

Inspection of Grantham College

Inspection dates: 24 to 27 January 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
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	Good

Information about this provider

Grantham College is a small general further education college located on a main site in the market town of Grantham. It provides vocational, technical and professional courses to students of all ages, from entry level to higher education. There is residential accommodation available for students at the main site. Leaders have recently opened an Institute of Technology, a new centre for higher education and digital skills.

At the time of the inspection, approximately 680 young people, 285 adults and 290 apprentices studied at the college. There were 68 students with high needs.

Most young people study full-time courses, between levels 1 and 3, in a wide range of subjects. Most adults study English for speakers of other languages, distance learning health and social care or level 3 access to higher education (access) courses. Most apprentices study standards-based apprenticeships in engineering. Smaller numbers of apprentices study across a broad range of other subjects.

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

Most students and apprentices find coming to college an enjoyable experience. They are keen to learn, demonstrate respectful attitudes towards each other and value the support they receive from staff.

Young people participate in a wide range of effective activities that develop their employability skills. They undertake relevant work experience, complete live projects with employers and attend frequent guest speaker sessions. As a result, young people are well prepared to take their next steps towards further study or employment.

Leaders offer courses for adults in a wide range of community venues, as distance learning or at the main site. This flexibility meets adult learners' needs well. As a result of their studies, adult learners gain valuable life skills or the knowledge they need to progress on to higher education.

Apprentices have access to a good range of facilities and equipment that reflect industry standards. This allows them to practise and apply their skills outside of work. Apprentices receive valuable guidance and support from their employers to complete their studies.

Students with high needs benefit from a curriculum that is thoughtfully planned. Teachers and support staff know their students very well. They provide a good balance of encouragement and challenge to students. As a result, students feel comfortable and confident to push themselves to try new things.

Leaders and managers have a strong focus on attendance. Apprentices and adult learners almost always attend their classes. Young people's attendance is improving and in several curriculum areas is high. However, despite leaders' focus, young people studying courses in construction, sport, English and mathematics do not attend their courses enough.

Student progress mentors provide good pastoral support for young people, apprentices and for students with high needs. They offer useful guidance on well-being and healthy relationships. Most students develop valuable citizenship skills by contributing to charity events and volunteering activities. Adult learners who want to progress to university receive good guidance and information on how to apply and prepare for this experience.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college and at work. They know who to contact if they have any concerns for themselves or a friend. They have access to mental health advice and counselling that provides valuable support to those who need it. Students and apprentices demonstrate safe working practices and understand fully the importance of this.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers collaborate effectively with the local authority, local enterprise partnerships, employers and universities to understand skills needs. Governors have a clear understanding of local and regional employment and community priorities. Leaders and governors use this knowledge well to inform their annual curriculum planning process.

Leaders successfully secure funding to help them to develop courses and resources in response to employer requirements. For example, they have developed a state-of-the-art energy centre so they can offer training in renewable energy.

Leaders and staff ensure that in most courses, employers and stakeholders have an active involvement in the curriculum. Many employers offer guest speaker sessions, work experience, visits and employer set assignments. For example, media students complete projects to produce content for a local visitor attraction.

Leaders and staff work well with Job Centre Plus and the local council to design and deliver courses in the community. Leaders have close partnerships with universities that ensure there are clear progression routes for students who study access courses. Leaders collaborate closely with employers to plan most apprenticeships and meet their needs well. However, leaders are yet to fully use these partnerships to inform the planning of the curriculum for young people.

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

Leaders and governors set a clear and relevant strategic plan for the college. They offer suitable courses that meet the needs of students, employers and the community. In response to local needs, leaders offer an appropriate curriculum for students who have not recently been in education or training. The route to employability course effectively reintroduces students to education and many of them progress to study a vocational course.

Most teachers plan the curriculum well to build students' and apprentices' knowledge and skills over time. For example, teaching assistant apprentices first gain a comprehensive understanding of safeguarding that is essential to their roles. Students with high needs follow a very effective personalised curriculum. However, in a very small minority of cases, the curriculum is not thought out well enough. For example, a few engineering apprentices attend monthly classes with other apprentices who attend weekly. It is not clear how apprentices who attend monthly will develop the knowledge and skills that are taught in the weeks between.

