

Inspection of Heart of Worcestershire College

Inspection dates: 3 to 6 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Education programmes for young people	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Heart of Worcestershire College is a large general further education college based across the county of Worcestershire. The college has three main sites: Worcester, Redditch and Bromsgrove. The college also has two specialist construction centres in Malvern and Redditch and the Duckworth Centre of Engineering in Worcester. Approximately half of all learners study at the Worcester site, with just over a third studying at Redditch and the remainder studying across the other sites. The sites at Worcester and Redditch offer a range of programmes in academic and vocational subjects and specific provision designed for those learners with high needs. The Bromsgrove site offers programmes in creative arts, engineering and digital technologies. The college works with nine subcontracting partners.

At the time of inspection, there were around 2,600 learners on education programmes for young people. Learners study on a range of academic and vocational courses, including BTEC National Diplomas, T levels, and preparation for employment. The largest subject areas are construction, health and social care, digital technologies and engineering. A high proportion of young people study level 1 programmes.

Around 1,500 adult learners study courses at entry level to level 5. Most study programmes in English, mathematics, preparation for work and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Around 140 of these adults study on full-time access to higher education programmes. The remaining 400 adult learners study part-time courses in vocational programmes in community settings or similar.

There were 240 learners with high needs studying with the college at the time of inspection, with a variety of individual learning needs. Around 100 study on full-time academic and vocational courses at levels 1 to 3. The remainder study on foundation level courses to help develop learners to prepare for independence and work. A small number of learners with high needs undertake supported internships.

Around 500 apprentices study at levels 2 to 5, approximately half of whom are over the age of 19. The majority of these study on apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3. Apprentices study a range of subjects, including business administration, accountancy, construction and engineering. Around 200 apprentices study with two subcontractor partners. The largest areas of study are level 2 lean manufacturing operative and level 3 business administrator.

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

Learners and apprentices across all sites develop positive attitudes to their studies. They study in calm and professional learning spaces. Learners and apprentices are respectful to each other, tolerant towards alternative viewpoints to their own and feel supported by college staff.

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning and study in inclusive environments and workplaces. Learners and apprentices, including those with additional learning needs, are confident to contribute in lessons. For example, learners with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia on level 1 employability courses feel calm, comfortable and able to contribute to discussions in the classroom.

Learners and apprentices arrive promptly and are ready to learn. However, a few learners and apprentices do not routinely attend all elements of their programmes of study. Specifically, those learners who are required to study English or mathematics qualifications as part of their studies do not attend their lessons frequently enough. Likewise, a few learners on education programmes for young people do not attend their face-to-face tutorials sufficiently well. Leaders have actions in place to improve learner attendance in these areas, but these have not had a measurable impact.

Most learners on education programmes for young people value and benefit from the teaching they receive on topics related to their personal development. Tutors support learners well to understand their role and contributions as citizens. Through their studies, learners gain valuable practical skills, such as how to manage their finances, how to avoid getting into debt and the requirements of taxation. However, the quality of the personal development curriculums for apprentices, learners with high needs and adult learners is poor. In these cases, the topics learners and apprentices study are not tailored sufficiently well to meet their needs. For example, adult ESOL, adult functional skills learners and apprentices are insufficiently aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and how this knowledge may help them to protect themselves in their daily lives.

Most learners and apprentices understand the importance of healthy relationships. Learners on education programmes for young people value what they have learned about consent and the indicators of abuse. Where appropriate, learners learn what this means in terms of their relationships with others, how they might identify signs of potential abuse, and what they should do about it.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. All college sites are secure and welcoming. Staff have taken sensible steps to better secure learners' and apprentices' personal safety. For example, frequent learner identification checks are made in social spaces, and digital door-locking systems are in place to restrict and monitor access to classrooms and workshops.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a limited contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have positioned themselves sensibly with a range of key strategic stakeholders, such as the chamber of commerce. They are members of several strategic boards that include a range of stakeholders. Leaders have an awareness of key priority sector areas within the geographical areas they serve, such as in health and engineering.

