

The designated safeguarding lead and deputy designated safeguarding lead are well qualified and have a good knowledge and understanding of safeguarding practice and local topics. They have effective links with external agencies and surrounding colleges, which they use well to improve college practice and procedures. However, leaders recognise rightly that the administration of safeguarding concerns should be improved so that they can identify learners' needs and prioritise resources better.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must rapidly improve the curriculum and support for all learners with high needs and ensure that staff use effective strategies and interventions so that learners achieve their potential.
- Governors must focus their support and challenge to better hold leaders to account so that they ensure improvements to the quality of education for learners and apprentices.
- Leaders must ensure that all learners and apprentices are supported to retain what they have been taught about understanding the signs of and risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders must ensure that they identify and respond effectively to the skills needs of stakeholders, developing the curriculum offer and providing appropriate high-quality education and training where required.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130806
Address	Church Road Street Somerset BA16 0AB
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Website	www.strode-college.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	John Revill
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	23 September 2014
Main subcontractors	Equestrian Learning Centre The Skills Network

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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