

# Inspection of Chelmsford College

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 March 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>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

Chelmsford College is a general further education college operating from two campuses in the City of Chelmsford. Leaders provide vocational courses, adult learning, professional courses and apprenticeships. The college is part of the South East Institute of Technology. Leaders started to offer T levels in 2022 starting with the level 3 design, surveying and planning for construction programme. In 2023, leaders introduced a further four T-level programmes. These include T levels in management and administration, engineering and manufacturing, education and early years, and healthcare science.

The college has approximately 2,030 learners aged 16 to 18 years and 400 adult learners. It has 345 apprentices in training, with nearly three-quarters aged 16 to 18 years. The college has 70 learners in receipt of high-needs funding. Most young learners and apprentices are studying level 3 programmes.

Leaders provide 27 apprenticeships from level 2 up to level 5. Apprenticeship programmes include business and customer service, construction and electrical installation, childcare and education, engineering, hair and beauty, IT and digital marketing.

Most adults are studying level 2 courses. Leaders work with two subcontractors to offer online distance learning programmes for adults: The Skills Network Group Limited and Learning Curve Group Limited. These courses meet professional development training needs for adults to support career development. Approximately one-quarter of all adults are on these level 2 subcontracted programmes. The remainder of adult learners are on preparation for life and work courses, offered in partnership with job centres and local housing associations and community groups. The college also provides sector work academy programmes in the professions of barista, business administration, construction labourer, customer service and security/door supervision.

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

Learners and apprentices work well together in lessons. They learn in calm and safe environments, and most learners attend well. Learners and apprentices respond positively to the high expectations and support that teachers set for them. Learners on the T-level design, surveying and planning for construction programme demonstrate highly professional behaviours. Learners on level 1 beauty therapy work together as a team to set up their salon for treatments. On the level 2 brickwork programme, learners appreciate the help they get from teachers, and they know support is always available for them. Teachers on level 2 travel and tourism know their learners well. They help those learners who are struggling with complex personal lives. Teachers provide additional support with attendance and meeting college deadlines. As a result, learners who had a history of low attainment at school make good progress at college.

Learners develop their confidence and resilience to face new challenges. Adult learners study first-aid and de-escalation skills to develop confidence for managing situations in the security industry. Learners with high needs have developed their ability to research, and extend their confidence to take part in, a range of social activities. As a result, they can make new friends, take part in different sports activities and stay healthy. Level 2 travel and tourism learners gain valuable work experience at a national travel conference. They work as meet-and-greet agents to help direct conference members. Learners attend valuable conference seminars about the travel sector. As a result, they gain confidence by practising their interpersonal and customer service skills.

Most learners and apprentices understand the importance of British values and how these apply to the workplace. Maintenance electrician apprentices understand that they will work with a large client base. They know they must show respect and tolerance for all at work. Most learners receive helpful information on the risks of radicalisation and extremism. They understand the risks in relation to their personal and professional lives. Adult learners on the door supervisor course understand how to recognise suspicious behaviour at work. As a result, learners and apprentices are ready for the world of work.

Learners and apprentices feel very safe in college. They appreciate the vigilance of staff who take prompt action to stop any inappropriate behaviour. Learners and apprentices routinely revisit safe working practices. They wear appropriate personal protective equipment in workshops. Teaching assistant apprentices learn how to keep children in their care safe. Furthermore, they understand how to protect themselves when working with young children. Learners with high needs understand how to stay mentally and physically safe. They learn about the importance of eating healthy food and taking part in regular exercise. Learners understand what constitutes a healthy relationship. They have a good understanding of the importance of consent and how to recognise abusive relationships.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders, managers and governors have identified skills needs as a high priority for the college. Leaders have secured a broad range of valuable strategic partnerships, including employers, education providers and other stakeholders. They participate actively and take a leadership role in many of the groups. As a result, leaders have a detailed understanding of the skills priorities locally and regionally. They use this knowledge skilfully to inform their own strategic priorities and plans.

Leaders have focused on priority skills areas effectively in their curriculum planning. They contribute to a high proportion of those priority areas. Leaders have developed curriculum areas such as construction and retrofit to meet the high demand created by the local large-scale projects. In digital media courses, they have used employer partners very well to inform the planned higher technical qualification in cybersecurity.

