

Inspection of North Hertfordshire College

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 November 2023

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

Information about this provider

North Hertfordshire College (North Herts College) is a large general further education college and part of the Hart Learning Group. The college has five campuses, with three main sites in Stevenage and Hitchin and two specialist campuses for students with high needs in Watford and Letchworth. One of the Stevenage sites is a dedicated engineering and construction training centre.

The college offers courses and training for students aged 14 to 18, adults, apprentices and students in receipt of high needs funding. On education programmes for young people, approximately 2,000 students are in education. This includes 11 students aged 14 to 16 and 461 students in receipt of high needs funding. Seven hundred and nine apprentices are enrolled on apprenticeships. Approximately 2,300 adults study adult learning programmes. These include employability programmes, access to higher education (access to HE) and part-time online courses. From September 2023, the college offered T levels in a wide range of subjects, including laboratory technician; digital business services and digital production; design and development; management and administration; education and early years; and hairdressing, barbering and beauty therapy. College leaders

work with two subcontractors: Aspire Sporting Academy Ltd, which provides teaching assistant qualifications, and CECOS Computing International Limited.

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

Students and apprentices enjoy learning and training using high-quality, industry-standard teaching resources. In information and communication technology, students practise network virus testing. They develop games and augmented reality applications in the immersive suites. This prepares them fully for their next steps and careers. Students in science extend their knowledge of atomic structures, molecular structures, and bonding. Under biosafety conditions, they confidently prepare, analyse and record DNA samples. The digital sensory room enables students with high needs to self-regulate their behaviour.

Students and apprentices enjoy coming to college and are punctual and eager to learn on arrival in lessons. They feel valued and respected by staff and their peers. They consider their well-qualified teachers and assessors to be professional role models. While the attendance of students and apprentices in most lessons is high, attendance rates for students in GCSE English and mathematics lessons are too low. Consequently, students miss key aspects of their learning.

Students thrive in a learning environment in which the development of their personal, social, and employability skills is valued. Students build their wider employment skills through the 'Top 10 skills for employment' approach devised by staff in consultation with employers. In each subject, teachers embed these skills into teaching, learning and assessment. Students in business demonstrate the importance of teamwork and good listening skills. During their employer project brief to design a marketing campaign, they listened respectfully and responded appropriately to a range of diverse views and opinions. They then competed against each other to 'win' the campaign from the employer.

Adult students overcome previous barriers to their employment through their studies. They enjoy mixing with their peers from different subjects. Students enjoy sharing their cultural backgrounds through 'cook and share' events at college. Those on access to HE nursing and midwifery courses learn the study skills they need to be accepted onto the degree course of their choice.

Students with high needs benefit from learning programmes that enable them to become more independent in their daily lives. Students very much value the opportunity to make friends and learn new skills in a mature and supportive environment. Teachers make excellent use of local community partners and employers to provide a wide range of high-quality, work-related activities, volunteering opportunities and visits to workplaces that are relevant to students' learning. As a result, students gain valuable insights into what work might be like. Students enjoy engaging in work experience in warehouses for local manufacturing firms and in tourist attractions, which creates highly relevant personalised learning.

Apprentices develop new skills and the professional behaviours they need to be successful in their future careers. They take on additional responsibilities in the workplace because of their studies, which results in them being highly valued by employers. Most apprentices benefit from additional qualifications that enable them

to move successfully into their chosen destinations. Apprentices on level 2 health care support worker, for example, gain the care certificate. Apprentices on the team leader qualification gain the Chartered Management Institute qualification.

Students and apprentices feel and are safe during their studies. They know to whom they should raise any concerns they may have. They told inspectors that they are not bullied or intimidated. Instances of banter are rare, and staff deal with this quickly and appropriately. Students, including those with high needs, have a comprehensive understanding of local contextualised risks to their safety, such as knife crime and county lines.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders use relevant information and labour market intelligence skillfully. This shapes their strategy to develop courses and training in priority sectors. These include areas such as life sciences (biochemical manufacture), catering, digital, and media. Working collaboratively with partners, leaders identify current and future skills gaps, such as laboratory skills for increasing vaccine manufacture in biochemical engineering. New level 3 apprenticeships and T levels also help to meet this need. The Mission 44 charity provides money for each T-level science student to help fund their studies. Level 3 technical courses in fashion and art and design contribute comprehensively to meeting the needs of the creative media and digital industries.

