

Inspection of Stoke-on-Trent College

Inspection dates: 6 to 9 December 2022

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

Information about this provider

Stoke-on-Trent College is a general further education college based in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. It comprises two campuses: Cauldon Campus, where the majority of vocational and adult learning takes place, and Burslem Campus, which focuses largely on construction, engineering and motor vehicle courses.

At the time of the inspection, 1,490 learners were studying on education programmes for young people, of which 85 were in receipt of high-needs funding. There were 2,205 learners on adult courses, 30 learners on traineeships and 423 apprentices studying in several areas, the largest of these being engineering, vehicle maintenance, pharmacy and construction-related subjects.

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

Learners are motivated to achieve. Teachers work closely with learners, providing encouragement and guidance. For example, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners value the friendly and supportive approach of teachers. As a result, they look forward to their lessons.

Learners and apprentices develop their confidence over time. They become competent in using and articulating the professional behaviours that they develop at college. For example, pharmacy apprentices learn how to communicate professionally and discretely with patients and customers at work.

The majority of learners and apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours while on their course or apprenticeship. This leads to nearly all study programme and adult learners making successful transitions to their next steps once they have completed their course. However, on the pharmacy apprenticeships, skills coaches do not support apprentices sufficiently to develop the skills that they need to acquire. As on too many occasions, there is an over-reliance on workplace mentors to support apprentices to develop these skills.

Learners and apprentices enjoy a broad range of enrichment activities, which enable them to develop their personal, social and emotional skills beyond the scope of the curriculum. Learners in receipt of high-needs funding take part in the 'Disability Counts' sports programme that gives learners with disabilities the opportunity to take part in competitive sports and fitness activities.

The majority of learners receive effective careers advice and guidance to support them into employment, education or apprenticeships. For example, most adult learners on access to higher education courses are well prepared for study in higher education. They participate in visits from local universities to support discussions on progression. However, not all apprentices have sufficient access to unbiased careers advice and guidance. Consequently, they are not aware of the progression routes available to them.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. Leaders have created a learning environment which promotes equality of opportunity and is a safe place to learn. Apprentices and learners respect each other and work well together.

Most learners and apprentices understand how fundamental British values and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism affect them and can apply this knowledge to their own courses. For example, apprentices discuss British values, contextualising current topics, such as the importance of human rights following media reports surrounding the World Cup in Qatar.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have identified and nurtured effective working relationships with a wide range of stakeholders. Leaders contribute to local and regional discussions with organisations to devise and develop a curriculum aimed at reducing local and regional skills gaps. As a result, they have now developed strategic plans to meet local skills deficits. However, many of these plans have only recently been implemented and it is too early to assess their full impact.

Leaders engage with local and regional employers effectively. Leaders and teachers work in conjunction with employers to enrich the curriculum. For example, leaders work with local NHS trusts to co-design work placements that support health and social care learners on study programmes to develop the skills that employers require in health-related professions. As a result, there is now more of an emphasis on communication skills, an area that employers identified that needed to be strengthened.

Leaders have developed positive relationships with other providers of education and training in the areas in which they serve. They work successfully with staff at local secondary schools to develop coherent curriculum pathways to support progression to further education. As a result, pupils from schools in the locality are more prepared to study at the college.

Leaders and teachers engage with local communities in the development of the curriculum. This allows learners to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours further. For example, creative media learners take part in social projects designed to raise the profile of the local area, subsequently showcasing their thought-provoking work in the college's own 'pop-up' in a city centre gallery.

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

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership team at Stoke-on-Trent College. While senior leaders have experienced challenges in the recruitment of experienced staff to senior posts, they and the governing body have achieved significant improvements in the quality of education and the experience that most learners receive.

The quality of teaching experienced by learners on education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes and provision for learners with high needs is now good. However, while leaders have taken positive steps to improve the experience apprentices receive, it is too early to see the full impact of these changes. At the time of inspection, teaching across apprenticeships was improving. However, the quality of teaching still remains

too variable in some subjects. As a result, not enough apprentices achieve to the level they are capable of or complete their apprenticeship on time.

Leaders and managers work closely with employers to identify the skills that learners need to work in their chosen sectors. Staff carefully map these skills to suitable qualifications and adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of employers. This ensures that most learners develop the skills that apprentices need and successfully move into employment, often becoming valued members of staff.

Leaders and managers have developed appropriate quality assurance processes, which they use effectively to enable them to identify the skills and development needs of their staff. They use this information to identify areas for development and provide support to enhance teachers' technical experience and improve their teaching practice. As a result, the quality of education that learners experience has improved across most subjects.

