

Inspection of York College

Inspection dates: 31 January to 3 February 2023

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	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

York College is a large general further education college. All of the college's provision is based at one campus on the outskirts of York. At the time of the inspection, there were 3,444 learners on education programmes for young people, 862 adult learners and 879 apprentices. The college had 149 learners with high needs. Education programmes and apprenticeships cover a wide range of subjects. Most learners and apprentices live in York or the neighbouring county of North Yorkshire. The college works with one subcontractor.

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

Learners and apprentices benefit from the good teaching and support that they receive from well-qualified and vocationally experienced teachers and assessors. Leaders recruit staff who are experts in their professional and vocational areas. For example, stonemasonry apprentices are taught by master stonemasons, adults on the access to HE law pathway are taught by experienced barristers, and young people studying health and social care are taught by experienced nurses. Learners and apprentices make good progress in gaining and applying new knowledge and skills as a result of the expert tuition that they receive.

Learners and apprentices gain in confidence during their time studying at the college. Teachers and progress coaches plan and provide an effective tutorial and enrichment programme which helps learners and apprentices to develop their character and resilience and gain valuable insights into how to be an active citizen in modern Britain.

Learners with high needs on the pathway to work and independent living programme benefit from a curriculum that focuses well on their personal development. The range of activities that staff plan supports learners well to develop positive relationships and promotes their physical and mental well-being. Learners with high needs on other programmes across the college receive effective support so that they can study and achieve alongside their peers.

Staff support learners and apprentices well to develop positive attitudes and habits to help them engage in and make the most of their time in learning. Most learners and apprentices receive timely and appropriate advice and guidance, including about careers, which helps them to make good progress and prepares them well for their next steps. However, although learners on A-level courses receive good advice and support for progression to higher education, a few who have alternative plans do not receive advice about wider career choices.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and are confident that leaders will take action if they raise any concerns. A few learners had raised concerns about some inappropriate behaviour that they had either experienced or witnessed. Leaders took swift action in response to these concerns and reinforced expectations about what constitutes appropriate behaviour.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders play a leading role as members of local and regional skills forums. They have a commitment to meeting the skills strategy for York and North Yorkshire. They are involved in multiple partnerships and projects to meet the strategy goals, which include development of digital skills and engineering and green skills, such as building energy-efficient homes and retrofitting older houses in line with the carbon emissions reduction strategy.

Leaders are actively engaged in education provider groups, such as the Higher York Board and the York and North Yorkshire Principals Group. They work effectively with other local colleges to plan provision to ensure that it responds to the skills needs across York and North Yorkshire. For example, leaders ensure that similar courses are not duplicated across providers, which enables learners to make clear choices. Leaders have developed beneficial partnerships with universities in the Yorkshire and Humber region. They ensure that the programmes they deliver prepare learners well for progression into higher education.

Leaders and curriculum managers do not involve employers and stakeholders consistently in the design and implementation of the curriculum across all courses and subject areas. Where employers and stakeholders are involved in co-designing the curriculum, learners gain valuable skills and experience of and for the workplace, which support them in planning for their next steps. However, this is not the case across all subjects.

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

Leaders and managers make well-informed strategic decisions about the subjects and types of provision that the college provides for learners and apprentices. They have established an ambitious curriculum offer which has been informed well by the needs of employers and regional partners. In the large majority of curriculum areas, managers and teachers work effectively with stakeholders, higher education providers and employers to plan and sequence the curriculum to meet the specific needs of the sectors that they represent. Through engaging in the curriculum that the college provides, learners and apprentices gain the knowledge and skills that they need to progress into employment or further study at a higher level, including university.

The large majority of learners and apprentices respond well to the expectations of leaders and staff and behave well in lessons and communal areas of the college. Most learners and apprentices develop consistently positive attitudes to their learning. They demonstrate resilience when faced with setbacks. Learners on education programmes for young people respond well to being treated as adults.

Actions that leaders have taken to improve attendance have had a positive impact for the current cohort of learners and apprentices in most subject areas. Although learners' attendance on GCSE English and mathematics courses has improved significantly, this is from a very low base in both subjects, and attendance remains too low. Leaders rightly recognise that although attendance is improving, in a few curriculum areas and in provision for adults, it needs to improve further.

Teachers and assessors sequence and teach the curriculum effectively so that learners and apprentices build and consolidate subject-specific knowledge and skills effectively over time. Learners and apprentices learn about key concepts early in their studies and then apply these to increasingly complex tasks. In A-level English

literature, teachers skilfully interweave content from early in the course in later learning, which helps learners to consolidate their knowledge. On the biology strand of the access to higher education course for adults, teachers ensure that learners develop a good understanding about cellular structures before moving on to more complex learning, such as physiology. Stonemasonry apprentices are taught how to master hand and tool skills to split blocks and form plane surfaces before moving on to cut more complex mouldings, such as an ovolo.