Leaders have developed a curriculum offer that aims to directly respond to skills needs within the locality. In a few cases, leaders use a range of information effectively, such as that linked to job trends, to inform their curriculum offer.

Leaders have not been proactive in ensuring stakeholders actively engage in the design and implementation of curriculums. In too many curriculum areas, stakeholder engagement is not fully effective. As a result, learners and apprentices do not always develop the knowledge and skills they need to have successful careers in the sectors they have chosen. However, a small number of curriculum areas within the college have been successful in engaging with stakeholders effectively. For example, within motor vehicle, leaders have proactively engaged with a range of employers and stakeholder groups. Leaders have refreshed their curriculum in direct response to this. Learners now benefit from learning about smart controls and fire prevention systems.

Leaders have developed programmes that aim to support learners and apprentices to develop key employment skills, such as teamwork and communication skills. On the majority of education programmes for young people, learners undertake the 'elements' programme, and in a few cases, this supports learners to develop additional employment skills. However, in most areas, such as apprenticeships, this approach to developing skills for employment is not fully effective.

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

Leaders and managers do not ensure that all learners and apprentices receive a good quality of education, training and support. There is too much inconsistency in the quality of the curriculums that learners and apprentices study. There are significant differences in the quality of taught curriculums across each site, as well as across each subject area. For example, there are large discrepancies in the quality of level 1 and 2 motor vehicle curriculums between the Worcester and Bromsgrove sites. Similarly, learners with high needs studying the same programme across multiple campuses experience sizable differences in the quality of teaching they receive. As a result, the improvements in learners' and apprentices' skills and knowledge over time are far too variable.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that the quality of curriculum planning and sequencing is consistently strong. As a result, a sizeable number of learners and apprentices do not benefit from taught content that is well structured, logically ordered, or works to support them in retaining information in their long-term memories. However, in a few cases, particularly in adult learning programmes, teachers sensibly sequence and teach well-designed curriculums. In these cases,

learners, are supported effectively to develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours over time.

Leaders and managers ensure that most staff receive support to develop, enhance and improve their technical knowledge and teaching practice. Teachers and learning and skills development officers are well qualified and build upon their experiences in the subjects they teach over time. Leaders deploy advanced practitioners to further support teachers to develop their teaching skills. Through working with these advanced practitioners, teachers, in some instances, improve their professional practice.

Teachers, except for those who teach adults, do not always make use of learners' and apprentices' starting points when planning their learning. In a few cases, learners repeat previous learning unnecessarily or study at a level below their existing qualifications. These learners do not make the rapid or sustained progress of which they are capable.

In most cases, learners and apprentices benefit from high-quality resources to support them in their learning. For example, on motor vehicle programmes, learners benefit from well-equipped workshops and a variety of different vehicles on which to work. In the better cases, learners practise and hone their skills over time. However, learners with high needs do not always have access to suitably challenging resources. They do not routinely have access to age-appropriate learning materials that support them to prepare for life after college. As a result, learners with high needs do not always develop sufficient awareness of themselves as adults.

Teachers do not ensure that the quality of teaching that all learners and apprentices receive is of a consistently high standard. In the better cases, teachers use a range of techniques to check learners' understanding effectively, for example through direct questioning on digital T-level programmes. As a result, learners secure new knowledge and gain confidence in class. However, in too many cases, learners, including apprentices and learners with high needs, experience less well-developed teaching, which fails to sufficiently challenge them to achieve their best. As a result, teaching hampers learners' progress, and learners are not supported well enough to make the progress of which they are capable.

Most teachers use assessment well to check learners' understanding, particularly in adult learning programmes and some education programmes for young people. For example, adult ESOL teachers use well-planned assessment activities that support learners to learn new structures and words quickly. Most teachers routinely use the information from assessments to close gaps in learners' knowledge and to correct misconceptions that learners may have.

