

# Inspection of Darlington College

Inspection dates: 8 to 11 November 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Darlington College is a medium-sized general further education college located on a single campus in Darlington. The catchment area includes Darlington and the neighbouring areas of North Yorkshire and County Durham. The college provides education and training across all provision types. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,198 students on education programmes for young people, 1,233 students on adult learning programmes, 680 apprentices on standards at levels 2 to 5, and 103 students with high needs. Darlington College works with two subcontractors.

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

Students and apprentices demonstrate positive and professional behaviours in classrooms, workshops and across the campus. Staff set high expectations for behaviour, and students and apprentices are polite and courteous towards each other and staff.

Students and apprentices are motivated to learn, and they apply themselves diligently to activities in classes and workshops. Most have good attendance and are punctual to their lessons. However, attendance in a few classes in GCSE mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is too low.

Students and apprentices benefit from learning environments with industry-standard equipment such as spacious motor vehicle and construction workshops. Leaders have invested in new technologies, such as a robotics laboratory to enhance the experience of students and apprentices. Catering students have access to realistic working environments, including a restaurant and well-resourced kitchens. Staff take pride in making the college environment attractive to students and apprentices and conducive to learning. Leaders and managers have committed significant investment in a new building to house the engineering provision that will open in spring 2023.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college, and they know how to report any concerns. Leaders and managers take swift and appropriate action to address safeguarding issues and concerns. There is a no-tolerance culture in relation to bullying and harassment, and students and apprentices are confident that leaders and managers will deal with any incidents appropriately should they arise.

Students and apprentices develop their understanding of occupational safety effectively. They can explain the health and safety requirements for specific tools and working areas. Students with high needs increase their knowledge of how to keep themselves safe when travelling to work placements. Adult students on employability programmes studying heavy goods vehicle and light goods vehicle driver courses complete training on how to keep themselves and their vehicles secure when they park overnight on long-distance journeys.

Most students and apprentices benefit from timely and effective careers advice. As a result, they are able to make informed choices about their next steps. Staff support students to select suitable universities, complete personal statements and become prepared for interviews. Students on level 2 light vehicle maintenance courses benefit from targeted training to help improve their awareness of career opportunities in the sector. However, a minority of students have not had personal discussions or received sufficient information about career routes. As a result, they cannot articulate their career goals and are less well prepared for their next steps.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work very effectively with most employers and stakeholders, such as the chamber of commerce, local authorities and mayoral combined authorities, to fully understand the skills needs in the local and regional area. Stakeholders consider that the college adds value to the area by offering courses and apprenticeships to upskill residents so that they are better prepared to take advantage of the growth in job vacancies in the area.

Leaders and staff work very well with a range of schools and sixth forms in the local area to ensure that they collectively offer the best provision to meet the skills needs in the area. Pupils from local schools are inspired by the industry-standard environment that they experience when they visit the college.

Leaders and managers work effectively with a range of partners to target learning to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged members of the community. Voluntary and community organisations that work with victims of domestic abuse refer their users on to the college's employability and well-being programmes. Leaders work with the local authority to support young people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community and to support elective home-educated students back into education.

Employers in a few sectors and the chamber of commerce would like to be more involved in curriculum planning and design so that courses can be better tailored to their specific needs. The chamber of commerce has identified a need for courses in surveying and for entry-level courses in agriculture in the Tees Valley to address skills shortages. In a few instances, staff do not involve employers sufficiently in the planning and sequencing of the curriculum. They do not identify clearly enough the knowledge and skills that students and apprentices will develop at work or on work placement, including students with high needs.

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

Leaders provide programmes that successfully meet the needs of the communities that they serve. They plan courses with clear progression routes into training, education and employment, including for students with special educational needs. As a result, most students and apprentices who study at the college move to the next stage of education and training or into employment.

Leaders and managers have effective oversight of the quality of education that students and apprentices receive. They carry out a range of quality improvement activities, including evaluating the quality of teaching and carefully monitoring the progress of students and apprentices, and identify actions for improvement accurately. They have effective oversight of the provision delivered by the two subcontractors.

Teachers plan the content of the curriculum in a logical order. They carefully organise topics so that students and apprentices develop their knowledge and build on their skills over time. On Access to Health programmes, adult students concentrate initially on biological and psychological theories so that they can use this

underpinning knowledge to understand disease causation and health promotion. Apprentices studying the level 3 manufacturing operations engineering technician standard learn about physical, chemical and environmental hazards before completing practical activities to identify and mitigate risks.

Teachers are knowledgeable and highly skilled in the subjects that they teach. They use their expertise well to teach specialist terminology and develop technical knowledge. Teachers in level 2 light vehicle maintenance classes ensure that students use the correct terms for equipment when communicating with each other. Students refer to ball-joints, coil springs and oscillation when discussing the component parts of a car suspension.

