

Inspection of Sutton London Borough Council

Inspection dates: 27 to 30 September 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Sutton College is based in the Public Health and Wellbeing Directorate of Sutton Borough Council. It provides education and training for residents and employees within the London Borough of Sutton and its neighbouring local authorities. Most of its courses are taught from their main site in the town centre, with some classes taught at community sites across the borough.

At the time of inspection around 1,700 learners were studying courses. Approximately 1,200 learners complete accredited courses that lead to qualifications in areas such as English and mathematics, childcare, health and social care, business and beauty therapy. About 300 learners enrol on non-accredited courses that do not lead to qualifications. These courses provide skills for employment or support learners to increase their confidence, reduce feelings of loneliness or help them to participate more fully in their local communities and with their families. There are approximately 200 apprentices enrolled on health and social care, and childcare courses, either directly with the college or at one of their subcontractors.

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

Learners and apprentices study in a friendly and supportive environment. From the point at which they enquire about a course, staff give them as much time as they need to ask questions and find out all the information they require. This level of support and encouragement continues throughout their studies.

Learners and apprentices are taught by assessors and tutors who are well qualified and have relevant industry knowledge and experience. Many staff who teach vocational subjects have current industry experience in the subjects they teach and use this to pass on up-to-date knowledge and skills to their learners. However, the proportion of learners who pass their qualifications is not consistently high enough across different subjects. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications is too low, and not enough apprentices achieve high grades in their final assessments.

Leaders put on courses that meet the immediate needs of learners. For example, learners can attend short courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in which teachers give them the skills so they quickly learn to converse in English.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report concerns. Tutors and assessors teach topics that help apprentices and learners understand how to keep themselves safe.

Learners and apprentices do not consistently receive sufficient information about their options once they complete their course. The majority of adult learners are given guidance about their next steps, but this is not consistent across subjects. For example, in photography and floristry, learners know the options available to them and are encouraged to progress on to higher-level courses to develop more-complex skills. Conversely, apprentices have limited information about the options open to them.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have not managed to sustain a consistently good quality of education across their provision. For example, tutors do not use strategies effectively enough in their lessons that help learners to consolidate what they have learned. ESOL tutors carefully introduce new grammar points and vocabulary but do not consistently model correct language structures or provide time for learners to practise speaking. Tutors do not routinely check learners' pronunciation during lessons.

Conversely, in creative arts subjects, teachers are adept and teaching both the practical and business components of their subjects. They adeptly model the techniques and skills that they teach in subjects, including floristry, singing and pottery. For example, floristry tutors give learners good demonstrations on creating and presenting bouquets. They follow this up by teaching concepts of wholesale

retail costing so that learners know how to relate what they learn to possible future employment.

Leaders and managers frequently evaluate the quality of teaching. They provide feedback to staff on areas for improvement. However, managers do not consistently check that staff have undertaken the improvement actions needed arising from feedback. They do not check well enough that these actions have an impact on the quality of their teaching.

Leaders and managers work closely with the council's Directorate of Public Health and Wellbeing to ensure that the college's curriculum supports the council's priorities and the local needs of the community. They work well with partners to provide courses for individuals who have been victims of domestic violence. Staff offer a range of community learning courses in art and creative writing that allow individuals to develop their confidence and, for example, explore the trauma they have experienced.

Staff have responded well to the specific language skills that learners need to develop. They ensure learners are enrolled onto the most suitable course to meet these needs. Staff allow individuals to enrol on single units of the ESOL programme, depending on which aspect will be most valuable for them. For example, those who need to improve their spoken English in order to make medical appointments or go shopping can register for the speaking unit. Those who are seeking employment enrol on the writing module so that they can complete job applications.

In supported learning, tutors do not plan and teach lessons that support the varying needs of learners well enough. For example, in dance, teachers do not use the information they have about learners' prior skills and ability well enough to teach activities that allow learners to explore movement. As a result, learners do not develop the skills they need to help them live more independently, such as improving their motor skills or gestures and expressions to help them describe how they feel.

Apprentices do not benefit from frequent enough progress reviews with their tutors and managers. This means that important discussions, such as ensuring that apprentices have their entitlement to off-the-job training, do not happen. Tutors similarly do not routinely discuss with apprentices how they can achieve high grades in their end-point assessment. Leaders and managers are unable to track apprentices' progress well enough. They have started to rectify this, but actions taken are not yet having an impact on apprentices.

Leaders and managers do not routinely collect information on what learners and apprentices do after completing their courses. They know whether learners progress on to courses within the college, but they do not know whether learners or apprentices progress on to further study or gain employment in their chosen area. As a result, they do not know the extent to which the courses they offer meet the needs of individuals.

Most tutors provide feedback on learners' and apprentices' written work that helps them improve. For example, ESOL tutors provide effective feedback on learners' homework. In a few of subjects, tutors do not provide frequent or detailed enough feedback on learners' work. In some instances, work is not marked, or the tutor notes that they have seen the work, without providing guidance on the quality of the work or how it can be improved further.

Tutors create a calm and safe environment for learners. They support learners to develop the skills they need so that they can progress to the next course or take them closer to gaining employment. In addition, learners support each other well in lessons. For example, ESOL learners work well in groups, supporting each other with speaking tasks. In floristry, learners work well in pairs to prepare and condition flowers. As a result, learners and apprentices enjoy their learning.

Learners' and apprentices' attendance at lessons is high. Staff have a rigorous process in place to follow up on non-attendance. Learners on supported learning courses who travel to the college independently are prioritised by staff to find out why they are not attending. As a result, learners know the importance of attending and value the diligence of staff in following up on absences.

Staff provide a good range of activities for learners outside of their main studies. For example, guided historic walks in the local area help learners to understand the history of where they live, as well as help them to stay fit. Information on how to cook healthy and affordable meals helps learners combat the cost-of-living crisis.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have a positive culture of safeguarding. This is led by the principal, who communicates effectively to staff their responsibility for safeguarding. All staff have been trained in safeguarding and a range of related topics. As a result, staff can discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Leaders and managers have a good overview of any safeguarding issues. They track concerns well using an effective online reporting and tracking system. They refer concerns to external agencies as appropriate. The governors and council safeguarding lead receive regular reports on any safeguarding concerns.

Apprentices and learners feel safe and have an appropriate understanding of the risks associated with living in, or near, the college. They know who to contact should they have any concerns.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that they follow up on actions for improvement identified for staff, and that these result in a positive impact on the quality of teaching, so that learners retain what they have learned and make good progress.
- Tutors should ensure that learners across all programmes receive feedback on their work that helps them to understand the gaps in their knowledge, and how to improve.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that learners on supported learning programmes have a personalised plan that takes into consideration their individual needs. This should identify the specific skills that each learner needs to develop.
- Staff should ensure that learners and apprentices across all programmes know what their options are on completing their course.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53146
Address	Civic Offices St. Nicholas Way Sutton Surrey SM1 1EA
Contact number	0208 405 7038
Website	www.suttoncollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Dipa Ganguli
Provider type	Community Learning and Skills
Date of previous inspection	25 June 2014
Main subcontractors	Sutton and District Training Willows End Training Park Education and Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the 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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