Teachers are well-qualified, knowledgeable and have relevant backgrounds or vocational expertise. They use this experience to effectively demonstrate and teach students how to meet industry standards. For example, media teachers have a very

wide range of current experience in filmmaking, photography and animation. They share this with students and challenge them to meet these industry standards in their work.

Most teachers use a good range of resources and activities in class. For example, in GCSE mathematics, teachers effectively use worked examples to illustrate difficult calculations to students. Most teachers plan tasks that help students and apprentices build on or revisit topics that they have studied. However, in a very small minority of cases, teachers use resources that are not accessible to students or plan activities that are too difficult. In these rare cases, students can lose confidence and withdraw from the activity.

Many teachers use assessment appropriately to check students' and apprentices' understanding of subjects. They use the outcomes to inform their teaching and revisit topics if students need to. However, a few teachers do not use the outcomes of assessment effectively enough. For example, teachers will give students the same worksheets to repeat again without any additional guidance. This does not support students to develop the knowledge they need.

Leaders recognise that not enough young people achieved their courses last academic year. Too many students had poor attendance or left their courses before they completed them. Leaders and managers have taken several actions in response to this. Student progress mentors have the capacity to monitor and support student attendance, performance management is stronger and leaders monitor closely the impact of their actions. Inspectors found that although it is still not high enough, attendance is improving, more students continue with their studies and the quality of education for most students is good.

Adults who study access courses achieve well. They receive precise and informative written feedback. Many achieve merit and distinction grades in assignments and those who pass know how to improve their grades. Students with high needs make good progress with their individual learning plans. They readily share their new knowledge and skills that enable them to progress to further study or prepare for adulthood.

Most apprentices have historically completed their studies and achieved high grades. At the time of the inspection, around a third of apprentices were past their planned end date of study. Staffing shortages have led to engineering apprentices not receiving timely feedback on assessed work and delays in visits to the workplace. As a result, these apprentices have fallen behind. Leaders have worked hard and now have staff in place. However, they were so new to their roles that inspectors could not judge the impact on apprentices.

Staff work together to provide effective support to students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The specialist learning support team share information and insight into teaching strategies with teachers that they use to successfully meet students' needs.

Students and apprentices have access to a good range of careers information, advice and guidance. Relevant careers activities take place as part of students' courses, in their tutorials and with the impartial careers advice and guidance team. Managers have developed a broad and relevant tutorial curriculum. This helps to develop most students' awareness of themes linked to employment and staying safe. However, for a small minority of students, the content is repetitive or not relevant and they do not find it useful.

Leaders ensure that teachers receive frequent and useful personal and professional development. For example, recent training from physiotherapists and occupational therapists has enabled the learning support team to embed more therapeutic approaches for students. Leaders consider carefully how they can support staff well-being. An ongoing trial of a reduced working week and teaching hours has been very well received by staff.

Governors have relevant experience and backgrounds to undertake their roles. Leaders produce comprehensive papers that help governors grasp the current strengths and areas for development. Governors closely monitor leaders' progress with their improvement plans. While this is useful, leaders do not consistently provide detailed enough data on key areas of improvement. For example, attendance is often reported for the whole college and only a few curriculum areas. This does not provide governors with enough detailed oversight.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers fully understand their responsibilities for safeguarding. Policies and procedures are clear and help staff deal with and report any concerns that they have for their students or apprentices. Staff undertake bi-annual training that is complemented by frequent and relevant updates from the designated safeguarding lead.

If a referral is made about a student, staff record these in detail and take timely and appropriate actions to support students. Staff work in close partnership with external agencies to support students and apprentices when they are in need. Managers follow safer recruitment practices. All appropriate pre-employment checks are undertaken.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should make sure that all courses and the personal development curriculum are logically planned so that students and apprentices gain the knowledge and skills they require over time.
- Managers should support all teachers to use assessment well and to help them develop appropriate resources and activities to aid students' learning.

- Leaders and governors should continue to closely monitor attendance and their strategies to improve student outcomes to ensure that students attend their courses and achieve.
- Leaders should ensure that staffing continues to be in place for engineering apprentices and that they catch up with their studies and achieve.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130759
Address	Stonebridge Road Grantham Lincolnshire NG31 9AP
Contact number	01476 400200
Website	www.grantham.ac.uk
Principal & CEO	Paul Deane
Provider type	General further education college
Dates of previous inspection	19 to 22 September 2017
Main subcontractors	N/A

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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