

# Inspection of Bolton College

Inspection dates:

28 November to 1 December 2023

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

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

## Information about this provider

Bolton College is a large general further education college based in Bolton, Greater Manchester. Most courses are taught at the town centre campus. Leaders use four community venues, Brownlow Fold, Deane and Derby, New Bury and Farnworth, to provide some of their adult learning programmes.

At the time of the inspection, there were 2,445 students aged 16 to 18 years on education programmes for young people studying a range of vocational courses in most subject areas from entry level to level 3. This includes T-level courses in digital production, design and development, management and administration, finance, accounting, legal services, education and early years, health and design, and surveying and planning for construction.

There were 3,598 adult students studying a range of vocational courses at the town centre campus and at the four community venues. Just over one third of these students study English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Community learning courses comprise mainly of courses in community interpreting, family learning, employability and life skills. Adults at the town centre campus study courses such as access to higher education (access to HE) and courses in the vocational areas such as health and social care, education and early years.

There were 599 apprentices studying across a range of apprenticeship standards from levels 2 to 4. Almost all apprentices study at levels 2 and 3, with the highest enrolments in construction, automotive, early years and business. There were 174 students for whom the college received high needs funding. These students study a range of vocational programmes at the college.

Leaders subcontract teaching for 79 students on education programmes for young people studying performing arts practice at Shockout Dance Academy in Manchester.

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

Most students and apprentices enjoy their courses. They benefit from the inclusive and diverse culture that teachers and leaders have created in the college. Students with high needs are well supported, particularly deaf students, who receive highly effective support to help them settle into college from school. Teachers in automotive adapt their timetable so that apprentices can attend religious worship. Most students and apprentices feel that the college is safe, welcoming and inclusive.

Most teachers create a calm environment in which students and apprentices work in a focused and diligent manner. Adult students, apprentices and most young students are attentive in class and participate confidently in group work and question-and-answer sessions. Most teachers set expectations for appropriate behaviour which are consistently implemented. However, in a few cases, teachers do not model the professional behaviours that students need for employment, such as wearing the correct personal protective equipment.

Too many students do not attend their classes regularly enough. Attendance is particularly low for 16- to 18-year-old students studying GCSE English and mathematics. Leaders have identified areas of poor attendance and have introduced more stringent attendance monitoring systems. However, these measures have not yet had the desired impact. In a few cases, students' punctuality is poor, which causes low-level disruption to lessons. In contrast, most apprentices attend regularly and on time.

Many 16- to 18-year-old students, including students with high needs, receive a poor quality of education, particularly students who are studying GCSE English and mathematics. A significant proportion of students have experienced a high turnover of teaching staff, which has disrupted their learning. In addition, poor planning of the November GCSE English and mathematics resit examinations led to a few students missing the opportunity to retake these important examinations. A few curriculums, such as the foundation programme, are either too low level or the content has not been planned effectively to ensure that they are ambitious enough for students to achieve their full potential.

Adult students speak highly of the college; they enjoy their learning, and most progress to further learning or employment when they complete their courses. ESOL teachers create an engaging curriculum that helps students to develop applied English language skills and the confidence to progress, achieve, and integrate into their local communities. Adult students on community interpreting courses come from a wide range of countries and cultures. They speak many languages and work collaboratively together with other students from diverse backgrounds. This helps them to support their communities and secure employment.

Leaders do not ensure that all their apprenticeship curriculums are planned effectively. In a few cases, apprentices do not receive regular, planned learning from work-based tutors. In electrical installation, this is because of a high turnover of staff, which has negatively impacted on apprentices' learning. In early years, a few

apprentices are unable to complete their learning at the planned time due to the need to maintain staff-to-child ratios in the nursery. Where apprenticeships are planned effectively, apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, level 3 business administrator apprentices gain the confidence they need to challenge customers and chase debts in a professional manner. The behaviour of most apprentices closely mirrors the expectations of their employers.