In most cases, teachers provide learners with feedback that is both well considered and developmental. The feedback that learners receive often helps them to understand what they need to do to improve the standards of their work. For example, in level 3 creative arts programmes, learners receive critical analysis which allows them to strengthen the quality of their project work from one project to the

next. However, in too many cases, the feedback that apprentices receive is not as clear or as useful. Consequently, apprentices are not always clear on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work as they move through their studies.

Most teachers ensure that the English and mathematics skills of learners and apprentices are developed throughout the course of their programmes. For example, apprentices who require functional skills as part of their programmes are supported with additional dedicated teaching to support them to achieve their qualifications. However, learners with high needs are not supported to develop new English and mathematics skills consistently well. As a result, learners with high needs do not achieve their English and mathematics qualifications at comparable rates to their peers.

Staff ensure that adult learners receive useful careers, education, information, advice and guidance to support them in planning their next steps. For example, adult access to higher education learners are given valuable opportunities to hear first-hand about career pathways and working in specialist fields. However, in too many cases, apprentices are not routinely provided with clear support and guidance about future careers or routinely offered support and guidance on their next steps. Similarly, learners on education programmes for young people struggle to understand the links between their current programme of study and the next steps that they might take, such as into further learning. As a result, too few young learners and apprentices are clear on their next steps or where they might obtain helpful advice to support them in making decisions.

Governance arrangements are not fully effective. Leaders do not ensure that governors receive sufficient information on the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive. Governors do not receive information about how different curriculums are performing or the improvements that leaders are making. As a result, governors do not hold leaders to account with the rigour that is required to improve rapidly the quality of the taught curriculums.

Leaders and managers do not have a fully accurate oversight of how learners and apprentices across the college are progressing on their courses or apprenticeships. As a result, leaders are not able to intervene to support learners and apprentices to catch up quickly when they are not making the progress expected.

Leaders have processes in place to review the quality of subcontractors, such as through quality and performance visits. However, these are not always fully effective in reviewing the quality of education that subcontractors provide. As a result, leaders are not always clear that the quality of subcontracted provision is in line with their expectations.

Too few learners on education programmes for young people and apprentices successfully gain the qualifications or apprenticeships they set out to achieve. Similarly, too many learners and apprentices leave their programmes of study early. For example, the number of learners who withdrew from their digital T-level programme is too high. However, in most cases, adult learners achieve well.

Likewise, of the small numbers of learners with high needs who study supported internships, a high number at the Redditch site moved into meaningful employment, voluntary work or further training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the consistency and quality of the teaching that learners and apprentices receive across the college.
- Improve the retention and achievement rates for learners and apprentices.
- Ensure that all learners and apprentices receive high-quality careers and education advice and guidance.
- Improve the effectiveness and consistency of wider stakeholder input into curriculum design and implementation.
- Improve attendance rates for learners and apprentices across all elements of their programmes of study.
- Improve governance and those arrangements that hold leaders to account.
- Increase the rigour of the methods used to quality assure all curriculum areas, including those provided by subcontractors.
- Ensure that all learners and apprentices understand the dangers of radical and extremist behaviours.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130713
Address	Peakman Campus, Peakman Street Redditch Worcestershire B98 8DW
Contact number	08448802500
Website	www.howcollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Michelle Dowse
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	30 January to 2 February 2018
Main subcontractors	AGL Training Ltd The Gold Standard Eagles Consultancy Ltd Eventcover Education Ltd Environmental Excellence Training and Development Ltd Learning Curve Group Miss Macaroon Willowdene Rehabilitation and Training Ltd. SBC Training Ltd

Information about this inspection

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

Mark Parton, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Paul Cocker	His Majesty’s Inspector
Joel Dalhouse	His Majesty’s Inspector
Steve Kelly	His Majesty’s Inspector
Ian Higgins	His Majesty’s Inspector
Stuart Collett	His Majesty’s Inspector
Mark Howes	His Majesty’s Inspector
Franki Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Whatsize	Ofsted Inspector
Rebecca Gater	Ofsted Inspector
Joanne Keatley	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Tucker	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Beth Selwood	Ofsted Inspector

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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

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