Leaders have been responsive in meeting the needs of adults in the local area who require upskilling and retraining. They provide English and mathematics courses for NHS employees to enable them to further their careers. Leaders have worked with universities to secure progression routes from teaching assistant apprenticeships to teaching degrees. Leaders have plans to provide courses for English for speakers of other languages to meet local need.

Leaders have taken decisive action to ensure that managers and teachers have good links with employers. As a result, managers and teachers can consult effectively with employers in planning and teaching their curriculum. Most curriculum leads have fostered good relationships with employers and education partners. Learners benefit by visiting sector organisations and learning from work-related opportunities. However, much is in the early stages of development. Teachers do not routinely use employers sufficiently well to inform their curriculum planning.

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

Leaders have high aspirations and seek to establish a high-performing organisation. They have worked proactively to identify a wide range of local stakeholders in their drive to be the education provider of first choice. They work closely with employers and stakeholders to understand and respond to their needs. Managers and staff work with the skills priorities that leaders set to inform their course design and implementation.

Teachers take part in relevant professional development related to their subjects. A high proportion of staff are working towards their teaching qualification. Staff new to teaching shadow colleagues and are allowed time for lesson planning. Leaders use a high proportion of agency staff. In English, mathematics and electrical, this impacts negatively on the quality of learning.

Most teachers have planned their programmes so that learners and apprentices build their skills over time. Leaders and teachers have ordered their games development courses in a logical sequence. Learners develop their skills at the start of the course. They learn how to research projects. They then move on to developing their practical skills. Learners first develop their visual programming skills. In year two, learners move on to learning about programming language.

Leaders and managers have designed an effective, personalised programme for learners with high needs. On the Inspire bespoke programme, teachers use the learners' education, health and care plan outcomes to skilfully plan their learning. Learners work towards personalised assessments and targets. Learners are developing a wide range of skills, including social communication, researching and planning activities in the community. Learners work towards individualised targets, such as increasing the amount of people they interact with when visiting community settings. As a result, learners with high needs are prepared effectively for living in and participating in their local community.

The specialist support learners with high needs receive is highly effective in developing their skills and independence. Leaders and managers ensure that specialist support is well coordinated. Teachers benefit from specialist training from physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language specialists. Teachers use this training effectively to incorporate what they have learned into lessons. Teachers use speech and language training to include the use of computer software in lessons. Teachers can create more meaningful sentences, key words and language that the learners understand.

Most teachers have a good level of expertise and industry experience. In level 3 maintenance electrician apprenticeships, teachers hold industry-standard qualifications. Teachers participate in 'back to the floor' days in industry to ensure that their knowledge is up to date. As a result, teachers make helpful links between theory and practice, using workplace examples that apprentices find interesting.

Teachers use a range of effective teaching approaches to interest learners and deepen their understanding. Teachers of English GCSE carefully select a good range of visual resources to interest level 1 beauty therapy learners. Teachers use video clips that enable learners to identify aspects of written text to analyse. This helps learners to describe what they see and identify key aspects of the clip to explain their analysis. As a result, learners develop their confidence in preparation for taking their examinations.

Most teachers check learners' understanding effectively before they move on to new topics. In each lesson, teachers use techniques to encourage learners to recall concepts from prior learning. Teachers on the level 3 diploma in accounting reinforce the understanding and use of technical vocabulary. Teachers recap prior learning on ethics, stewardship, accruals and faithful representation. In a minority of cases, teachers do not consistently check apprentices' understanding of concepts before

moving on. As a result, a minority of apprentices cannot recall and remember key theoretical concepts.

Learners receive clear and helpful feedback. Teachers on games development courses provide helpful feedback on how learners can improve the quality of their written English. They discuss how learners could write in shorter sentences. They provide feedback on the importance of proofreading work to ensure clarity and correct spelling mistakes. As a result, they know what they need to do to improve. The quality of their work improves over time. Teachers on T-level construction use frequent assessment to inform learning. Teachers set scenario-based project management activities for learners. Learners explain what they would do on their first day as a project manager for a leading building contractor. Learners identify what they would want to prioritise, and why. As a result, learners participate well, develop their understanding and know how they are progressing.

