

# Inspection of Milton Keynes College

Inspection dates:

6 to 9 February 2024

**Overall effectiveness****Good**

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

**Information about this provider**

Milton Keynes College is a large general further education college in the city of Milton Keynes. It has two main sites, one in the centre of the city and one in Bletchley. Additionally, there is a smaller sports' facility and an Institute of Technology (IoT) located next to the Bletchley campus.

At the time of this inspection, the college had 2,844 students aged 16 to 18, 1,498 adult learners, 727 apprentices and 170 students in receipt of high-needs funding. Of the 727 apprentices, 386 are under the age of 19 and 341 are over 19. There are an additional 160 students with subcontractors.

For full-time students aged 16 to 18, the college offers mostly full-time vocational courses from levels 1 to 3, including a broad range of T levels. These cover almost all subject areas apart from land based. The college offers a range of provision at entry levels 1 to 3 for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with high needs. The largest numbers of students are studying courses in arts and media, construction, sport and engineering-related subjects.

The provision for adult learners ranges from English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses at entry levels for recent refugees who are new to the UK to level 3

access to higher education courses. Adult learning courses also include professional qualifications such as accountancy. The largest numbers of adult learners are studying courses related to health and social care and accountancy.

The college offers a broad range of apprenticeships at levels 2 to 4. These principally meet the needs of Milton Keynes based employers. A small proportion of apprentices are working quite some distance from the college in locations such as Northumberland and Manchester, but their employer has its head office in Milton Keynes. The majority of apprentices are on qualifications in construction, engineering, retail or digital-related subjects.

The college works with four subcontractors for the provision of very specialist courses that the college does not offer directly. This includes provision for students aged 16 to 18 in dance and specialist provision for students with high needs.

The city of Milton Keynes is experiencing rapid population growth, which includes young people aged 16 to 18 years. While there are many large and international businesses located in the area, there are also numerous small and micro businesses. Although the city is experiencing much economic growth, about half of the college's students aged 16 to 18 come from local areas that are some of the most deprived in the country.

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

Staff create a calm and respectful environment where students, apprentices, adult learners and students with high needs enjoy their studies and make progress with both their vocational learning and skills for work or independence. Staff have high expectations of all learners which students, adult learners, apprentices and students with high needs consistently achieve, particularly in classrooms, workshops and other learning spaces. Most teachers and trainers are experts in their subjects. They use their expertise to illustrate and enliven lessons and training, which enthuses learners.

Most students, adult learners and apprentices have high rates of attendance to lessons and training sessions. They are punctual and understand the importance of attendance and timekeeping to the world of work. Students' rates of attendance to lessons for GCSE mathematics are lower. Leaders, managers and teachers are aware of this and are working with determination to improve students' attendance, the quality of teaching and students' achievement in this subject.

The behaviour and conduct of adult learners are exemplary. They are keen and enthusiastic to learn and they do so with respect and consideration for their peers and teachers. Despite many adult learners having barriers to learning, such as jobs and childcare commitments, they endeavour to attend their lessons. They value highly the way teachers and managers have organised the timetable so that courses take place in the evenings. Where start and finish times are during the day, they enable those with children to take them and collect them from school.

Adult learners on ESOL courses develop positive and professional approaches to their learning through teachers setting high standards and modelling the behaviours they expect.

Adult learners develop their confidence through learning new knowledge and skills. They feel empowered by their learning, they improve their self-confidence and put their new learning to good use in their daily and work lives. ESOL learners apply their newly learned English speaking and listening skills in a wide variety of ways, such as making appointments with doctors or taking part in community projects and charity work. Access to higher education learners discuss topical themes in the healthcare and science sectors with their tutors and peers in preparation for university interviews.

Apprentices value the calm and professional learning environments in which their training takes place. They benefit from high-quality practical and technical resources that at least match the standard they use in their different jobs.

Apprentices have many opportunities to participate in a wide range of additional activities, such as skills competitions and charity events, to develop their skills and knowledge beyond their qualification.

Students with high needs show respect for each other and visitors. Several high-needs students, who were unable to communicate well previously, even with people they know well, were able to hold a conversation with inspectors.

Students with high needs enjoy being at college. They feel supported and valued by their teachers and by each other. They form sound friendships and know to whom they should speak if they have any worries or concerns.