Governors, leaders and managers have extensive knowledge and expertise in priority sector skills areas. They use this information highly successfully to work with local employers and Stevenage Borough Council to bring about positive change for local people. Through the 'Stevenage Works' partnership, leaders contribute to the regeneration of Stevenage. Other partnerships include working with Jobcentre Plus to help adults gain their construction site licences. This enables major employers to recruit qualified labourers. New skills lead governors provide expert guidance on the skills and the technical equipment students need. This enables leaders to offer training programmes that include appropriate, high-quality study resources to meet skills priorities.

In most subjects, teachers involve employers, community and other partners expertly. Employers have led on the introduction of extra practical work in waxing and improving retail skills in beauty courses. In hospitality, introducing Asian cooking skills in consultation with a renowned chef has increased students' repertoire of dishes. Digital communications skills identified by employers are now incorporated in motor vehicle courses. In a few subjects, such as brickwork, employers are not yet closely involved with shaping the education and training students receive.

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

Governors and leaders have worked tirelessly to overcome the significant financial challenges the college previously faced. Alongside this, leaders have sustained good-quality education and training for students and apprentices. Provision for students with high needs remains outstanding. Leaders are highly ambitious for students and apprentices. Leaders ensure that the courses and training programmes they offer extend students' and apprentices' knowledge and skills beyond technical standards and qualifications. Many level 2 students complete GCSE science in addition to mathematics and English. Hospitality students understand 'farm to fork' provenance comprehensively through extensive trips and visits.

Leaders and managers have developed high-quality training programmes with a clear purpose: to meet local and regional skills needs. The level 2 health care support worker apprenticeship for the Gloucester Health Trust provides qualified healthcare staff. The team-leading apprenticeship meets the national demand for leadership and management skills. Apprentices new to team leading roles learn to motivate and manage teams. They learn to deal with conflict effectively. This provides employers with a vital pipeline of future managers and leaders. Partnership working has resulted in highly appropriate training pathways for students with high needs. As a result of this and highly effective teaching, students move to higher levels of learning and into supported or independent employment. Leaders have a clear rationale for their adult provision. On adult learning programmes, leaders make good use of subcontractors to meet this need.

Teachers and assessors are appropriately qualified, and most have good vocational expertise. This enables them to prepare students and apprentices fully for their careers and next steps. Staff experienced in using assistive technology ensure that students with high needs benefit greatly from using this. Students' mastery of these technologies enables them to live and study more independently. Hospitality teachers have substantial commercial experience. As a result, students understand the importance of cooking food to a high standard in the shortest possible time.

Teachers design curriculums that enable students and apprentices to make swift progress. Business students first learn the core functions of finance and marketing. They then develop more specific skills in digital marketing and international business operations. In access to HE nursing and midwifery courses, teachers start with the mental health and resilience unit. This helps students to understand the personal demands of their sector. Students are prepared appropriately to work in a busy hospital environment as a result. Team-leading apprentices first learn about emotional intelligence and reflective practice. They then move on to consider the impact of these theories when managing teams. Students on subcontracted provision for education support first learn about safeguarding children. They move on to learning about how to manage challenging behaviours. This enables them to work confidently in school settings.

Teachers and assessors use a range of effective teaching methods very skilfully. They help students and apprentices to develop the new knowledge they need, ensuring that their understanding is secure over time. In vocational subjects, teachers expertly demonstrate new skills. They relate these effectively to previous

learning about key concepts. Students then practise and refine their own skills to a high standard under the guidance of their teachers. At level 3, teachers develop students' research and analytical skills to a high standard. Teachers use topical case studies to very good effect, such as in learning about product innovation and sustainability.

