

Inspection of Specsavers Optical Superstores Limited

Inspection dates:

25 to 28 July 2023

Overall effectiveness**Outstanding**

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Apprenticeships

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Specsavers is the largest provider of optical and audiology services in the UK. The company also provides these services to customers in northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand. In the UK, the business model is one of a joint venture partnership (JVP), where locally based directors own their own business in partnership with Specsavers. Specsavers has an apprenticeship team that provides training and support to apprentices employed in the JVPs. Apprentices receive monthly, online, one-to-one learning sessions and complete practical training in the workplace.

At the time of inspection, 534 apprentices were studying standards-based apprenticeships, of which 31 were studying level 2 customer service, 244 were studying level 2 optical assistant, 195 were studying level 3 optical assistant and 61 were studying level 3 spectacle maker. One hundred and ninety-six apprentices are 16 to 18 years old and 338 are over 19 years of age. All apprentices are employed by Specsavers. Specsavers does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices enjoy the very well-planned, frequent and supportive learning sessions with their coaches and rightly appreciate the positive culture of inclusivity staff have created. As a result, apprentices attend training and the workplace well and make very good progress towards achieving their qualification.

Apprentices benefit from expert coaches who use an extensive range of teaching techniques, combined with high-quality resources to help apprentices to learn new skills and knowledge. For example, coaches use creative videos to demonstrate a range of essential processes such as checking and dispensing and matching products to customers' orders. As a result, apprentices greatly value their taught sessions which helps them improve in their jobs swiftly.

Apprentices are extremely well motivated to achieve their qualification. They enjoy their learning and demonstrate very positive attitudes to their studies. They quickly develop extensive new knowledge, skills and behaviours through well-designed training programmes that coaches plan in close collaboration with employers. Apprentices rapidly gain confidence because they practise, improve and apply their new skills exceptionally well in the laboratories and stores. For example, level 3 spectacle maker apprentices become more confident fitting different lens types into a variety of frame types early in their training.

Apprentices consistently meet and often exceed the high expectations staff have of their professional conduct. Apprentices demonstrate exceptional behaviour and a strong work ethic in both the learning and work environments. They are extremely polite and respectful to their store colleagues and customers.

Apprentices quickly develop valuable skills in understanding the differing needs and vulnerabilities of their customers. They learn about the effects of certain illnesses such as diabetes and glaucoma on vision. A few apprentices demonstrate commitment beyond their qualification, including roles such as the Specsavers apprentice champion and apprentice charity ambassador. Most apprentices complete additional activities that support their local community, such as dementia friend training, leading store opening events, promoting apprenticeships in schools and taking part in neighbourhood watch schemes. As a result, most apprentices become responsible and active citizens in their communities.

Apprentices have high aspirations and are very well supported to achieve these through useful careers advice and guidance that informs them of the range of opportunities available to them. Most apprentices gain promotion and move on to further training or education. For example, apprentices continue to study the level 4 certificate in optical dispensing or progress to university to complete a degree in optometry.

Apprentices feel safe and they know how to report concerns about their safety should they have them. Apprentices value highly the newly appointed apprentice engagement coaches, who support them early in their training with any personal

matters and to understand how to stay safe in store and online. Apprentices develop resilience and feel safe, and most stay on track to achieve.

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

Leaders and managers have very carefully considered and designed exceptional apprenticeship training to meet the skills needs of the optical sector. Leaders ensure that all apprentices benefit from high-quality training. Apprentices receive extremely well-planned and monitored on- and off-the-job training. They benefit from excellent resources to develop new and existing knowledge, skills and behaviours and to support their practical learning at work, for example mathematics for optics. Coaches use their extensive industry expertise to support apprentices during their training and in the practical sessions in the laboratories and stores. They meet with them frequently online and face to face to review their progress and develop their skills further. Consequently, apprentices become extremely valued team members.

Leaders have developed a culture of high aspirations for their staff and the apprentices they train. The ambitious and challenging curriculums that extend beyond the apprenticeship standards ensure almost all apprentices take part in a wide range of additional learning, such as audiology and contact lens care. This provides apprentices with extensive and valuable skills needed for employment. As a result, apprentices, including those with support needs, make excellent progress in their work and careers.

Managers, coaches and store colleagues provide expert training, support and feedback to develop apprentices' character and confidence. The very close liaison and communication during well-planned progress reviews ensure this is consistently achieved both in the learning sessions and at work. This helps apprentices quickly become more confident and highly skilled in their roles.

