

Inspection of Heart of Birmingham Vocational College

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 February 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Heart of Birmingham Vocational College is an independent specialist college based in Birmingham which has been directly funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency since 2014. At the time of inspection, the college had 130 students aged 16 to 25 with complex and moderate learning difficulties studying a curriculum which is based on preparation for adulthood. Of which, 99 were on preparation for adulthood pathway, 14 were on the sport pathway, nine were on the horticulture pathways and eight were on a supported internship. Students benefit from having access to speech and language therapy.

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

Students are highly motivated and work well in both classroom and work-based learning environments. Supported internship students ensure that they prepare for work and arrive promptly at their workplace. They are proud of their achievements and show considerable commitment to their work.

All staff have high expectations for their students. The majority of students attend lessons well and are positive and motivated in all aspects of their learning. Students are punctual to lessons, demonstrate pride in their work, and are keen to succeed.

Students demonstrate exceptional behaviours; all students are highly engaged. They demonstrate that they are polite, respectful, and where appropriate have professional behaviours.

Leaders have successfully created a calm, purposeful and respectful environment for students to learn in. Teachers support students to adjust socially inappropriate behaviours quickly and effectively. As a result, students consistently display high levels of tolerance and respect for their peers and staff.

Leaders have put in place clear plans to provide students with an effective careers programme across all pathways. However, these plans are not yet implemented across the whole college. A minority of students do not regularly access independent careers advice and guidance. Most students on work-based learning programmes understand what careers options are available to them after college; however, students following classroom-based programmes are less well prepared.

Teachers deliver a well-planned healthy relationships and sex education curriculum. As a result, students are able to discuss challenging subjects such as sexual well-being and personal relationships. They participate in mature and respectful discussion with each other.

Students feel safe, have a clear understanding of who to report concerns to, and are confident that they would be helped and supported if they raised a concern.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum to support students to progress into adulthood. More recently they have introduced new pathways that give students the opportunity to develop their skills in vocationally specific areas such as sports and horticulture to support students moving on to employment.

Leaders have put in place effective initial advice and guidance to support new students to transition into the college. Students attend taster and open days for pre-assessment. This is used to place students on the most appropriate pathway. As a result, the majority of students are working towards the goals set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Leaders do not yet have a clear overview of how students are progressing on their courses from their starting points. Leaders are beginning to develop processes to ensure they more effectively track the progress of students, as they recognise that they currently rely too heavily on the feedback from teachers.

Leaders have developed a range of activities and training to improve the quality of teaching that students experience. These include undertaking formal teaching observations, best practice sessions, and through targeted professional development. As a result, teachers are more confident in the classroom and further develop their teaching skills.

Leaders have in place a highly skilled board of governors, which provides effective challenge to the leadership team. Governors are aware of the key strengths and areas for development. They have recently introduced link governor activities that are already improving their understanding and ability to hold leaders to account.

Leaders have designed a curriculum that focuses on developing students' employability, personal development, and independence in preparation for adulthood. In the vocational focused pathways, they have collaborated with employers to establish the curriculum as a vehicle for practical learning. Leaders ensure the curriculum includes support for students' mental health, well-being, and employability skills alongside the vocational teaching.

Most students on vocational pathways develop subject-specific knowledge and skills. In sport, students participate in a curriculum that is ambitious and supports them to make progress against the planned outcomes in their EHC plans. However, the horticulture pathway is in the early stages of implementation. There is a limited focus on developing students' subject knowledge that underpins their practical work skills. As a result, a few students on this pathway do not develop the skills to a level of which they are capable.

Most teachers use appropriate and effective teaching strategies to ensure that the majority of students participate in learning activities that are engaging and useful. However, in a very few cases students are not challenged to achieve in line with their potential. In these instances, teaching strategies and resources are not always age appropriate and suitable to support young people to prepare for adulthood.

Most teaching and support staff use a range of teaching methods and tools highly effectively to check understanding and tackle gaps in students' knowledge. However, this is not consistent practice across all groups, and consequently a few students do not have regular opportunities to revisit topics to relearn aspects that they do not understand.

Most students are being prepared for employment effectively. Students on work-based learning programmes benefit from well-planned and regular activities where they research different roles, practise interview skills, and learn how to prepare a curriculum vitae. Students on work placements and supported internships access

high-quality employer training that extends their understanding of key information relating to their roles and responsibilities. For example, a student with an interest in becoming a personal trainer observed the set up and delivery of a public spinning class at the local sports club.

Leaders and teachers provide a highly effective and coherent personal development and sex education curriculum that builds on students' knowledge of healthy relationships, puberty, personal hygiene, consent and grooming. Students are able to recognise their peers' personal space and have significantly reduced their inappropriate behaviours. As a result, the majority of students are able to speak with confidence about what they have learned and how they have applied this to their own lives.

Leaders have designed a well-planned curriculum that focuses on building students' knowledge of life in modern Britain. Students on work-based learning programmes demonstrate good knowledge of key topics such as fundamental British values and the 'Prevent' duty. However, a few students on college-based programmes do not demonstrate a secure understanding of these topics and what they mean for their personal lives.

Leaders ensure that a range of therapeutic and pastoral support is available to develop and support all students' health and well-being. Around half of all students access specific interventions and activities that enable them to maintain positive mental and physical health. These interventions and activities include talking therapies, mindfulness and a specific LGBTQ+ rainbow group. Students value highly the support they receive at the college and discuss the multiple ways in which this support has helped them to feel more comfortable with who they are.

The majority of students develop a wider understanding of their local communities. Leaders have put in place a student leadership group that builds self-advocacy skills, while a few students engage with specific community and volunteering groups. As a result, the majority of students' activities prepare them to be more active citizens.

Students are well prepared to make their next steps. Students following work-based pathways have clear aspirations for their future. Teachers encourage and support students to gain the experience and skills they need to progress. As a result, the majority of students who have an EHC plan target to gain employment undertake meaningful work experience or are already participating in paid part-time work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have appointed an appropriately qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL). In addition to the DSL there are a number of staff who have received designated safeguarding lead training who work on a rota basis to ensure consistent support is provided to students, should any concerns arise.

The DSL has policies and procedures in place to safeguard students, including an appropriate policy for the safer recruitment of staff. They have put in place suitable arrangements for the recording and reporting of safeguarding concerns.

The DSL ensures that all staff are appropriately trained on topics related to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. They share regular updates from the regional links they have developed with colleagues to ensure students are aware of the local risks.

Teaching and support staff have a sound understanding of how to keep students safe in the college and when working with them in the community.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that they identify the starting points of students and use them to identify clear learning goals to ensure that all students can achieve their best.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers consistently plan the curriculum and their teaching to enable all students to achieve at the level at which they are capable, in order for them to reach their potential.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers give clear feedback on students' work to give them a clear understanding of what they do well and what they need to improve.
- Leaders should ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in a range of well-planned activities, such as volunteering, to ensure they develop the behaviours needed to be a citizen in the wider community.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141435
Address	328–332 Bromford Lane Birmingham West Midlands B8 2SD
Contact number	01218 090666
Website	www.hbvc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Emma Clark
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	22 June 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal quality and curriculum, 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

Sharon Dowling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Bernie White	Ofsted Inspector
Lois Knight	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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