Leaders and managers use information on learners' progress to identify courses that require intervention and support. For example, managers and teachers of level 3 childcare programmes have taken swift and decisive action in response to learners' poor learning experience in previous years. They have reviewed and strengthened the curriculum content to ensure that it reflects current industry practice, and they now engage with employers, who contribute to the design of the course.

Governors use their expertise and the information they receive to provide robust challenge to leaders and managers. This has led to improvements, such as a new data dashboard which provides them with an accurate oversight of the quality of education and learners' and apprentices' learning experiences. They use this information to challenge college leaders, to improve the education and training that learners and apprentices experience.

The majority of teachers and skills coaches have expert knowledge and industry experience in their subjects. However, on a few apprenticeships, there is too much reliance on workplace specialists to provide apprentices with their training. As a result, not all skills coaches have an accurate oversight of the knowledge and skills that apprentices acquire throughout their apprenticeship.

Managers have designed an effective curriculum that allows learners to develop the skills that they need to work in industry and move on to their next steps. In most cases, managers and teachers sequence the curriculum to allow learners and apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills. As a result, learners and the majority of apprentices incrementally develop their knowledge over time and can make clear links between current and previous learning.

Teachers take into account learners' starting points and use this information to plan learning. Teachers and support staff demonstrate a good understanding of the needs of learners with education, health and care plans and use them well to plan learning. However, in apprenticeships, skills coaches do not routinely use the starting points of apprentices to develop individualised learning plans. As a result, a few apprentices do not progress as quickly as they are able.

The majority of teachers provide valuable feedback to learners, which learners use to good effect to develop their skills and improve their work as they progress through their course. Teachers on access to higher education courses provide clear feedback to learners on the strengths and weaknesses within their work. This allows learners to know what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

Teachers ensure that learners on adult courses and study programmes develop their English and mathematics skills during their course. Learners on the level 3 diploma in creative practice (games art and animation) who need to improve their written skills are supported to complete these elements of the assessment first, before moving on to their preferred activity of programming. However, apprentices are not routinely supported to develop their English and mathematics skills. As a result, not all apprentices improve these skills over time.

Most learners who need to re-sit their English and mathematics GCSEs make good progress. In English, learners use persuasive language to present their view of the relevant merits of social media as a good or a bad thing in society. In mathematics, learners enjoy using the 'tiny dot one' programme to self-correct their practice questions.

Leaders and managers have established an appropriate work experience programme. As a result, learners apply the skills, knowledge and professional behaviours they learn at college in different contexts and develop effective employability skills. Study programme learners access a broad range of work placements. For example, learners on motor vehicle courses attend general repair garages, specialist tyre and exhaust centres and light body repair shops. However, learners in receipt of high-needs funding do not take part in the same breadth of activities and do not experience the wider world of work.

Attendance of learners and apprentices on most courses is good. On a few courses where attendance is low, managers have put in place a range of interventions that have led to improvements in learners' attendance.

Almost all learners and apprentices who complete their courses achieve. Learners in receipt of high-needs funding are supported well for life after college. The large majority move on into paid employment, further training or to independent living.

Too many apprentices leave their programme prior to the end-point assessment. Leaders have identified this and have recently implemented a range of improvement strategies, such as more rigorous assessments at the start of the course and more focused reviews of apprentices' progress from their starting points. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these changes on the quality of education that apprentices receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders have an appropriately trained and experienced safeguarding team which supports staff and learners. This includes supporting learners aged 14 to 16 who are electively home educated and who are attending part time at the college.

Leaders and managers have an extensive range of safeguarding, behaviour and well-being policies in place, which staff use effectively. Staff who support or undertake recruitment follow appropriate processes to check the background of applicants.

Most learners and apprentices have an understanding of safeguarding topics. Through tutorials they learn about topics such as consent, harmful sexual behaviours and positive relationships. They demonstrate that they can keep themselves safe and know who to report their concerns to.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that the starting points for all apprentices are accurately assessed and are used to inform learning plans that challenge apprentices and support them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders and managers should identify apprentices' English and mathematics skill levels promptly at the start of their apprenticeship and provide relevant training to support their continued development.
- Leaders and managers should continue to refine the monitoring of apprentices' progress to ensure that all apprentices make good progress towards completing their apprenticeship by the expected completion date.
- Leaders should ensure that learners in receipt of high-needs funding are able to participate in a broader range of work experience activities, to enable them to gain a wider understanding of opportunities available to them in the world of work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130815
Address	Cauldon Campus Stoke Road Shelton Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST4 2DG
Contact number	01782208208
Website	www.stokecoll.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Lisa Capper MBE
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 October 2019
Main subcontractors	North Staffordshire Engineering Group Training Association Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Director of Quality, as nominee, and the Deputy Principal, as the skills 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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