Leaders and managers support teachers in their roles by enabling them to update their professional practice frequently and to develop their teaching skills. Staff in travel and tourism work in travel agents or attend a training school for cabin crew to look at developments in managing safety and evacuation. Teachers in health and social care work alongside current practitioners such as paramedics and visit healthcare settings. This helps them to develop further the knowledge and skills that they need to support students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Teachers ensure that most students and apprentices successfully develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours. They help students and apprentices to understand key concepts and apply them in assignments or the workplace. Students on patisserie and confectionary courses frequently work in the college restaurant, where they apply their new bakery skills and develop their communication and teamwork abilities. Apprentices on the level 4 commercial procurement and supply standard identify cost-effective ways of working, negotiate more favourable contracts and take on extra responsibility at work. Employers value the positive impact that apprentices have in the workplace.

Staff provide good support to enable students and apprentices to complete their courses and achieve their qualifications. Leaders and managers employ student liaison officers, who are on hand to offer support in communal areas of the campus. Progress coaches know the students well and provide effective academic and pastoral support. The safeguarding team provides frequent and ongoing support to the students and apprentices who need it. Students with additional needs benefit from highly effective visits to college while still at school, to help prepare them for transition to college life.

Teachers skilfully use a range of techniques to embed knowledge in students' and apprentices' long-term memory. In GCSE English, teachers use an effective framework that helps students to structure their responses when analysing and evaluating creative writing. Students easily recall and apply the process, which gives them the confidence to produce work of greater complexity and maturity. However, teachers and assessors do not use the results from initial assessment of English and mathematics well enough to plan training activities for apprentices. As a result, a

minority of apprentices are not supported well enough to develop their English and mathematical skills from their starting points.

Teachers use effective assessment strategies to check students' and apprentices' understanding and identify gaps in their knowledge. They recap and repeat key concepts and carefully sequence assessments to link prior learning and embed important knowledge. As a result, students and apprentices quickly improve their knowledge and skills.

Most students and apprentices produce work of a high standard. They take pride in their written and practical work and can talk confidently about what they have learned in their coursework and assignments. Most successfully achieve their qualification aims.

Teachers support most students and apprentices to develop an appropriate awareness of local risks. On level 3 sports science programmes, students confidently identify local risks in Darlington, such as 'white terror' groups and the dangers of county lines gangs. However, a few students and apprentices are not aware of these potential risks and how to keep themselves safe from them.

Staff deliver useful tutorial activities to help students and apprentices to understand and model British values in their interactions with others. Teachers ensure that students understand why we observe Remembrance Day, and students and apprentices take part in a service maturely and respectfully. Business administration apprentices understand how policies and legislation such as the general data protection regulation affect them in their work. Staff at the subcontractor focus on developing warehousing students' attitudes and behaviours for work, such as tolerance and respect for others.

Staff successfully promote the benefits of keeping mentally and physically healthy to students and apprentices. For example, they provide helpful tutorial sessions to raise students' awareness of drug and alcohol abuse. On a short course on mental health and well-being for adult students provided by a subcontractor, teachers inform students of techniques to combat stress. Leaders and managers have negotiated an effective arrangement with a local sports facility, and many students take up the opportunity to use the gym and swimming pool.

Leaders and managers provide a wide range of curriculum enrichment activities to promote students' and apprentices' personal development. Students participate in trips and visits relevant to their curriculum studies. For example, a MasterChef finalist led a masterclass on creating a taster menu based on foraged foods. Students take part in overseas visits, and for some students this is their first experience of foreign travel.

Leaders and managers have implemented appropriate governance arrangements. Governors on the board receive useful information from a range of subcommittees led by college staff. They are suitably qualified to carry out their roles and have varied and relevant experience to ensure they provide effective challenge to senior

leaders. Governors take part in self-assessment and visit curriculum areas to enhance their awareness of the curriculum. As a result, they have a good understanding of the provision and can identify accurately what the college needs to do to improve.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers foster an effective culture of safeguarding in the college. They have a good understanding of local risks and plan useful topical information campaigns to raise students' and apprentices' awareness of issues such as drug abuse and sexual harassment.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff receive appropriate mandatory training. Designated safeguarding staff are well qualified. They work well with relevant agencies across the local authority areas to ensure that students and apprentices are safe and have access to the help that they need.

Leaders and managers ensure that they follow appropriate safe recruitment procedures to check that staff are safe to work with young people and vulnerable adults. They check annually that staff have read and understood important guidance and to ascertain if any staff circumstances have changed regarding their suitability to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure that staff set high expectations of attendance in GCSE mathematics and ESOL sessions so that more students attend frequently.
- Ensure that apprentices' prior knowledge in English and mathematics is identified at the start of their programmes so that staff can develop apprentices' skills and understanding in these areas.
- Ensure that across all parts of the curriculum, including provision for students with high needs, employers are sufficiently involved in curriculum planning and design.
- Provide all students with high-quality careers information, advice and guidance early in their programme, to support them to identify potential career and training routes for their chosen next steps.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130656
<b>Address</b>	Central Park Haughton Road Darlington DL1 1DR
<b>Contact number</b>	01325 503050
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.darlington.ac.uk">http://www.darlington.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Kate Roe
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	17 to 20 May 2016
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Orangebox Training Solutions Limited Optimum Skills Training

## 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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