

# Inspection of Preston College

Inspection dates: 17 to 20 January 2023

**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

Preston College is a general further education college based in Lancashire. It operates from one campus in Preston. The college specialises in technical and vocational education, providing courses from entry level through to higher education. The college offers education programmes for young people, courses for adults, apprenticeships and programmes for learners with high needs.

At the time of the inspection, the college provided education and training to 2,300 young people. Most young people study full-time courses in a wide range of subjects between levels 1 and 3. There are 165 learners aged 14 and 15 who study part-time vocational courses in hair and beauty, construction or GCSEs in English and mathematics. In addition, the college provides courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to 240 asylum seekers new to the country. Most of the 2,100 adult learners study on a part-time basis. All 971 apprentices follow standards-based apprenticeships from levels 2 to 5 in a range of sectors, including business, construction, hair and beauty therapy and dental nursing. There are 111 learners for whom the college receives high-needs funding. The college works with two subcontractors, providing training for learners who are mostly aged 16 to 18.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their experiences at Preston College. They appreciate the positive and welcoming culture and understand the importance of treating each other with respect and behaving responsibly. Most learners and apprentices achieve their qualifications and apprenticeships and progress into higher education, further training or employment.

Learners aged 16 to 18 benefit from carefully sequenced curriculums that allow them to progress through stages of increasing levels of difficulty as they develop their skills. Most teachers are aspirational for what their learners can achieve. They provide regular opportunities for learners to practise and consolidate their learning. Learners display positive behaviours and are focused on their work. Most learners attend their vocational subjects and arrive ready to learn. However, learners' attendance in GCSE English and mathematics is too low.

Adult learners quickly develop the knowledge and skills required for employment, further study or life in the United Kingdom. In hairdressing, barbering and joinery, teachers ensure that learners understand how to work safely before they develop their vocational skills. They then work on live models in hairdressing or use tools and equipment safely and confidently in construction workshops. ESOL learners develop independence as they improve their English skills. Learners who previously found it difficult to gain employment are offered work, as they can better communicate with prospective employers.

Apprentices swiftly develop their professional behaviours and the confidence they need to be successful at work. Apprentices are highly productive and work independently in practical workshops. Carpentry and joinery apprentices learn in facilities that effectively replicate industry settings. This allows apprentices to gain up-to-date practical skills. Work-based tutors give encouraging verbal feedback on apprentices' practical work to help them maintain high standards, both on their apprenticeship and at work.

Learners with high needs explain how the bespoke support they receive has a positive impact on their learning. Learners are supported well by staff in the classroom. Support staff get to know learners and build a good rapport with them. Learners feel confident that they can ask for help when they need it. Learners with hearing impairments undertake British Sign Language qualifications to enable them to communicate more effectively with staff and their peers.

Learners and apprentices feel safe in college. They are confident in talking to teachers and support staff about any problems they encounter. This includes issues relating to sexual harm and discrimination. They appreciate that teachers take matters seriously and are quick to tackle inappropriate behaviour.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have a comprehensive understanding of local and regional skills priorities. They align the curriculum extremely well to the key growth pillars outlined in the local enterprise partnership plan. They are highly responsive to meeting the skills needs of a diverse range of stakeholders in a range of sectors. As part of the development of Preston City Centre, leaders work with the council to determine the skills needs of employers who are developing the city's infrastructure.

Leaders are highly committed to providing curriculums that meet the needs of learners and local businesses, such as hairdressing, beauty therapy and the creative industries. They develop effective relationships with employers. In health, for example, NHS leaders wanted to develop customer service skills for their employees. In response, leaders now include a customer service qualification as part of the level 3 health course, and learners undertake a formal work placement.

Leaders and managers engage widely and frequently with stakeholders about how the curriculum is planned and taught. For example, automotive teachers benefit from training on electric technologies from a large heavy goods vehicle manufacturer. Leaders invest in resources that include electric vehicles and charging points and a safety rig that learners use when servicing vehicles.