Most students, adult learners and apprentices understand what their next steps in education and training are because of the careers guidance and support they get from teachers, tutors and specialist careers staff. They know what further qualifications or experience they need to gain. Those students who wish to go to university receive good support for their UCAS applications and those who wish to apply for jobs get the right help to produce CVs and fill in job applications.

Learners feel safe and learn how to work safely in practical subjects. Staff deal with the rare instances of bullying and discrimination rapidly and firmly.

Occasionally, a few students' behaviour in social spaces and around the campus is not of the same standard seen in learning environments. Leaders have taken steps to improve supervision of these areas by increasing the numbers of people in the security team and increasing the time leaders and managers spend in and around the college. Leaders are also developing plans to increase the space available for students to eat, socialise and relax as they recognise the current spaces at the Chaffron Way site are often overcrowded.

Through the college's tutorial programme, students learn about fundamental British values and what these mean for them as students and in the world of work. While most students and apprentices exemplify these values in their daily lives, a few male students and apprentices do not show their female peers the respect to which they are entitled. Leaders and managers already have further work planned to help staff teach these topics and build students' confidence to report any incidents that make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. These include sessions from external speakers from women's refuges and others who have experienced sexual harassment and violence. This is in keeping with the college's mission of fairer futures.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders work very effectively in partnership with numerous stakeholders to identify, understand and contribute to meeting skills needs in the city, region and nationally. Staff are members of several boards, including the Northamptonshire chambers of commerce, to make sure they fully understand priorities and are able to swiftly adapt the range of courses, qualifications and training they offer. Leaders and managers use these excellent partnerships to develop an offer that aligns very closely with the local skills priorities and the needs of the region as reflected in their accountability agreement. To tackle a significant skills gap in the hospitality industry

staff from Silverstone and Milton Keynes College work collaboratively to design a hospitality curriculum that gives students exciting opportunities in a prestigious hospitality environment. Each week, students study theory at the college and then practise their new skills at the Silverstone circuit.

College staff work very well with stakeholders, industry experts and community organisations in the planning of the individual curriculums. This provides students and apprentices across all provision types with opportunities to appreciate the real world of work and the skills they need to be successful. For example, all level 3 music students benefit from the opportunity to present their electronic preference kit to the head of record label at a music industry employer. They receive individual feedback and a clear understanding of how the industry would view their presence and work.

Leaders and managers have developed new apprenticeship and professional training opportunities through the recently opened Institute of Technology at Bletchley Park. IoT partners have worked in collaboration with college staff to strengthen technical and professional education in the city. The courses are designed and taught with an employer partner for apprenticeships in level 4 software developer and level 4 data analyst and higher technical qualifications in digital technologies to support digital skills priorities in the region.

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

Leaders make effective use of the partnerships they have with learners, parents, employers and their communities to support learners with their education. Their extensive employer partnerships provide learners with enviable opportunities to experience 21st century industry practice and open their eyes to exciting careers. They work with strategic leaders in their communities and with employers, including subcontractors, to provide programmes of learning that raise aspirations and improve prospects for the people of Milton Keynes. Leaders and managers have responded swiftly to develop an ESOL programme to support refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Ukraine. Learners develop the skills required to quickly integrate into life in the UK and achieve their qualifications.

Leaders and managers have high ambitions for all learners, including those who are disadvantaged or hard to reach and who study with subcontractors. They provide a wide range of courses to help learners develop the skills they need for their next steps. Staff care for and support learners to manage and overcome challenging circumstances in their lives. As a result, learners build their aspirations and they learn the knowledge they need to achieve their qualifications. Most move on to further learning, training or employment in their chosen sectors with the skills and behaviours they need to be successful. The proportion of students aged 16 to 18 who achieve their qualifications has increased each year for the past three years. On many vocational courses and apprenticeships, the majority of the students and apprentices achieve merit or distinction grades.

In working with the college's hospitality and motor vehicle departments, Silverstone Circuit is rightly proud of the work it has done with the college in lifting aspirations for the city and demonstrating to young people what they can hope to achieve locally. Silverstone staff teach lessons to hospitality and motor vehicle students at college before students then work at the Silverstone circuit supporting the commercial events and activities that take place there, including the British Formula 1 Grand Prix.

