

Inspection of Boston College

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 December 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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Boston College is a medium-sized general further education college with five main sites across Lincolnshire.

Leaders provide education programmes for young people, apprenticeships, adult learning programmes and courses for learners with high needs at the college's main site in Boston. The college has four smaller sites, in Boston, Spalding, and Horncastle, with specialist facilities for performing arts and sport courses, as well as facilities for evening adult education.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1,802 young learners. The majority study business and accounting, hair and beauty, health and social care, graphics and media, construction, motorsport and automotive at levels 2 or 3. There were 85 learners with high needs, of whom 31 were studying a foundation pathway.

There were 774 adult learners. Many adults study access to higher education (access to HE), business and accounting, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

There were 340 apprentices at the time of the inspection. They follow apprenticeship standards from level 2 to level 5. Most apprentices are aged 16 to 18 and study subjects such as business administration, electrical installation, plumbing and heating, and classroom support.

The college works with one subcontractor.

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

Learners and apprentices rightly value the positive and professional relationships they build with staff. They find staff approachable and helpful. They are confident to seek help and support from staff, who deal with concerns swiftly and appropriately.

Staff have clear expectations for behaviour. Learners and apprentices clearly understand and meet these expectations. They listen and participate well in classes and respect other people's opinions when engaging in debates. Staff carefully monitor learner behaviour and are quick to deal with minor behavioural issues.

Young learners are well informed about key topics linked to their personal development, such as healthy relationships, consent, and sexual harassment. They are confident to discuss these topics and understand how to identify negative behaviours in others.

Leaders and managers successfully support learners and apprentices to become responsible and respectful citizens. Learners have access to a range of community projects and voluntary initiatives, which helps them to develop an understanding of how they can contribute to their wider communities positively.

Staff within the college promote equality of opportunity well. They integrate topics surrounding equality and diversity into lessons. Learners develop a good understanding of different groups within their own communities.

Learners and apprentices have access to a range of support mechanisms that promote reflection and a better sense of personal well-being. As a result, learners are able to manage stressful situations and develop greater resilience to support their learning, as well as their attendance to college.

A majority of learners and apprentices develop new skills, knowledge, and behaviours during their studies. Consequently, they are prepared to progress on to their next steps successfully.

Learners with high needs benefit from well-planned induction activities that prepare them suitably for college. Staff in foundation learning create a calm, caring and nurturing environment. Learners with high needs develop their independent living and personal skills well. However, too many learners with high needs on the foundation pathway do not develop sufficient new vocational and employability knowledge and skills.

A majority of adult learners demonstrate maturity and enthusiasm for learning. Most develop confidence, communication skills and digital skills throughout their studies. They feel well supported to complete their courses.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders have developed positive relationships with a range of stakeholders and employers. This includes large and small businesses, community organisations, and local council groups. Leaders represent the college on a wide range of external bodies, such as the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the Towns Board and the Federation of Greater Lincolnshire Colleges. They are well connected with the local community and understand well the region's existing and emerging skills needs.

Leaders review their existing provision and develop new curriculums appropriately. For example, they quickly developed on-site courses in ESOL for migrants working in the county's food factories. This improves ESOL learners' communication at work and supports their understanding of the health, hygiene, and safety practices of their employers.

Leaders and managers ensure that, in most curriculum areas, employers and stakeholders are sufficiently involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum. For example, when local employers identified a shortage of logistics drivers, college leaders invested in the relevant technology and worked closely with employers to teach the relevant skills needed for this industry. However, this is not yet consistent across all curriculum areas. In a few cases, such as the access to HE curriculum, leaders are yet to seek the views of stakeholders and employers to inform curriculum content.

Curriculum managers and teachers work with employers and community groups to help understand and develop the skills that their learners need. They develop positive links with employers so that many learners, including those with high needs, benefit from work experience placements or work-related learning and live briefs.

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

Leaders and managers provide a range of suitable courses that meet the needs of learners, employers, and the community. For example, electrical engineering apprenticeships focus on the needs of local employers. ESOL courses meet the specific requirements of local people who need to develop their English language skills and knowledge.

Managers plan most curriculums well. They ensure that learners and apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need for their next steps. For example, level 2 health and social care staff select optional units that best suit the various career paths that learners plan to take. This planning means most learners and apprentices are prepared to progress on to their next steps successfully.

Leaders and managers select appropriate topics for learners with high needs to study. They focus appropriately on skills and knowledge that learners need to become employable and to live as independently as possible. However, in too many cases, managers and teachers within foundation pathways do not plan ambitious courses that meet learners' specific needs well. Consequently, the curriculum is often undemanding.