Leaders work with the local authority and the Red Cross to support some of the most disadvantaged groups. They provide programmes for asylum seekers to develop their English skills. Leaders have a very well-established approach to supporting learners who are not in education, employment or training. They partner with The Prince's Trust to provide programmes to help young people to re-engage in learning and move into work. They provide extensive support to children looked after and care leavers. Preston is a designated city of sanctuary, and for these learners, Preston College is a college of sanctuary.

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

Leaders and managers develop ambitious curriculums to prepare young people, adults and apprentices for their next steps in education, training and work. Teachers and work-based tutors design programmes that allow learners and apprentices to progress through stages of increasing difficulty as they develop their skills. In performance and production arts, learners first develop an understanding of stage and screen performance. They then acquire industry awareness through work placements and live performances in local or regional theatres at the end of the first term.

Teachers plan the curriculum so that it builds on previous teaching and develops the new knowledge and skills that learners need. Learners on level 3 health and social

care learn about the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion and apply this understanding to their study of dementia and clinical practice. In ESOL, teachers adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of learners from different nationalities to ensure that lessons are culturally sensitive. Learners are placed in classes with groups of similar language learners to help them to progress quickly with their English skills.

Learners with high needs benefit from a supported internship programme that managers develop with the local police force. Teachers adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of working in this environment. They teach learners about the Official Secrets Act and other mandatory training at the start of the course. As a result, learners are well informed and prepared effectively for work.

Learners with additional learning needs are well supported by teachers and learning support staff. Learners with autism spectrum disorder are well supported. They meet teachers at the start of each day to set goals and check what they are going to achieve by the end of the day. Learners with high needs demonstrate the same level of skill as their peers.

Teachers and work-based tutors are well qualified and experienced. They have good subject knowledge and industry experience. Teaching is effective in helping learners to understand the key concepts and develop sector-specific knowledge. For example, in dance lessons, teachers demonstrate jazz sequences of increasing complexity and duration, with strict timing and secure landings required. Learners follow the demonstrations as a group, then in pairs, to build their confidence of these routines.

Carpentry and joinery apprentices are set relevant and contextualised costing activities at the start of lessons. For example, they have an 'on site' meeting within the workshop facility as they would at work. They assess the cost of door fits with various locks and ironmongery, including VAT. This helps apprentices to familiarise themselves with timber types, key terminology and practise their numerical skills in an industry context.

In some curriculum areas, teachers do not always assess the knowledge that learners develop in their studies effectively. In GCSE mathematics, for example, teachers' open questioning results in some learners choosing not to answer questions, and it is therefore difficult to assess individual learners' knowledge. Occasionally, more confident learners respond and dominate the lesson, while quieter learners disengage from what they are being taught.

In a few lessons, the pace of teaching is too slow; learners do not make progress at the speed of which they are capable. Teachers spend too long explaining a task that learners already understand. In other lessons, learners are left waiting for teachers to check their work. Learners with high needs miss the opportunities to develop the communication and interaction skills that feature in their education, health and care plans (EHCP).

Most teachers provide helpful feedback to learners that helps them to improve. Most learners' work is completed to a good standard and improves over time. Apprentices acquire a range of knowledge, practical skills and demonstrate positive behaviours. They produce products of a very good standard from scale drawings. Learners on access to higher education (HE) courses submit their work electronically, with inbuilt plagiarism software to prepare them for university study. In a few cases, teachers and work-based tutors' written feedback contains some typographical or spelling errors.

Teachers and support staff do not track the incremental steps that learners with high needs take towards their EHCP outcomes. Learners are therefore not able to celebrate the progress that they make towards their longer-term goals. Managers have recognised that this is an area for improvement and have invested in a new recording system. However, this has yet to be implemented.

Too few learners achieve high grades in GCSE English and mathematics. Although leaders and managers have made some interventions to improve this, they are not yet having a discernible impact.