Coaches skilfully facilitate professional discussions and use effective questioning that helps apprentices retain knowledge in the long term. For example, apprentices discuss how lens waste is recycled and successfully link this to the Specsavers sustainability agenda. As a result, apprentices quickly build their knowledge and make very good progress.

Coaches frequently and accurately assess apprentices' work to check on their progress. Apprentices act on the clear and precise feedback they get from coaches and so produce high-quality, comprehensive work over time. Leaders and coaches monitor apprentices' progress extremely carefully and effectively. They take swift and effective action when apprentices' progress slows or falls below the expected rate. As such, apprentices who remain on their apprenticeship make excellent progress and swiftly develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are essential for their current job roles.

Leaders and managers ensure that training staff are vocationally competent in their subject. Coaches have extensive industry knowledge and receive frequent updates

from the sector. For example, they are allocated one day per month where they complete 'back-to-the-floor' days in store. As a result, staff have the most current knowledge and skills to train apprentices effectively.

Leaders and managers collaborate very effectively with the national Specsavers training teams to ensure that the quality of training apprentices experience is high. For example, training teams liaise effectively to arrange for apprentices to shadow optometrists and complete short sessions in other departments. As a result, apprentices benefit from high-quality, on-the-job training.

Coaches know their apprentices very well. They have a very good awareness of their individual needs and support them effectively through the monthly one-to-one sessions. Coaches develop apprentices' knowledge and understanding of topics such as the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and focusing on mental and emotional well-being. For example, coaches helpfully signpost apprentices to online resources such as the 'WeCare Programme' and 'Headspace' to support with well-being. As a result, apprentices feel very well supported and understand how to keep themselves healthy.

Leaders and managers effectively raise apprentices' awareness of the threats of extremism and radicalisation as part of their training. Consequently, most apprentices know how to keep themselves and others safe from the dangers of radicalisation, online, in the workplace and in the wider community.

Leaders consider the workloads of their staff carefully. They review this as part of their fortnightly meetings at which staff have opportunities to share any concerns they have and agree on the support they need. Staff appreciate the open, inclusive environment leaders have created for them to work in. They feel able to voice opinions with confidence and know they will be listened to. Almost all staff are happy in their roles and feel very well supported.

Leaders have an effective governance structure in place. Board members are highly experienced and qualified to provide useful scrutiny, challenge and support to leaders to ensure that they continue to improve and develop the quality of apprenticeships. They have oversight of the progress that apprentices make and challenge leaders to ensure all apprentices succeed. For example, governors identified and supported the need for the recruitment of a functional skills trainer to teach apprentices so that they achieve their mathematics and English qualifications.

Leaders and managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision exceptionally well and focus relentlessly on the quality of their programmes. They use their data very effectively to rapidly identify areas for improvement. Leaders rightly recognise that too many apprentices have left their training programme early. They use the information to thoroughly analyse the reasons behind this and have quickly put in place measures to ensure apprentices do not leave early. For example, they have recruited a new role of apprentice engagement coach to support apprentices early in their training with personal concerns. Store directors now offer trial days to give a realistic experience of the working environment, and senior

leaders have also reviewed pay for apprentices to support the cost of living. As a result, the number of apprentices leaving programmes early has declined rapidly and continues to be sustained.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the decline in achievement rates for level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships between 2020/21 and 2021/22. Due to the COVID pandemic, Specsavers did not recruit any new apprentices between March and November 2020 and, as a result, had very few complete in the subsequent year. The number of leavers was greatly amplified as a percentage against the number of completers, disproportionately affecting the achievement rates. Leaders have very well-considered plans in place to ensure they recruit and retain enough apprentices to meet the needs of their stores.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, managers and staff have created a positive culture of safeguarding at Specsavers. Leaders ensure staff and apprentices receive useful training and information about safeguarding during induction and throughout the programme.

Leaders have effective safeguarding procedures and policies in place which they use to recruit new staff safely. Safeguarding staff are appropriately trained. Safeguarding staff record concerns carefully and take appropriate action, involving local agencies when required. Leaders analyse trends in safeguarding disclosures and use this information effectively to provide additional training when this is required.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1223881
Address	Forum 6 Solent Business Park Fareham PO15 7PA
Contact number	01481234843
Website	www.specsavers.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	John Perkins
Provider type	Employer provider
Date of previous inspection	6 to 9 February 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships, 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

Jo-Ann Henderson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Kate Hill	His Majesty's Inspector
Carole Wilson-Frizzell	Ofsted Inspector
Nicky Witton	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Addis	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Griffin	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023