In most cases, teachers organise course content appropriately. They frequently revisit topics, so learners and apprentices gradually and successfully build their knowledge. For example, in GCSE mathematics lessons, teachers use recap activities well to ensure that learners understand key topics such as area and perimeter. However, in a small number of cases, teachers of adult learning courses do not organise topics well enough to help learners to build progressively their knowledge and understanding.

Leaders and managers have established appropriate mechanisms to identify learners who might benefit from extra help and support. They evaluate learners' needs carefully and develop appropriate support plans. However, teachers of learners with high needs on foundation pathways do not use this information well enough. For example, the strategies and resources detailed within support plans for learners with processing difficulties are not used routinely. This impacts on the ability of these learners to reach their potential.

Teachers are well qualified and have expert knowledge in their subjects. Most set work that is suitably demanding. They progressively build the level of challenge to ensure learners and apprentices complete increasingly complex tasks. However, foundation pathway teachers do not set tasks that are sufficiently challenging. For example, in employability skills lessons, learners are set low-level information technology tasks that do not develop new knowledge and skills. As a result, learners with high needs do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Most teachers use a range of effective teaching methods to help learners and apprentices understand topics. They make good use of resources to reinforce their teaching. For example, the online resources that teachers use for adult learning courses are of a high quality. However, in a small number of cases, teachers within adult courses do not explain topics clearly and use poorly planned examples to illustrate topics, which leaves adult learners confused.

In the majority of cases, teachers use a range of well-planned, useful assessment activities to reinforce and check understanding. For example, in adult level 2 accountancy courses, tutors make effective use of online exercises to check that learners have understood a particular theme.

Most teachers provide learners and apprentices with frequent opportunities to practise what they have been taught. Level 3 electrical apprentices complete work to industry standards, such as wiring exercises, where they work to measurements within a 5mm tolerance. As a result, most learners and apprentices develop their knowledge and skills well, and they perform at, or above, the expected standard.

However, teachers of learners with high needs within discrete provision do not provide enough opportunities for learners to practise their skills. Too many foundation pathway learners do not develop sufficient new knowledge and skills in relation to vocational and employability subjects.

Teachers provide suitable feedback, so learners and apprentices understand how they can improve. For example, in level 3 motorsport, learners receive regular verbal feedback on their practical work, to help them identify errors and develop problem-solving skills. However, in a very few cases, adult learners do not develop their skills and knowledge swiftly. For example, while most level 2 ESOL learners speak fluently, they make basic grammatical errors in both their spoken and written language, and they do not develop their pronunciation skills quickly enough.

Learners and apprentices benefit from clearly structured careers education and guidance that prepares them appropriately for their next steps. They know how to access support through the college's careers service and rightly value the support and guidance that they receive from their tutors.

A majority of learners and apprentices develop the skills and knowledge they need for their next steps. Consequently, many go on to further study at the college or at university, and others secure employment.

Leaders provide managers and teachers with suitable professional development activities. Staff benefit from frequent opportunities to update their industrial expertise. For example, teachers in health and social care work in a local care home, and they complete industry-related training to ensure they remain up to date with industry practice. However, new staff delivering the curriculum for learners with high needs have not completed sufficient professional development to support them in their job roles.

Leaders and managers use appropriate quality assurance processes to identify strengths and weaknesses. This includes the small number of apprentices who study with a subcontractor. In most cases, they identify reasons for underperformance successfully and implement appropriate activities to drive improvements. However, the focus on provision for learners with high needs is limited. Managers have been slow to identify areas for development, and actions to improve this area are underdeveloped.

Governors are representative of the local community and hold relevant posts, such as senior leadership roles in local authorities, education, and industry. They understand local needs well. During board meetings, governors scrutinise performance data and challenge leaders to bring about improvements, such as achievement and attendance in GCSE mathematics. However, governors do not have sufficient oversight of weaknesses across the entire curriculum, such as the areas for improvement required within the foundation pathways curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that support plans for learners with high needs are used to plan effective and individualised teaching.
- Ensure that teachers have the necessary skills and knowledge to plan and teach a demanding curriculum for learners with high needs.
- Ensure planning and teaching on adult learning courses is of a consistently high standard.
- Ensure governors have appropriate understanding and oversight of provision for learners with high needs, enabling them to challenge leaders appropriately and identify areas for improvement swiftly.

Provider details

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Contact number	01205365701
Website	www.boston.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Claire Foster
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	15 November 2017
Main subcontractors	Boston LGV training LTD

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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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