

# Inspection of Southport Education Group

Inspection dates:

14 to 17 November 2023 and 30 to 31 January 2024

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

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

## Information about this provider

Southport Education Group is a medium-sized, general further education college located in the borough of Sefton, Merseyside. The college operates from two campus locations, both of which are in Southport.

The Southport College campus provides a wide range of vocational and technical qualifications for young people and adults from entry level through to level 4, and apprenticeships from level 2 to 5. The King George V sixth-form college (KGV) campus provides academic and vocational level 3 programmes exclusively for young people.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1,904 learners on education programmes for young people on a range of academic and vocational courses, including A-level and T-level programmes. Courses are at levels 1 to 3 with the largest subject areas in: science and mathematics; languages; early years, health and social care; creative arts, media and communication and business and professional services, including business, administration and finance. There were 114 learners studying towards T-

levels in: construction, design, surveying and planning; early years education and childcare; management and administration; health and science and digital production, design and development.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1,381 adult learners studying full- and part-time courses from pre-entry level to level 5. There were 65 of these learners on access to higher education (HE) courses in social science and nursing, including midwifery. A small minority study on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.

There were 42 learners who qualify for high-needs funding. There were 29 of these learners on a range of vocational courses at the college and 13 were on programmes designed specifically for learners with high needs.

At the time of the inspection, there were 320 apprentices studying a range of apprenticeships from levels 2 to 5, 64 of whom were aged under 19. The large majority of apprentices study level 3 apprenticeships across a range of vocational sectors, such as construction, healthcare, team leading and catering.

The college does not use subcontractors.

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

Most learners and apprentices enjoy their courses and behave well in classes and around the college. They are respectful towards each other and to staff. Although most learners and apprentices have positive attitudes to their studies, and take pride in their work, too many miss classes and do not attend regularly enough.

Most young learners studying vocational and academic programmes improve their confidence and resilience during their courses. For example, A-level art and design learners compete in competitions. They develop mastery in their art and design skills on a regional or national stage. Beauty therapy learners participate in fundraising to raise money for charities that provide wigs for children undergoing chemotherapy. Most young learners achieve their qualifications and gain the knowledge and skills required for their next steps.

Adult learners benefit from appropriate and well-planned curriculums that help them to move on to their next stage of education or employment. Learners on counselling courses help the local community by providing free counselling services to charities during their placements. ESOL learners learn how to use English to communicate in everyday life and in situations, such as managing a household, visiting the post office and travelling in their local area.

Learners with high needs receive effective individualised support that meets their needs. Learners' aspirations and interests are identified early in their course, so that an appropriate learning plan can be put in place. Most learners make positive progress and move to the next level of learning, higher education and employment. Learners on the foundation programme learn skills for work during employability sessions and while attending internal work placements at the college. This prepares learners well for external work placements when they progress to the next level of learning.

Too many apprentices receive a poor quality of training on their apprenticeship. Too few apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeship. Assessors do not identify the starting points of apprentices to enable them to plan an individualised learning programme that meets apprentices' needs and recognises prior learning. This is particularly evident for apprentices on the level 3 lead adult care worker apprenticeship, many of whom have worked in the sector for many years. In contrast, apprentices studying the level 2 production chef apprenticeship, and the level 4 accountancy apprenticeship, do develop new skills.

Young learners quickly develop an understanding of themes related to being safe in a variety of contexts, including when accessing online content. Through regular tutorials and in-class learning activities, learners develop an appropriate understanding of healthy relationships, healthy living and well-being. However, this learning is less well developed for apprentices and some adult learners.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders have a broad awareness of local and regional sector priorities. They use their extensive links with a wide range of stakeholders, including the mayoral combined authority, the Southport business improvement district and the Southport Learning Trust to inform the college's strategic skills curriculum response. Leaders use sector specific skills and employment data from industry boards, such as the Construction Industry Training Board, to identify skills gaps in the local community. Leaders host skills network events such as the Sefton Business Forum. These forums help to inform the skills landscape in the local area and help leaders to support employers with their specific needs.

Leaders have ensured that the college's recently developed accountability agreement provides a clear link between the skills needs in the geographical areas local to the institution. For example, leaders have ensured the college's curriculums include provision in construction, health and life sciences, business and professional services, and the visitor economy. In addition, leaders have utilised recent skills capital grants that were obtained as part of a range of collaborative projects. These grants have been used to invest in specialist equipment, and the provision of targeted staff professional development, to support curriculum plans for new courses, such as those associated with green energy and electric vehicles.