Teachers and trainers use a range of effective strategies in classrooms, workshops, salons, laboratories, studios and kitchens to help learners understand key concepts. These include demonstrations, discussions and opportunities for them to apply their learning. Learners benefit from using technical resources in lessons to support their development and reinforce activity that is seen in the industry. Teachers encourage learners to take time to think about what they have learned so that they understand what they are doing well and what they can do better. Apprentices use job cards that are specific to the task they are doing to record what they have learned and how they might use their new learning at work.

Teachers use a range of assessment activities to check, extend and correct learning. They use questioning in the classroom and the workplace to evaluate the progress learners are making and inform further teaching. Teachers' feedback on learners' work helps them to know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve and to achieve their best. On occasions, trainers' feedback to apprentices is not specific enough to help them know what they need to do to improve, and their targets for improvement and further learning are too general. Consequently, employers do not know how to best help these apprentices when they are at work.

Students studying the T-level construction (design, surveying and planning) qualification make very good progress with their studies. They are taught by highly skilled industry experts who help students develop the professional skills and behaviours that the industry needs. They value highly their industry placements, where they get to learn more about the topics they have studied at college and to practise some of their new skills.

While the majority of students aged 16 to 18 complete an external work placement or another form of work-related experience, too many do not benefit from this opportunity. Those who do complete a placement are able to reinforce much of what they have learned at college and to develop further the skills they need for work, such as communication, personal presentation, as well as improving their industry or subject-specific skills.

Adult learners' progress is exceptional. Those studying mathematics embrace the subject after coming to college with fears from previous experiences of learning mathematics. The college's commitment to its communities enables adult learners to be successful when studying access to higher education qualifications. They go on to study at local universities and then stay in the area to fill skills shortages in the healthcare and medical sectors when they leave university. Learners studying ESOL

build their confidence in spoken and written English, which they use to improve their daily lives, apply for jobs and integrate into their new communities.

Students with high needs make rapid and sustained progress with their academic, vocational and personal learning. Those on study programmes at levels 2 and 3, such as art and design and games animation, receive very specific support to help them achieve at least in line with their peers. A high proportion gain merit and distinction grades in their vocational qualifications. Those on courses at level 1 and below develop their independence and skills for life as a result of high expectations of staff, very well considered and tailored teaching and very specific support, based on students' education, health and care plan targets.

Leaders and managers have rigorous processes in place to assure themselves of the quality of teaching. They ensure that teachers and trainers are provided with helpful support and training to further improve their teaching and meet leaders' and managers' high expectations. They mitigate any risk to students' learning sensibly and proportionately. As a result, most learners benefit from effective teaching and develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to achieve well, including merit and distinction grades, and move on to their next steps.

Leaders and managers work effectively with staff at subcontractors to ensure that the quality of provision meets their high expectations. They know the strengths and weaknesses of subcontracted provision and collaborate well with subcontractor staff to resolve problems quickly. Consequently, students studying with subcontractors, many of whom are disadvantaged or vulnerable, improve their opportunities and life chances.

Leaders and governors use their extensive experience in education, business, enterprise and community to help staff at the college provide high-quality education, training and opportunities that benefit learners. They have an ambitious vision and a well-considered strategy, based on their knowledge of the region, to provide fairer futures for the communities in and around the city. They strive for continuous improvement and seek opportunities that benefit the people, employers, partners and stakeholders with whom they work. Leaders and governors have positioned the college to be integral to the economic development and social cohesion of Milton Keynes.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Develop the skills and confidence of staff teaching apprentices and students aged 16 to 18 to teach the challenging and difficult subjects in the personal development curriculum, such as sexual harassment and healthy relationships.

- Ensure that students aged 16 to 18, but only those for whom it is appropriate, have the opportunity to participate in meaningful and worthwhile external work experience placements.
- Improve the teaching of GCSE mathematics so that students improve their confidence with this subject and the proportion that achieve at least a grade 4 in their examinations increases.
- Improve the specificity of apprentices' development targets and the quality of feedback on their written and practical work.



## Provider details

Unique reference number	130609
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Website	<a href="http://www.mkcollege.ac.uk">www.mkcollege.ac.uk</a>
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Sally Alexander
Provider type	General further education college
Dates of previous inspection	23 to 26 May 2017
Main subcontractors	ARTS1 Limited Macintyre Academies SOFEA The Walnuts School

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the group director for quality and teaching and learning improvement, 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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