Many teachers use retrieval and recall techniques highly effectively to consolidate apprentices' and students' learning. Most teachers prepare students and apprentices thoroughly for their external examinations. As a result, apprentices and students build their knowledge comprehensively and achieve merit and distinction grades. Teachers check apprentices' and students' understanding systematically, identifying and correcting any misconceptions promptly.

Most students and apprentices benefit from clear and timely feedback from their teachers and assessors. They know the progress they are making and how to improve their performance further. Students with high needs make very effective use of teachers' audio recording of feedback. This method enables students to reflect, improve their performance and consolidate their skills. Most students and apprentices produce work of a good or better standard.

Most teachers use assessment effectively to identify the progress that students and apprentices make. Teachers use a broad range of questioning techniques and other assessment strategies adeptly. These include chat boxes, online quizzes and activities that develop students and apprentices as reflective practitioners. Teachers also use students' own work experiences to assess learning. In motor vehicle, teachers use questioning comprehensively to establish apprentices' understanding of compression ratios. Teachers then get apprentices to explain and describe how this knowledge links to what they do at work. Teachers' use of problem-solving scenarios with students with high needs is highly effective. It enables students to think independently and consider their options carefully before replying.

The quality of teaching and learning of English and mathematics is not yet good. This is due to the heavy reliance on using temporary agency staff. Too few teachers in English and mathematics use assessment methods effectively. Not enough students make good progress in their learning, and too few students achieve grades 4 and above in either GCSE mathematics and/or GCSE English. At the Hitchin and construction campus, teaching is often not planned effectively. In mathematics, students do not learn and practise the skills they need for everyday problem-solving. In English, teachers do not plan activities to extend students' learning. Across the college, teachers of GCSE English take too long to provide helpful feedback to students on the quality of their work. As a result, too few students understand their progress or know what they need to do to improve. Most vocational and academic teachers plan learning skillfully to include English and mathematics. Teachers make English and mathematics relevant to students' core subjects. As a result, students understand how valuable these skills are to them in their work.

Students enjoy a wide range of high-quality, motivational activities. These enhance their wider learning and happiness. Students develop into self-confident individuals

as a result. Students with high needs benefit from talks by housing charities, discussing topics such as money management. Second year students on health and social care courses take part in community projects for primary school children to promote healthy living. This helps students to develop important life skills such as patience and age-appropriate communication. However, while a small proportion of apprentices are fortunate to take part in wider educational experiences, too few are able to do so. Most students and apprentices have a secure understanding of fundamental British values. They know how these relate to their studies and life outside college.

Students have access to effective, ongoing careers information, advice and guidance. They receive information from specialist advisors and talks from visiting speakers and employers. As a result, most feel thoroughly prepared for their next steps and career choices. Students with high needs are knowledgeable about supported employment and moving to higher-level courses. They practise interview techniques with their teachers until they feel confident to meet prospective employers. Most students with high needs continue into employment.

Teachers enjoy a good range of professional teacher training and coaching. They speak positively about how training improves their teaching. Teachers and support staff working with students with high needs have annual customised training. This enables them to meet the specific requirements of each new group of students effectively.

Leaders' arrangements for flexible working and employee benefits contribute substantially to staff well-being. Staff morale is high. They told inspectors that their workload is challenging but manageable.

Leaders' and governors' performance improvement measures are highly effective. Governors have relevant backgrounds and expertise in education, finance and safeguarding. They have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of education and training at North Herts College. Governors show through their challenge and scrutiny that they contribute to maintaining high standards. They work effectively with leaders to shape the strategic direction of the college. Leaders manage subcontracted provision effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that the teaching of English and mathematics across the college is of a high quality and prepares students effectively for their examinations.
- Ensure that apprentices can access a broad range of high-quality enrichment activities to complement their studies.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130721
Address	Monkswood Way Stevenage Hertfordshire SG1 1LA
Contact number	01462424242
Website	www.nhc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Kit Davies
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	31 October to 3 November 2017
Main subcontractors	Aspire Sporting Academy Ltd CECOS Computing International Limited.

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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