

Inspection of South and City College Birmingham

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

South and City College Birmingham is a large general further education college with eight campuses across Birmingham. The main sites are the Longbridge campus, Digbeth campus, Hall Green campus, Handsworth campus and Bordesley Green campus. These sites offer a range of technical, academic and vocational courses. The 14 to 16 academy is based at the Longbridge site. The Golden Hillock Women's Centre is for women only. At this campus, leaders offer subjects such as childcare and health and social care. The Longbridge construction site is based at the Longbridge campus. Leaders at this site focus on practical construction courses. Leaders at the Fusion Centre mainly offer courses in fashion, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and business retail.

At the time of the inspection, there were 3,850 learners aged 16 to 18 enrolled at the college. For these learners, leaders offer A level, vocational, T level and foundation learning pathways. On the A-level pathway, there are 15 A levels and four A level equivalents. Leaders provide seven T levels including digital support services, education and childcare, fashion and textiles and laboratory sciences. They also offer six T-level transition courses. Leaders offer over 90 vocational/technical

courses from level 1 up to level 3. These courses are taught across all sites. Subjects include ESOL, art and design, automotive, childcare, construction, engineering, games development, hairdressing, music, science, sports and travel and tourism.

Leaders offer entry-level and level 1 foundation learning courses across three campuses. These include pathways to employment, pathways to independence and supported internships. At the time of the inspection, 500 learners had special educational needs, of which there are 145 learners with high needs.

Many of the courses for school leavers are also taught to adult learners. Other courses taught to adults include access to higher education (HE), higher national certificates, higher national diplomas, ESOL, foundation degrees and undergraduate degrees. During the inspection, there were 6,317 adult learners enrolled at the college.

There were 476 apprentices studying apprenticeships. Leaders offer 28 apprenticeships from level 2 up to level 6. Most of these study at level 3. Trades include accounting, bricklaying, electrician, healthcare support work, motor vehicle service and teaching assistant.

At the time of the inspection, there were 123 learners aged 14 to 16 enrolled at the college. The available pathways are engineering and technical crafts, health sciences, physical education, animal care and art and design.

Leaders do not work with any subcontractors.

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

Most learners and apprentices experience a positive and respectful culture. The staff know and care about their learners. However, in the 14 to 16 courses some poor language used by learners undermines a considerate culture. Most learners and apprentices greatly value the relationships they have with their teachers. They appreciate the support they get with their studies. As a result, they acquire the confidence to express themselves and ask questions in class.

Many learners learn how to become respectful and active citizens. They do this by working on local community projects and with the public sector. For example, learners volunteered to take part in a 'weapons sweep' in a local park with community police officers. They attend workshops about hate crimes. Learners studying fashion worked with Birmingham Children's Hospital to create a fashion show that promoted adaptive clothing for children with physical conditions. Hospitality, hair and beauty and media learners also supported the event.

Many learners do not routinely attend lessons. Because of this, too many learners miss valuable learning opportunities. However, learners who do attend display positive attitudes and enjoy learning. Most learners arrive at lessons on time and are ready to learn. They want to be successful and are motivated to achieve.

Learners and apprentices develop a solid understanding of subjects outside of their chosen curriculum. They learn about topics such as debt awareness, LGBTQ history, mental health support, stereotyping, healthy eating, diet, exercise, smoking and vaping, sexual health and sexual harassment. Learners can access gymnasiums, sports halls, football and netball. They can attend a range of clubs such as chess clubs and debate clubs. Staff and learners jointly celebrate cultural festival days. In the 14 to 16 courses, lessons cover specific modules on living in the wider world, health and well-being and relationships.

Learners on education programmes for young people and learners with high needs do not routinely access work experience that prepares them for work. Leaders do not sufficiently focus on the employability needs of learners. Level 3 learners are prioritised. As such, the numbers of A level and level 3 vocational learners' work experience placements are high. However, the number of learners accessing work experience-related activity on level 2 courses and learners with high needs is too low. This means too many learners do not receive the work-related skills and experience they need before progressing into employment after their course.