Teachers and assessors use a range of effective strategies to ensure that learners and apprentices can apply securely and fluently the knowledge and skills they have learned. Most staff return to key topics throughout the course, enabling learners and apprentices to deepen their understanding. For example, in sports science, teachers recap how the circulatory and respiratory systems work throughout the course and, as a result, learners understand the connection and impact of these systems on each other when treating a range of different sports injuries. On the auto care apprenticeship, repeated practice enables apprentices to routinely complete tasks, including wheel alignment and the refit to a high standard of components such as radiators and condensers.

Most teachers and assessors use assessment effectively to identify any misconceptions that their learners or apprentices develop and then to correct these quickly. Teachers use skilful questioning in lessons to enable learners and apprentices to consolidate new knowledge and to check their understanding of the topic being taught. Too often, however, teachers' written feedback is not specific or useful enough to help learners and apprentices know what they need to do to improve.

Teachers and assessors ensure that learners and apprentices who have already achieved at least a grade 4 in English and mathematics at GCSE continue to develop their knowledge and skills in these subjects by applying them in academic and vocational contexts. For example, learners in beauty therapy use mathematical skills when working out client bills and discounted services while carrying out reception duties. They are also taught the importance of communicating well when replying to client enquiries.

On GCSE English courses for learners aged 16 to 18, the progress that learners make is too dependent on which teacher they have. In some learner groups, teachers do not mark learners' written work or provide them with feedback on the areas that they need to develop further. In other groups, teachers' feedback in the classroom and on learners' written work is specific and useful, enabling learners to work on their areas for improvement. In too many English classes, learners do not complete the set activities. The proportion of learners who achieve a grade 4 or better after completing a year on the GCSE English course is too low.

Staff ensure that learners who require it benefit from work experience and exposure to the industries in which that they are planning to work. For example, learners in beauty therapy gain experience of the workplace through working in the college's busy commercial salons with paying clients.

Learners and apprentices have good access to and engage well in a range of enrichment activities, trips and visits, often with direct relevance to their subject area. Many also engage in charitable activities in the local community and have the opportunity to engage in a broad range of extra-curricular activities, such as a chess club, yoga and various sporting activities. The college's female football development squad recently won the Association of Colleges' national cup, which was widely celebrated across the college. Apprentices are encouraged and supported to participate in national competitions, with one apprentice winning the bronze medal in the 2022 national SkillBuild final for stonemasonry.

The large majority of learners and apprentices develop significant new knowledge and skills while at the college. Most learners who apply to universities progress on to the institution of their first choice. The great majority of first- and second-year learners progress on to their next year of study in academic and vocational subjects. Most apprentices gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to progress into careers in their chosen vocational area. Learners with high needs on the pathway to independent living and work programme develop valuable knowledge and skills to help them to prepare well for adult life.

Through the input of progress coaches and other tutors, most learners and apprentices gain a good understanding of what constitutes healthy relationships and inappropriate sexual behaviour. Leaders and managers identified the need to provide additional input in relation to these subjects for a few male learners enrolled on construction courses when their behaviours towards other learners was identified as concerning. Topics covered for all learners and apprentices help them to recognise the impact of toxic relationships and the importance of consent.

Through their regular monitoring activities and timely interventions when they have cause for concern, leaders and managers take effective steps to ensure that the quality of provision is good for most learners. They work effectively with the sole subcontractor, York City Football Club Foundation, to ensure that leaders there provide effective coaching for learners on the level 3 extended certificate in sports coaching. However, leaders' and managers' actions have not yet resolved the poor quality of teaching that learners experience in a few GCSE English classes.

Governance is effective. Governors bring a wide range of expertise and skills to their role, including in the digital, legal and education sectors, which they use to good effect. They are aware of the many strengths of the college and the areas that need to improve. They provide good support and challenge to the senior leadership team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have effective policies and procedures in place to ensure the safeguarding and well-being of learners. This includes a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan. The appropriately qualified designated safeguarding

lead and the deputy lead ensure that learners at risk receive appropriate and speedy support when required.

Leaders and managers carry out background checks on staff and hold appropriate records of completed checks and training that staff have completed to ensure that they are suitable to work with learners. Staff know how to recognise and report concerns they have about learners' safety and well-being.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Take action to improve the quality of education in GCSE English and ensure that the proportion of learners who achieve a grade 4 or higher improves.
- Ensure that feedback following assessments of learners' and apprentices' work makes it clear to them what they need to do to improve their work and make progress.
- Ensure that the attendance of learners continues to improve, particularly where it remains low, such as on a few adult learning courses and on GCSE English and mathematics courses.
- Take swift and effective action to deal with any further incidents of inappropriate behaviour of learners and ensure that all learners behave well and are respectful to their peers.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130594
Address	Sim Balk Lane Bishophthorpe York YO23 2BB
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Website	www.yorkcollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Lee Probert
Provider type	General further education college
Dates of previous inspection	9 to 13 December 2013
Main subcontractors	York City Football Club Foundation

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality of education, 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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