

Inspection of Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (HLNSC)

Inspection dates: 18 to 21 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	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

HLNSC was formed in 2018 following the merger between Herefordshire and Ludlow College and North Shropshire College. The college consists of six main sites. General further education campuses (Folly Lane and Oswestry), land-based studies campuses (Holme Lacy and Walford), a sixth-form campus in Ludlow and The Gateway Centre in Shrewsbury.

HLNSC offers education programmes for young people, adult learning, apprenticeships and programmes for learners with high needs. At the time of the inspection, the college provided education programmes for 2,155 young people who study vocational programmes from entry level to level 4 and A levels. Most of the college's 569 apprentices are on standards-based apprenticeships. Most study in construction, business administration or early years. Just over half of the 522 adult learners complete distance learning courses in the health and social care sector with a subcontractor The Skills Network Limited. The remaining learners undertake courses in subjects such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and employability. The college receives funding for 138 learners with high needs. Almost all learners are undertaking courses between entry level and level 2.

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

Learners and apprentices benefit from studying in environments that have up-to-date resources to support them to develop the skills that employers require. For example, learners undertaking courses in information and communication technology use industry-standard computers and server equipment to carry out their work. Learners and apprentices value the opportunity to train in well equipped and safe workshops.

Across the different college sites most learners and apprentices, including adult learners on subcontracted provision, achieve well on their programmes. They produce work of a high standard and successfully move on to their next steps.

Learners with high needs enjoy their learning. They feel safe and respected. They develop their confidence over time. However, leaders and teachers do not support them to develop their wider targets and goals listed in their education, health and care plans (EHC plans) quickly enough. Leaders and teachers do not monitor progress against these targets well enough

Leaders, managers and staff provide a wide range of effective support services that help learners and apprentices who are struggling with their studies or mental health and well-being. Learners and apprentices feel comfortable speaking to their teachers and college staff about their concerns. They appreciate the support that leaders and staff provide to protect their mental health and well-being.

Learners and apprentices feel welcome, safe and secure at all college sites. They are frequently provided with age-appropriate information about working safely in different environments, such as in workplaces. They value the college's security arrangements and feel confident that staff would deal with these promptly if they have any concerns.

Learners and apprentices enjoy participating in a wide range of enrichment activities, many gaining additional skills. For example, learners and apprentices take part in 'the skills show' where they learn how to cook and improve their awareness of healthy eating and the importance of a balanced diet. Learners on blacksmithing courses benefit from taking a highly influential role in national and international blacksmithing events which enriches their personal development.

Learners and apprentices benefit from the wide range of useful relationships that leaders have nurtured with employers and stakeholders. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is responsive to employers' needs and prepares learners well for the next steps in their chosen careers.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work well with a range of stakeholders. College leaders are well placed and have significant involvement with local enterprise partnerships and local authorities. Leaders work diligently with local NHS trusts. They have co-designed programmes to support NHS staff to develop their English skills through the use of a mobile teaching facility. Leaders contribute positively to research across the region which helps inform local skills improvement plans.

Leaders have developed positive relationships with other providers of education and training in the areas in which they work. They link well with other local colleges to plan provision to ensure that it responds to the skills needs across the geographical areas where they work. Leaders have developed useful partnerships with a range of universities. They make sure the curriculum prepares learners well for moving into higher education.

Leaders work well with employers across the sector areas in which they offer provision. They understand clearly the changing skills needs in areas such as agriculture, energy and care. For example, leaders have worked with the Microgeneration Certification Scheme to secure significant funding for, and to develop, the Herefordshire Low Carbon Technology Centre. This facility is in direct response to a significant identified skills need from local businesses linked to low carbon and renewable energy technologies.

Leaders have an effective understanding of the communities in which they work. They work proactively with a range of community groups. Leaders and teachers use this information to help plan the curriculum. In areas such as sports, learners and the wider community benefit from these well-established links. Learners deliver coaching sessions to support disabled young people. This supports learners to develop their knowledge and skills and also contributes positively to the wider communities the college serves.

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 learners and apprentices benefit from a broad and rich curriculum that closely reflects the skills needs of local, regional and national economies.

Leaders have a clear curriculum vision which they successfully realise to provide a broad range of programmes across the large geographical area in which they work. This supports learners and apprentices to access local provision. Leaders are very knowledgeable about the needs and priorities of each of the college campuses. They provide programmes that contribute to the skills needs of the locality. In the north of the region, the curriculum in land-based studies responds directly to the focus on dairy farming. Whereas, in the south of the region, the land-based curriculum is focused much more closely on arable farming. Learners and apprentices who study in these areas develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to work in this sector area.

Leaders and teachers use the information they gain from well-developed relationships with employers and stakeholders across the sector areas in which they work to plan the curriculum carefully. They ensure the curriculum that learners and apprentices access is up to date and linked well to industry areas. Apprentices in electrical studies develop their knowledge and skills in the use of renewable technologies such as solar power, electric vehicle charging and ground and air source heat pumps.