Too few apprentices receive helpful feedback and targets that support them to improve. Often, feedback is minimal and does not direct them on how to improve. On level 3 maintenance electrician apprenticeships, teachers set targets that are task based. Apprentices receive targets to complete unit work, rather than develop their skills and knowledge. More recently, teachers provide feedback that gives clear direction to apprentices on how they can improve their work and practice. As a result, apprentices improve their progress.

Most teachers establish learners' and apprentices' existing knowledge and skills effectively. Teachers use this information successfully to ensure that the programme meets learners' and apprentices' needs. Teachers of mathematics and learners with high needs use information effectively to ensure that learners are studying at the appropriate level. In the first few weeks of their programmes, teachers evaluate learners' progress in mathematics. Learners who have the potential to study at a higher level, or those who would be more suited to a level lower, are then directed to a more appropriate class. On apprenticeship programmes, teachers adjust the learning for those who have already completed the level 2 programme. Level 3 maintenance electrician apprentices, who have progressed from the level 2 programme, complete a short recap of health and safety and scientific principles because of their previous learning. Consequently, apprentices stay on their programme and develop new skills and knowledge.

The quality of teaching in mathematics is too variable and not yet good. In the more effective sessions, teachers use their considerable experience to design lessons that interest learners. For example, learners developed their knowledge in labelling diagrams of triangles by using an a, b, c system. As a result, learners were able to make links between trigonometry and Pythagoras' theorem. In less effective lessons, learners are not sufficiently ready to learn with paper and pens. Teachers do not ensure that learners complete the tasks they have been set. As a result, too few learners make good progress in developing the knowledge and skills they need in mathematics.

Learners and apprentices benefit from robust careers advice and guidance. They have a good awareness of the range of options available to them when they complete their course. Learners work with employers to develop essential skills in readiness for work. Learners planning to progress to higher education, work with a range of universities to prepare for the next stage of their education. Adult learners have a good understanding of the different job roles in their sector. They understand their next steps and many secure employment, progress to further study or gain promoted job roles.

Most learners achieve their qualifications and secure a positive destination on completion of their course. Most learners with high needs have a positive transition into further learning, higher education and independent living.

Too few apprentices stay on their programme, particularly those aged 16 to 18. This is particularly prevalent in level 3 maintenance electrician apprenticeships and level 2 carpentry and joinery. Leaders have instigated new processes to improve the monitoring and achievement of apprentices. Leaders and managers now provide support when apprentices are not making the expected progress. However, it is too early to see the impact of this.

Leaders place a high priority on maintaining the health and well-being of staff. They have put in place a range of benefits, including a well-being festival. Managers check workload and support staff to work flexibly to promote work–life balance. Most staff are proud to work at the college and feel it is an inclusive and supportive environment. However, in a few instances, staff feel that workload is too high. The recruitment challenges in a few curriculum areas impact negatively on teachers' and managers' workloads.

Leaders and managers have enhanced their quality assurance arrangements. The actions they take ensure that the quality of provision is good for most learners. Managers frequently check learners' progress. Managers quickly identify learners at risk of falling behind and take appropriate action. Leaders have effective subcontracting arrangements. Leaders use subcontractors where it strengthens adult courses. However, leaders' strategic oversight of education and training is insufficiently rigorous. They do not know that appropriate checks and balances in place are effective. In a minority of cases, leaders were not aware that groups of learners were not registered in good time with the awarding organisation.

Governors are suitably qualified and experienced to fulfil their roles. They have a good overview of the work of leaders and managers and share leaders' vision for high quality. Governors know the underperforming courses and understand what needs to improve. However, they are too accepting of the continued low achievement of a minority of learners. Too few apprentices complete their apprenticeship within the time planned. Too few learners on supported internships progress into sustainable employment.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Ensure that apprentices receive helpful feedback and targets to enable them to make good progress.
- Ensure that apprentices stay in learning and achieve within planned timescales.
- Strengthen leaders' oversight of education and training.
- Ensure that learners benefit from good-quality mathematics provision.



## Provider details

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<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.chelmsford.ac.uk">www.chelmsford.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	David Warnes
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	12 to 15 December 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	The Skills Network Limited Learning Curve Group Limited

## 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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