Students with high needs build their confidence because of the support they receive in the college. Learning support staff provide individualised support that meets students' needs. Where appropriate, staff reduce support gradually so that students become more independent over time. However, teachers do not always take account of education, health and care (EHC) plan targets when planning teaching. In a few cases, students are given work that they can already do, and in other cases students working at lower levels are given the same target as students working at higher levels. Managers have recently introduced new processes to include progress monitoring and tracking of individual targets from EHC plans. However, it is too early to see the impact that these changes will make.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work strategically with stakeholders to understand current skills and employment needs and to provide solutions for future employment requirements in key sectors such as health and digital. Governors have been involved in developing the local skills improvement plan and have well-established links with local employers.

Leaders have a close working relationship with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Bolton Council to provide education and training solutions for identified priorities in Bolton. For example, leaders provide a wide range of courses for ESOL students to increase their employment opportunities and, for those who are new to the country, to help them to transition into life in Britain. Their programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have helped to engage more young people into learning at the college and reduce the proportions of NEET young people in Bolton.

Leaders have developed positive relationships with a range of large- and medium-sized businesses in the local area. In automotive, leaders have established links with large automotive companies and use their advice to invest in industry-specific technologies. They are currently working with Bolton Hospital and Christies to develop a digital assessment tool for patient records. However, leaders have not yet established as many positive relationships with smaller employers. These employers would welcome more regular opportunities to discuss the needs of their sectors.

In most curriculum areas, stakeholders are involved in planning curriculum content, contributing to masterclasses and guest speaking. In engineering, the employer focus group advised that students needed to be taught how to use computer-aided

design and systems applications and products software. In health and social care, stakeholders teach masterclasses, provide careers information and offer professional development opportunities for staff. However, involvement of stakeholders in curriculum design and implementation is not yet evident in all curriculum areas.

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

Teachers and support staff work closely together in the best interests of students and apprentices. However, staff morale is low, and too often the education that 16- to 18-year-old students and a few apprentices experience is poor. Many staff feel that their workload is unmanageable. This has a negative impact on their well-being. Students and staff report high levels of disruption due to staff turnover and absence, vacant teaching posts and the use of temporary staff. This leads to a lack of consistency in teaching, particularly for younger students.

Leaders have accurately identified the skills needs in the local and regional area and have designed courses to meet these needs. The T level in digital production, design and development is offered to meet the skills shortages in the digital sector locally. Courses in health and social care are closely linked to Bolton priorities on healthy families and healthy communities. Higher-level health courses such as access to HE help to give adult students the stepping stone they need to apply for university for courses in nursing, midwifery, mental health and adult nursing. This gives Bolton residents more opportunities to progress in their careers.

Most teachers in adult learning use effective teaching strategies to help students to remember key topics and to build on their previous knowledge. ESOL teachers contextualise their teaching to scenarios that adult students find helpful and relatable. For example, they provide key phrases to help them to speak to their doctor or their child's teacher without the need for an interpreter. ESOL students make good progress from their starting points.

Not all curriculums are planned clearly and logically. Students on the T level in digital production, design and development spend too much time carrying out research and learning theoretical concepts, with little opportunity to practise their practical skills in topics such as programming. The curriculum plan for the level 3 electrical installation and maintenance electrician apprenticeship does not reflect the latest sustainability amendments within the new apprenticeship standard. Where planning is effective, teachers take advice from industry experts on the most appropriate order of teaching. Forensic science staff work with crime scene investigators to plan teaching on conducting valid experiments accurately followed by writing laboratory reports detailing the results. These students are better prepared for their next steps.

Most students and apprentices learn new knowledge, skills and behaviours during their courses. Access to HE nursing students readily recall the structure of cells, tissues and how organs interrelate in the body. Level 1 plumbing students learn skills in joining pipes through compression fittings and push-fit connectors. Level 2 early years practitioner apprentices learn about the importance of healthy eating for pre-

school children and are confident to discuss nutrition with parents. Most students, achieve their qualifications, although too many students on level 3 programmes do not achieve the merit and distinction grades of which they are capable.