Most teachers take account of what learners know and can do when they start their course and design a curriculum that builds effectively on this knowledge. They plan their courses effectively so that learners and apprentices understand new concepts before learning more complex, detailed course content. In farriery, apprentices develop their understanding of the basic scientific principles and anatomy of horses before accessing more complex aspects of anatomy later in their programme. However, in a few cases, such as in ESOL and for learners with high needs, teachers do not identify well enough what learners know and can do when they start their programme. As a result, teachers do not focus their teaching sufficiently well on learners' gaps in knowledge which slows down the progress that they make.

Teachers are highly qualified industry experts. They use their skills effectively to plan a challenging curriculum and to provide effective teaching. This includes carefully choosing activities that allow learners to repeat, practise and master the skills they have been taught. Apprentices in accounting revisit and repeat double-entry bookkeeping and develop fluency in their skills over time.

Teachers link theory and practical elements of the curriculum effectively. Learners and apprentices in childcare are introduced to theories such as child-centred play and benefit from class visits to outdoor play facilities. They apply this knowledge to improve their practice over time. Most learners make rapid progress and develop their practical skills well.

Teachers make skilful use of assessment to check what learners and apprentices have learned and correct any misunderstandings swiftly. They use this information well to set targets for learners and apprentices to improve their work. In GCSE mathematics, teachers frequently use quizzes to check learners' understanding of key concepts. Teachers quickly reorder the curriculum where needed so that they can swiftly correct any misunderstandings learners have.

Staff ensure that learners on education programmes for young people have access to meaningful work placements. For example, learners on beauty programmes complete placements in a range of settings. Learners have frequent access to clients where they perform a range of treatments which support learners' progress over time. However, too few learners with high needs benefit from regular high-quality work placements. As a result, these learners do not get as frequent opportunities to apply theory into practice and to develop their wider behaviours for the workplace.

Most teachers use feedback effectively to deepen learners' and apprentices' understanding. As a result, most learners and apprentices are clear on the

improvements that they need to make, and their work improves over time. Teachers on adult distance learning courses provide timely feedback to learners. Teachers' feedback is precise and supports them to improve their work over time.

Teachers of learners with high needs and who study on foundation programmes do not set high enough expectations of what learners can achieve. As a result, they have not developed a curriculum for learners that enables them to make good enough progress.

Learners' and apprentices' attitudes and behaviours are exemplary. They respond very well to the high standards set by leaders and teachers. Learners and apprentices are very positive towards their learning. They demonstrate high levels of motivation and are polite and courteous in lessons and around campuses. Learners and apprentices take pride in their college. Learners at Holme Lacy campus stay late after lessons to ensure that the grounds are tidy and very well maintained.

The vast majority of learners benefit from high-quality careers advice and guidance. Learners are prepared well for their next steps whether that be further education or employment. However, a minority of apprentices and learners with high needs do not always receive sufficient high-quality careers advice and guidance. Where this is the case, learners and apprentices do not know the full range of options available to them after they have completed their course or apprenticeship.

Teachers actively plan the tutorial curriculum that enriches learners' personal development. The 'boost programme' supports learners to develop their wider employability skills such as communication. The tutorial programme ensures that most learners have a good understanding of fundamental British values. However, in a few cases, apprentices do not have a fully secure understanding of threats associated with extremism and radicalisation in their industries. Such as the risks associated with animal rights groups in land-based programmes.

Leaders have high expectations of learners and apprentices, including those in subcontracted provision. They review critically the extent to which learners achieve the stretching targets that are set for them and use a wide range of information, including from the evaluation of teaching and learners' views, so that they take swift action to resolve weaknesses in the quality of the curriculum. However, leaders do not know well enough the progress of learners with high needs to ensure that they make the progress of which they are capable.

The governing body has the necessary skills and experience to provide effective governance. Governors have strong oversight of leaders' actions to improve learners' and apprentices' experience. They use a wide variety of useful information such as learners' views, learners' outcomes and employers' views to challenge leaders about the effectiveness of their improvement actions. As a result, governors hold leaders to account effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that there are appropriately qualified and experienced designated safeguarding leads to support learners in each campus location. They have highly effective links with local and regional agencies such as local authorities, police and health services to ensure that learners have the support they need.

Leaders have comprehensive safeguarding and health and safety policies. They ensure that staff know how to raise and track learners' concerns using the college system. Learners have a good understanding of safe working practices. Learners and apprentices know how to work safely with potentially dangerous equipment across a range of sector areas in which they study.

Leaders follow safer recruitment strategies effectively ensuring that staff hold the requisite clearances to work with young people and vulnerable adults. They ensure that staff receive frequent training and support to keep learners and apprentices safe.

Leaders have raised learners', apprentices' and staff's awareness of mental health, with campus hubs and mental health first aiders to provide immediate drop-in support where needed.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should improve the quality of provision for learners with high needs so that they are taught the skills they need to progress rapidly to the next stage of their education or training.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices have a secure understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism in the sector areas in which learners and apprentices work and in their wider lives.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all learners and apprentices, including learners with EHC plans, receive unbiased and high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance so that they know well the full range of next steps available to them.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers improve the information they gain on what learners know and can do at the beginning of adult learners programmes, especially in ESOL, and for learners who have high needs. Teachers must use this information to plan learning carefully so that learners make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130710
Address	Folly Lane Hereford Herefordshire HR1 1LS
Contact number	01432870316
Website	www.hlcollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	David Williams
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	The Skills Network Limited

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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