Leaders have ensured that some of their curriculums benefit from positive stakeholder engagement that informs the curriculum to ensure teaching is current. For example, T-level design, surveying and planning for construction learners benefit from masterclasses from a construction company that is developing the Marine Lake exhibition centre. In beauty therapy, staff have responded to employer feedback by offering builder gel and nail art training to meet the current trends in the sector. Hospitality students learn additional barista skills, alongside wider knowledge, related to the principles of fairtrade and high-quality coffee. However, stakeholder involvement is not yet evident across all curriculums in the college. Leaders do not yet have a systematic college-wide approach to stakeholder involvement in curriculum design and implementation.

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

Most vocational and academic staff carefully plan curriculums, so that the order of activities help learners, including those with high needs, to successfully embed key principles into their long-term memories. T-level design, surveying and planning for construction learners develop their understanding of the principles related to building design and planning. This is because they work on a range of live project briefs and take part in organised work experiences. Adult learners in level 1 ESOL benefit from teachers who use their experience to develop language concepts that improve self-confidence in spelling, pronunciation and grammar.

Most teachers help, guide and support learners effectively to be successful at college by developing their independent learning and thinking skills. On academic programmes, A-level learners in mathematics and further mathematics set out clear explanations regarding their understanding of scientific concepts, such as problem solving, mathematical arguments and the concept of proof. Level 2 beauty therapy learners complete detailed client consultation records with a focus on planning and recommending products for a range of treatments, such as facial massage, manicures and pedicures.

Teachers present information clearly and concisely. They ask probing questions and carry out frequent checks of learning during lessons. Most learners develop a secure understanding of the subject matter and are confident about applying new knowledge and skills in different contexts. Counselling learners develop a clear understanding of phenomenology and can identify how noticing feelings, events, experiences and behaviours may influence their point of view. Learners apply these skills when working with clients in their placements.

Teachers do not always provide clear and developmental feedback for learners and apprentices. For example, the written feedback that learners receive lacks sufficient clarity and precision. Learners and apprentices do not always know what actions they need to take to improve their understanding or the quality of their work.

Teachers work effectively with support staff, so that learners can gain new and useful knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, when working with learners with high needs who have anxiety, support staff use a calming voice. This helps to promote engagement and interaction. Learners self-regulate and return to learning quickly.

Teachers do not make use of information regarding the starting points of apprentices and a few adult learners when planning learning or setting out demanding curriculums. On academic programmes, most learners, particularly those studying at level 3, do not always achieve the grades expected of them relative to their prior attainment. A few teachers do not set sufficiently challenging extension activities to enable learners to progress at a more rapid pace. On apprenticeships, on- and off- the job training is not coordinated sufficiently well. The progress of apprentices, as they move through their studies, is not always rapid or sustained.

Learners are prepared well for living and working in modern Britain. Teachers challenge and extend learners' views and opinions by using a wide range of learning activities and projects to help them understand the beliefs and values of others in society. Art and design learners are designing a plaque and sculpture to commemorate local workers who died during the construction of the Wallasey Tunnel. Learners are proud to be part of the local community. However, apprentices are unable to articulate their learning on wider topics to increase their personal development.

Leaders provide effective careers education, information, advice and guidance, which supports young learners' professional and career goals. This includes guidance

on writing personal statements and applications for further study or apprenticeships. Learners benefit from careers events with HE providers and employers from the local area, which help to broaden their ideas on what they might do next. However, apprentices, and some adult learners, do not benefit from the same level of careers advice.

Turnover of staff has disrupted teaching in a few curriculum areas, which has negatively impacted on learners' and apprentices' enjoyment of learning, their progress and their performance. Leaders have recently implemented initiatives to stabilise the workforce by retaining experienced teachers and recruiting new staff. However, additional action is required by leaders to further reduce the disruption experienced by learners and apprentices due to fluctuations in college staffing.

Leaders' actions have yet to improve the quality of education in apprenticeships. Weaknesses from the previous inspection remain unresolved. Leaders have recently completed a restructure of the apprenticeship curriculum. They have invested in additional resources, recruited new staff to quicken the pace of change and ceased recruitment on several of their apprenticeships. However, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Set clear and measurable actions to improve the quality of education for apprentices.
- Ensure that staff are aware of apprentices' and adult learners' knowledge and skills prior to starting their course or apprenticeship, so that they can plan challenging curriculums for all.
- Swiftly improve attendance for learners and apprentices.
- Increase the proportion of learners who achieve the highest grades of which they are capable.
- Reduce the level of disruption experienced by learners and apprentices arising from turnover in college staffing.
- Provide an improved offer of careers advice and teaching of wider personal development topics for apprentices and adult learners.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Michelle Brabner
<b>Provider type</b>	General Further Education College
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 to 14 February 2020
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## 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.

An additional visit was carried out to gather evidence to ensure that the evidence base was complete in line with the Ofsted Gathering additional evidence protocol: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection>

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