Adult learners enjoy lively, purposeful and productive learning environments. Lessons are inclusive and draw on the learner's own wider experience. In level 2 electrical installation, adult learners secure an understanding of different electrical practices in other countries. ESOL learners are positive about their experience. They are motivated to be successful and improve their employment prospects. Learners are enthusiastic about coming into college and practising their language skills. As a result, learners quickly develop their knowledge and skills to become confident in their ability to complete their studies successfully.

Apprentices demonstrate professional approaches to their learning. They arrive at lessons on time and are encouraged to work as part of a team to share their experiences. Apprentices enjoy their learning. They are motivated to learn and increase the range of skills they can offer to employers. They understand extremism well and how it relates to their work. They have access to a range of opportunities outside of their apprenticeship. Many attend events which extend their knowledge of the sector such as the UK Construction Week at the National Exhibition Centre. Because of this, most apprentices make good progress.

Learners with high needs enjoy learning in a calm, welcoming and inclusive learning environment. They appreciate their learning and are respectful of their peers and teachers. Attendance to sessions is high. Most learners with high needs continue in further education, and a small number go on into employment.

Most learners and apprentices feel safe in college. They have not personally experienced or witnessed any bullying, harassment or discrimination. They feel staff would deal with issues quickly if any did arise. They cite things such as helpful security staff, wearing lanyards and easily located helpline numbers as ways that help them to feel safe. They also know who they would go to if they had a concern. However, a very small minority of learners have experienced homophobic name-calling at the Longbridge campus. At the time of the inspection, they told inspectors that this made them feel vulnerable.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have a very good understanding of the needs of the local economy. They engage with a broad range of stakeholders such as the West Midlands Combined Authority, University Hospitals Birmingham National Health Service Foundation Trust, National Express, the Department for Work and Pensions and the local member of parliament. They are proactive in creating networks and links to resolve local skills needs now and in the future. For example, leaders worked with employers to identify an emerging need for retrofitting homes. Leaders responded quickly to this need by building two retrofit training homes in East Birmingham. However, Leaders know that they need to further increase their engagement with small and medium enterprises.

Leaders have set up employer boards across all curriculum areas to ensure that learners develop the knowledge and skills they need. These boards are more established and effective in areas such as engineering, construction and business than in others. In many areas, teachers involve stakeholders in the planning and implementation of their curriculum. For example, managers adapted the curriculum for access to HE diplomas in health to include more biology content. This was to ensure that the curriculum met the needs of the link universities. However, leaders recognise that they need to take further steps to ensure that stakeholder involvement is consistent across all curriculum areas.

In the best curriculum areas, industry specialists teach part of the curriculum using state-of-the-art technology. This enables learners and apprentices to bring new technology to the workplace. For example, specialists teach higher apprentices in construction to use drones to monitor the fabric of buildings and check for cracks.

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

Many leaders and managers have implemented logically sequenced curriculums that build learners' knowledge and skills progressively over time. In access to HE biology, adult learners initially learn about the nature of cells, before moving on to more complex biological concepts such as organs. Teachers of the level 3 bus and coach engineering technician apprenticeship plan high-quality on- and off-the-job training successfully. Teachers work in close consultation with employers. This is to ensure that apprentices can swiftly practise what they have learned. As a result, learners can relate to learning and build new knowledge successfully.

Leaders of the 14 to 16 academy do not have a clearly designed curriculum for English or Mathematics that supports the needs of learners. In English and mathematics leaders rely too heavily on examination specifications to design their curriculums. They do not support learners to acquire a deeper understanding of the development of component skills. This results in a superficial understanding and gaps in learners' knowledge.

Leaders of courses for high needs do not have sufficient oversight of learners' progress. They are unclear about the progress learners are making. In classes such as mathematics and vocational learning, tracking focuses on the completion of units rather than learning. Teachers do not set or monitor targets appropriately to identify learners' progress. Individual teachers know how learners are progressing in their classes. However, they do not systematically measure progress and share this information with managers.

