

# Inspection of South Staffordshire College

Inspection dates: 16 to 19 April 2024

## Overall effectiveness **Good**

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>Good</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

South Staffordshire College is a medium sized further education college. The college has five campuses all located in South Staffordshire. There are also a number of outreach community learning venues.

The Rodbaston campus specialises in land-based curriculums and houses one of the futures centres where courses designed for learners with high needs are taught. The Lichfield campus provides mainly creative arts courses, including games and e-sports and a few adult community learning courses (ACL). The Tamworth campus focusses on vocational courses including engineering, electrical and automotive, hair and beauty, catering, sport, travel and public services, information technology, and business. The Torc campus in Tamworth provides courses in construction as well as those designed for learners with high needs at the second futures centre. The Cannock campus provides courses, training and apprenticeship opportunities for the local and wider community including engineering and electrical facilities.

The college provides courses from entry level to level 5. These include education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships, and

provision for learners with high needs. At the time of the visit, there were approximately 6,100 learners.

There were 2988 learners studying on education programmes for young people in a variety of vocational areas. The largest areas were in animal care and veterinary science, building and construction and foundations for learning and life. The college does not currently teach T-levels.

On adult learning programmes there were 2055 learners studying full and part-time courses. The largest subject areas were in preparation for life and work, health and social care, public services, and retail and commercial enterprise. There were no Skills Bootcamps being taught at the time of the inspection.

There were 646 apprentices, of which 176 were under the age of 19. Most apprentices study at level 3 in subjects which include engineering, animal care and veterinary science and building and construction.

Four hundred and forty-six learners qualified for high needs funding. Around half were on courses designed for learners with high needs and half were on vocational courses alongside their peers.

The college does not use subcontractors.

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

Learners and apprentices are positive about the education and training they receive. They value the safe, calm and purposeful learning environment that teachers create. For example, at the Rodbaston and Torc campuses, learners with high needs benefit from teaching and support areas such as life skills rooms, sensory and reflection rooms. As a result, learners and apprentices build positive relationships with their teachers and enjoy their learning.

Learners are well prepared for their next steps, whether that be into employment, training or education. Younger learners attend tutorials which focus on their next steps such as applying to university or for jobs. Managers and staff have focused on increasing the opportunities for younger learners to benefit from work experience. Consequently, most learners take part in meaningful external work experience where they can put into practise the knowledge, skills and behaviours they have learned on their courses.

Most learners on education programmes for young people participate in curriculum activities such as charity fundraising and social action projects. In level 1 and level 2 construction courses, learners at the Cannock campus work with the canal restoration trust to help prepare a new canal wall using 200-year-old bricks. As a result, learners become more responsible, respectful, and active citizens and know how to become involved in public life.

Leaders have designed an effective personal development curriculum for younger learners. Learners cover topics such as e-safety, cyberbullying, and healthy relationships. However, a small minority of adult learners do not benefit from an age-appropriate personal development curriculum.

Learners and apprentices build their confidence and resilience. For example, apprentices studying level 3 veterinary nursing learn about building resilience and maintaining good mental health in their workplace. They learn to cope with the challenges of working in their sector, such as dealing with the euthanasia of animals, early in their studies.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college and at work. Managers and staff create a mature and professional culture which encourages learners to be respectful of staff and of each other.

In most instances learners and apprentices have good attendance to their lessons. Managers and staff take sensible actions to help learners and apprentices improve their attendance over time. They closely monitor and track attendance of learners and, where applicable, set targets to help them to increase their attendance. Although improving, leaders rightly recognise they need to further improve learners' attendance to English and mathematics lessons to ensure they can make rapid and sustained progress through their qualifications.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders engage very effectively with a range of stakeholders, such as Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase District Council and Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce. They use these links to set a clear curriculum strategic focus that aligns well to the current and future skills needs required by the areas that it serves.

In most instances, leaders involve employers and other relevant stakeholders in the design of their curriculums. For example, in the engineering apprenticeships, managers have liaised with employers such as Perkins Engines Stafford and Counterplas Ltd to gain information on the use of robotic logistics. They have used this information to plan their future curriculums to help meet the engineering skills priorities in topics such as pneumatics and hydraulics.

In curriculum areas such as accountancy, motor vehicle and carpentry and joinery, leaders are in the very early stages of engaging stakeholders in their curriculum design and implementation. In a minority of instances, such as on adult learning programmes and in level 3 installation and maintenance electrician apprenticeships, leaders do not ensure that they involve stakeholders sufficiently well enough in their planning and implementation of the curriculum.

In most instances, leaders are clear on how they contribute to meeting skills needs. Leaders ensure teachers teach their curriculums effectively so that learners learn the skills they need. Leaders have responded to the need for green skills by providing teachers of electrical courses with professional development in solar and electric vehicle skills. However, in a small minority of adult learning programmes leaders do not accurately track the impact of their curriculums and share this with their stakeholders. For example, stakeholders such as the West Midlands Combined Authority and Cannock Chase District Council are not clear on the impact of courses such as Free Courses for Jobs.