Teachers' assessment of students' and apprentices' learning is inconsistent. In health and science, teachers do not check or consolidate students' learning effectively. They do not always identify students' understanding of topics before they move on. Conversely, engineering teachers break down topics into manageable chunks so that students complete tasks and build on their knowledge at a gradual but challenging pace. Adult ESOL teachers check learning regularly through progress tests, classwork and homework to help students consolidate their skills and demonstrate their progress. These students make positive progress on their courses.

Teachers are generally well qualified, and most have industry experience and the appropriate qualifications to teach their subjects. Teachers participate in a range of relevant professional development related to the subjects they teach. They benefit from the opportunity to study professional qualifications at the University of Bolton. However, a few staff have minimal experience of teaching higher-level specialist topics, which limits the breadth of knowledge that they can teach to students and apprentices.

Leaders do not provide effective training for all staff on improving and enhancing their teaching skills. Although training is focused on important teaching principles such as formative assessment, it is not contextualised to teachers' individual subjects. For example, mathematics teachers may learn about effective teaching methods but do not learn how to apply these methods in the teaching of mathematics. A few teachers, particularly those new to the profession, are frustrated that they do not receive the constructive feedback they need to help them to develop their classroom practice.

Leaders have not identified carefully enough several of the weaknesses in the quality of education that need to rapidly improve. Although they identify under-performing curriculum areas, this is mainly based on data, such as achievement rates at the end of the year. Leaders have not focused closely enough on the quality of teaching and learning in the college during the academic year. Consequently, weaknesses are identified too late for sustained improvements to be implemented in-year.

Governors are suitably qualified and experienced to fulfil their roles. They are aware of a few underperforming curriculums and attend self-assessment validation panels to understand the aspects of education that need to be improved. However, because leaders are overly focused on data rather than teaching and learning, governors do not receive meaningful reports on the quality of education and training that students and apprentices receive. They are not always able to provide enough scrutiny and challenge to make rapid improvement.

Students studying performing arts at the subcontractor receive a high-quality education. The curriculum is appropriately planned and taught. Dance students start by exploring different performance styles such as ballet and jazz before they work

on their own choreography and critiquing their own performance. Students benefit from work experience in professional shows, where they take part in intensive rehearsals, technical runs and working with lighting. Almost half of these students complete the course with triple distinction grades or higher.

Leaders provide a comprehensive tutorial programme for students to learn about topics such as knife crime and mental well-being. They have developed a comprehensive training package to raise awareness of sexual harassment and healthy relationships. Students are aware of consent and how to spot the signs of a manipulative or coercive relationship. Most students are aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and are better prepared to live safe and healthy lives. However, apprentices' knowledge of these topics is less well established, and a few cannot recall their training.

Leaders provide opportunities for students to join trips and visits, such as visits to see the contemporary sculpture the Knife Angel, as well as visits to an outdoor pursuits centre and museums. However, there are limited options for students to take part in clubs and societies in college. Sports teams are limited to football and badminton, and there are few options for other clubs that students can join to widen their interests and talents.

The quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance that students and apprentices receive varies across the college. In some cases, such as access to HE, engineering and community interpreting, students receive effective advice on their next steps such as employment, progression to higher education or apprenticeships. However, in other cases, particularly apprenticeships, not enough advice is provided for students and apprentices to raise their ambitions and make fully informed decisions for their future careers.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure that staff are supported effectively to manage their workloads.
- Stabilise teaching teams where vacant posts and staff absence are impacting negatively on the quality of education that students and apprentices receive.
- Increase the focus on the quality of teaching and learning in classroom and workshop sessions, particularly in education programmes for young people and GCSE English and mathematics.
- Ensure that staff are trained to teach all aspects of the curriculum, particularly in higher-level and specialist topics.
- Ensure that teachers take account of the EHC plan targets for students with high needs when planning their teaching.

- Increase attendance, especially for 16- to 18-year-old students studying GCSE English and mathematics.



## Provider details

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<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.boltoncc.ac.uk">www.boltoncc.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Bill Webster
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 to 10 February 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Shockout Dance Academy

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal, 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 students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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