Most teachers use a variety of teaching strategies effectively within lessons. In foundation learning courses, teachers provide clear explanations so that learners can complete their tasks successfully. Where learners have misconceptions, teachers take corrective action to rectify these promptly. In T-level courses, teachers create posters, use quizzes and regularly recap previous learning. Teachers of learners with high needs design sessions with practical activities to enable learners to practise useful life skills. Because of this, most learners quickly grasp and remember key concepts successfully.

Teachers in the 14 to 16 academy do not check learning and challenge misconceptions effectively. Teachers in lessons do not robustly check learners' understanding. For example, teachers check understanding by asking, 'is it clear?' In other pathways, teachers set mid-topic assessments. Where teachers identify poor attainment of knowledge, they set revision sessions. However, learners do not routinely attend these. This results in unresolved gaps in learning and knowledge.

Many teachers do not use the starting points of learners effectively to influence their teaching. Most teachers set diagnostic tests at the start of the year to assess the current knowledge of learners. However, in the 14 to 16 courses and the courses for learners with high needs, too often teaching activities do not build effectively on the prior understanding that learners have. In GCSE English lessons, a considerable number of learners had not completed the assessment of their starting points. As a result, learners undertake a generic programme of learning that does not allow them to develop the knowledge they need at the rate at which they are capable.

Teachers and learning support assistants are appropriately qualified and experienced. In lessons, teachers use their expert knowledge to describe and demonstrate real-world activities to make learning more relevant. They undertake appropriate professional development with industry experts. This is to ensure that they are up to date with their chosen vocation.

Too few learners successfully acquire the qualifications they set out to achieve. This is especially true for qualifications in English and mathematics. Overall, achievement across all provision types is too low. Not enough learners or apprentices achieve the grades they are capable of.

Learners and apprentices have access to effective careers support and guidance from specialist careers advisers and their curriculum teams. For example, cross-college HE fairs are provided to support learners with their applications. Curriculum staff work with industry experts to help learners develop interview skills through dedicated workshops. Teachers on foundation pathway courses incorporate learning about time management, applying for work and dressing for interviews. Apprentices have a clear view of the career routes open to them. Consequently, learners and apprentices are aware of their next steps.

Leaders were too slow to resolve the significant underperformance in the quality of education. Leaders report that in the previous few years, they have been greatly affected by COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis, a cyber-attack and a failure in their data systems. There were poor levels of retention and pass rates across all age groups and provision types. Consequently, too few learners and apprentices achieved the qualifications they had trained for.

Leaders have recently taken action to improve the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive. They have restructured management posts and invested in new management data systems. They refocused staff on attendance, assessments and improving teaching. They have produced a detailed and effective quality improvement plan that is robustly monitored. As a result, in several areas, the quality of education is starting to improve.

Leaders have appointed a suitable set of governors with a blend of experience and appropriate expertise. They provide support and challenge for the development of the college strategy and the accountability agreement. Governors understand the challenges of the past few years and recognise the underperformance. Governors have provided appropriate challenges to the underperformance and supported the

principal to take action. Because of this, learners' and apprentices' education experience is starting to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Rapidly improve the quality of education for learners on education programmes for young people, particularly those aged 14 to 16.
- Make sure learners with high needs receive appropriate targets that focus on the development of essential learning. Ensure the targets are robustly monitored to make certain learners with high needs are making the progress they are capable of.
- Make sure that leaders of the high needs courses have sufficient oversight of the progress learners are making.
- Ensure that attendance to lessons is routinely high.
- Make sure that teachers use the information from learners' starting points to plan learning.
- Ensure that all learners on education programmes for young people and learners with high needs receive access to meaningful work experience that prepares them for employment.
- Increase the number of learners and apprentices who successfully achieve their qualifications.
- Ensure that learners and apprentices achieve the grades they are capable of.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130461
Address	129 Floodgate Street Digbeth Birmingham West Midlands B5 5SU
Contact number	01216 946293
Website	http://www.sccb.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mike Hopkins
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	27 to 30 November 2018
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal for 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

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