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

Leaders have selected curriculums that are ambitious for learners to prepare them to move into skilled job roles. In level 2 electrical installation at the Cannock campus, the curriculum introduces learners to new green technologies, the various pathways in electrical engineering and the higher additional skills that can bring higher levels of income. As a result, learners are well prepared and informed to move onto their next stage of education or employment.

Managers and teachers carefully consider the design and sequence of their curriculums to develop learners' knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. For example, in level 3 veterinary nursing, teachers teach apprentices about working safely with radiology and imaging early in the curriculum as these are high-risk

activities. Teachers regularly revisit anatomy topics throughout the curriculum as they introduce the skills needed to understand and perform different procedures.

Leaders are committed to providing courses for people in the community who may not normally attend education and training. Leaders work effectively with community partners to provide education to some of the most vulnerable adult learners.

Disadvantaged learners, such as asylum seekers, adults with low or no qualifications, those who have been out of education for a long time and those with mental health difficulties can access appropriate community learning courses. As a result, adult learners improve their well-being and prospects for future education, or employment.

Teachers have extensive vocational experience which they use well to broaden learners understanding of the different industry options and specialisms. In many areas, teachers complete training to ensure they are teaching the skills needed by industry. For example, at the Lichfield campus, level 3 creative media staff visit motion capture studios to learn how standards and practice is developing in this subject.

Teachers are quick to recognise learners additional support needs. Teachers use effective strategies to ensure that learners can make progress in line with their peers. In level 3 animal management at the Rodbaston campus, staff support learners with low confidence to develop their study skills so they can work independently. Learners develop strategies to cope with anxieties so that they can contribute during lessons. As a result, learners are able to attend work placements and progress successfully through their course.

In most instances, teachers use a variety of teaching methods effectively to help learners to know more and do more over time. For example, in education programmes for young people, level 3 creative media teachers change their pedagogical approaches over time. They start with scaffolded demonstrations, practise and repeat to build foundations skills and develop learner confidence. They gradually reduce this over time to create independent problem solvers who are competent and confident in applying the technical knowledge and skills they have developed. However, in education programmes for young people, too often more capable learners are not sufficiently challenged during lessons to build on their knowledge and skills.

Most teachers use questioning well in class to establish what learners know and remember. However, in a few cases, teachers and support staff on programmes designed for learners with high needs are too quick to answer for learners and speak on their behalf. As a result, these learners are not able to develop their independent thinking, express their own thoughts, and improve their communication skills.

Leaders have invested in resources to ensure that the curriculums are taught according to the emerging needs of industry. In level 3 animal management, learners have access to an extensive range of animals including mammals, birds,

reptiles and amphibians. Learners gain experience well beyond the requirements of their qualification. However, in a small minority of lessons, teachers for learners with high needs use materials which are not age appropriate, or that are not suitably adapted to meet learners' individual needs.

Leaders have worked hard to listen to the views of their staff. Staff are proud to work at the college and take pride in the support and training they provide for learners. Leaders act quickly to support staff and listen carefully to their concerns. Leaders manage staff workload well.

Leaders and managers have developed a governance board which is well-structured and includes several key and effective sub-committee groups. The board includes very experienced members who monitor leaders' performance successfully. Governors provide appropriate challenge to leaders. They have been supportive in creating new roles to provide a renewed focus and increased scrutiny on apprentices' performance and progress.

Learners and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge skills and behaviours. For example, at the Cannock campus, adult learners on access to higher education health professional courses learn subject specific vocabulary such as mitochondria, pituitary gland and hypothalamus and can confidently use these terms in their work. Most learners successfully complete their course.

Following the previous inspection, leaders have taken significant steps and made revisions to their apprenticeship curriculums. For example, teachers have worked to ensure apprentices who have fallen behind are supported to catch up. Consequently, the number of apprentices who successfully achieve their apprenticeship is improving with an increasing number of apprentices achieving distinction grades.

Learners on education programmes for young people benefit from careers education, information, advice and guidance. Teachers teach these topics through tutorials, career learning plans, and career-specific learning weeks which include careers talks from guest speakers. Learners understand the career pathways available to them. However, a minority of adult learners and apprentices do not benefit from the college careers advice and guidance service. Too many apprentices are not aware of the professional institution membership their qualification will provide.

Through their studies, most learners and apprentices develop a greater understanding of the fundamental British values and the importance of shared values in their everyday and working lives. However, too many learners and apprentices do not develop their understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, including an awareness of risks in their local area.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Increase attendance to English and mathematics lessons to ensure learners can make rapid and sustained progress through their qualifications.
- Ensure all adult learners and apprentices have access to careers education, information, advice and guidance and fully understand, where appropriate, the professional institute memberships that their qualifications will bring.
- Ensure younger learners are sufficiently challenged during lessons to build on their knowledge and skills and make the progress of which they are capable.
- Ensure teachers of learners with high needs plan their teaching and adapt their learning resources to meet the needs of individual learners.
- Ensure all learners and apprentices understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism – including localised risk.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135658
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<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.southstaffs.ac.uk">www.southstaffs.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Claire Boliver
<b>Provider type</b>	General Further Education College
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2–5 November 2021
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	n/a



## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy chief executive, 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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