Most learners progress on to positive destinations. Access to HE learners progress on to degree level programmes, such as nursing and midwifery, social work and other social science degrees at university. Level 3 health and social care learners progress on to access to HE programmes or other courses at the college. Many learners progress into employment, and apprentices progress their careers further at work. Almost all learners with high needs who were on the supported internship programme the previous year gained sixteen hours of paid employment per week. They are proud of the skills they develop to get a job.

Learners' and apprentices' attendance varies significantly across different departments. In most departments, attendance is high. However, attendance on GCSE courses, level 1 courses and a few adult classes is too low.

Managers use the tutorial curriculum effectively to develop learners' understanding of life in modern Britain. This includes learning about discrimination, equality, diversity and inclusion, fundamental British values and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Learners enjoy tutorials and discussing these topics with teachers and peers. Most learners have at least a reasonable grasp of these issues. Many have a strong understanding of online safety and the methods that can be used to influence young people and involve them in criminal activity. Apprentices readily recall training on fundamental British values. They understand how the rule of law applies to building regulations and health and safety legislation in the construction sector.

Learners receive helpful information about courses they can progress to and how to move into employment. Learners are clear about their next steps and future opportunities. However, learners attending ESOL evening classes are not provided with the same level of information on potential progression and career opportunities.

Learners on these courses are less clear about what they will do next in their education and training.

Leaders have robust and rigorous quality assurance processes to identify strengths and areas for improvement. They review performance with managers frequently through school performance reviews and curriculum area reviews in which they analyse performance, learners' attendance and progress.

Leaders and managers provide staff with a range of continuing professional development (CPD). There are themed staff development topics each month that staff can access either online or face to face. They have regular whole-college CPD days. Sessions include external specialists in topics such as behaviour management and learner motivation. Staff also receive training to improve their digital skills for teaching, learning and assessment.

Leaders are considerate of the workload and well-being of staff. They have a range of policies and procedures in place to support their well-being. Staff can join mental health awareness training and have trained mental health first aiders across the college, as well as occupational health and counselling. Staff say they are proud to work at the college.

Leaders have reduced the number of subcontractor partners; they now only work with two subcontractors. Leaders apply the college's quality assurance processes to ensure the quality of education learners receive in subcontracted provision is in line with leaders' expectations. Staff who work for subcontractors participate in the college's CPD programme.

The governing body consists of members with a range of experience and skills in legal, finance and education. This enables them to support the senior leadership team to develop the college's strategic direction. Governors receive comprehensive reports on the quality of education and training that learners and apprentices receive. They provide scrutiny and challenge to help senior leaders to continue to improve.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff at all levels have developed a culture of safeguarding. They have put in place a range of safeguarding policies to ensure that staff know how to keep learners and apprentices safe. This includes safer staff recruitment processes.

Leaders have put in place a safeguarding team with a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies who are appropriately trained to carry out their roles. There are appropriate procedures in place to record and monitor any concerns raised. The DSL diligently maintains records of incidents and actions taken. The safeguarding team uses a range of agencies and referral organisations to support learners. The DSL

and safeguarding team monitor all vulnerable learners, such as children who are looked after and unaccompanied asylum seekers, to ensure they are safe.

Leaders and managers provide staff with mandatory safeguarding, child protection and 'Prevent' duty training.

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

- Ensure that learners rapidly improve their skills in English and mathematics and significantly increase the number of learners who achieve high grades in these subjects.
- Ensure that teachers and support staff plan and track the incremental steps that learners with high needs take towards attaining their EHCP outcomes. Teachers and support staff should help learners to recognise and celebrate the steps they take towards their longer-term goals.
- Improve learners' attendance, particularly on level 1 courses and in GCSE English and mathematics.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Simon Nixon
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15 to 18 October 2018
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Preston North End Community and Education Trust



## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice 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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