

Inspection of Cirencester College

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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

Cirencester College is a sixth-form college in Cirencester, Gloucestershire. The college provides a range of academic, vocational and technical courses and apprenticeships from pre-entry level to level 4, and provision for learners with high needs. At the time of inspection, around 2,900 learners aged 16 to 18, around 200 adult learners and 50 apprentices were studying at the college. There were around 50 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and in receipt of high needs funding, studying on academic or vocational programmes.

Almost all learners aged 16 to 18 study academic or vocational programmes at levels 2 or 3, the majority study A-level programmes. Most apprentices study a range of business and administration apprenticeships. Most adults study English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL), GCSE English or GCSE mathematics programmes. The college works with one subcontractor, who provides remote education for one learner with high needs.

The most senior leadership positions at the college have recently changed. The roles of principal and chair of governors are recent permanent appointments, both of whom have quickly formed a positive and supportive working partnership.

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

Learners and apprentices' behaviour at college and work is good. They value highly how staff establish positive relationships with them to create a respectful and positive learning culture. For example, staff welcome learners and apprentices onto the campus at the beginning of the day. Learners behave maturely in campus social spaces, and incidents of bullying and harassment are rare.

Learners and apprentices value the support they receive from their teachers. They know their learners and apprentices well. Teachers have a good knowledge of how to provide effective support for those learners with SEND. For example, learners with dyslexia receive specialist support in lessons and attend additional individual support workshops to help them to develop practical strategies that help them in their studies and the workplace.

Most teachers use their expertise skilfully to enliven lessons for learners. Teachers on the level 2 digital T-level transition course encourage learners with high needs to work collaboratively to share their research into vintage card games. As a result, learners improve their teamworking skills and develop valuable new research skills. Teachers on the level 3 creative media course use their recent industry experience well to ensure that learners learn relevant technical knowledge. For example, learners gain up-to-date knowledge of interviewing techniques, cutting skills and working with the latest camera technology. Consequently, they understand the context in which they develop important skills to prepare them for their next steps.

Adult learners enjoy their studies. Teachers recognise, and prioritise rightly, the importance of ensuring that adults can study in a supportive and respectful environment. For example, in ESOL classes, teachers reinforce frequently the importance of peer support and treating others with respect and tolerance. As a result, adults learn from each other and develop valuable language skills. In GCSE English classes, teachers ensure that adults develop excellent relationships so that they feel safe to assess their own work and share their grades with their peers. As a result, adults who have previously found formal learning difficult gain the confidence and academic skills they need to study effectively and make good progress towards achieving their personal goals.

Apprentices develop valuable new practical skills and knowledge that prepares them effectively for their future careers. Employers value highly the positive contribution that apprentices make to their businesses. For example, apprentices studying business administrator at level 3 gain a better understanding of the equality act and how this should be considered when dealing with planning applications. Apprentices studying marketing executive at level 4 develop their confidence and time management skills and prioritise their work effectively when working on advertising campaigns. Most apprentices who start the apprenticeship remain on the programme, and nearly all complete their qualification, with many achieving the highest grade.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college. They appreciate the actions taken by leaders, such as the visibility of security guards on campus and the highly accessible

pastoral support team. Learners and apprentices feel able to report concerns to staff and are confident that these will be taken seriously.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a limited contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders do not involve employers and universities enough in the development of most curriculums. They do not work well enough with or use the expertise and knowledge that these stakeholders possess, to plan and enhance the content of all curriculums. As a result, too many learners do not develop sufficiently the vocational and transferable skills they need to progress to their next steps. Leaders have successfully developed employer focus forums in a minority of curriculum areas, such as construction and digital, to support the introduction of T-level qualifications. Through this work, leaders and teachers obtain useful, industry-relevant, feedback which they use well to improve and develop the curriculums.

Leaders do not know how well the college's curriculum is meeting the skills needs of employers, universities and local authorities. Leaders audit the intent of the curriculums they offer. However, this assessment is superficial and lacks rigour. As a result, leaders do not have a clear or accurate picture of the impact the curriculums they provide have on meeting local and regional skills needs.

Leaders have a good understanding of the local and regional skills need sectors. Leaders engage actively with Gloucestershire County Council, Swindon Borough Council, Business West, the Cotswolds Economic Advisory Group, Job Centre Plus and GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership to identify the skills, knowledge and behaviours learners need to develop and how the college can help to meet these needs. For example, leaders responded swiftly to the urgent needs of Swindon Borough Council to teach ESOL courses to adult refugees. Leaders worked closely with the Association of Colleges and the Department for Education to establish T-level courses from the first wave of their implementation. Leaders collaborate well with three regional colleges to agree on the contributions each makes towards meeting Local Skills Improvement Plan priorities. Frequent liaison between them ensures that funding bids are developed appropriately to support specific projects and deconflict curriculum and course offers of each college. Leaders have used Local Skills Improvement funding well to refurbish the library and T-level cyber security laboratory as part of their role as the lead provider in cyber digital T levels.

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

Leaders and managers do not have sufficient or accurate oversight of the quality of education and training of young learners and learners with high needs. They do not recognise weaknesses sufficiently well to ensure that learners, including the most disadvantaged, learners with SEND and those who have high needs make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders recognised rightly that too many apprentices were not successfully completing their apprenticeship, and they took effective action to improve this. For example, working more closely with employers to agree the sequence of on- and off-the-job training for apprentices. As a result, most apprentices who start an apprenticeship now achieve their qualification. However, leaders and managers actions to improve the number of young learners who achieve their qualification have been ineffective, including for those with high needs. Too many learners do not complete their course. As a result, they do not gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications they need to progress into jobs or further and higher education.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that all learners receive the advice and guidance they need to make informed choices about the course they study. Leaders do not use teachers' knowledge and expertise well enough to support learners to choose the most suitable programme for them. As a result, too many learners are studying courses which are too challenging, lack the appropriate level of support for their studies or lack relevance to their ambitions.

Leaders do not ensure that teachers have all the information they need to take account of what learners know and can do at the start of their programmes to plan teaching that challenges the more able learners and supports those who need help with their studies. Teachers complete an early rudimentary assessment of learners' abilities, but this does not provide them with useful or accurate information to accurately identify and address gaps in learners' prior knowledge and to ensure that teaching is impactful and enables learners to make rapid progress in learning new knowledge and skills.

The majority of teachers do not challenge learners enough to achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. For example, A-level biology teachers offer optional workshops to help learners who are struggling. However, few learners attend these workshops, including those learners who most need support to achieve their target grades. Level 2 T-level transition teachers' expectations of the academic abilities of learners with high needs are too low. They do not set learners work that is sufficiently challenging, and as a result, these learners do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers of GCSE English are not ambitious enough in the work they set learners to complete and do not use learners' starting points well enough. As a result, in the majority of GCSE English classes for younger learners, teachers only teach to the 'pass' criteria. While an above-average number of learners pass their GCSE qualification at the college, the majority of learners are not appropriately challenged or inspired to achieve higher grades or to make the progress that they are capable of.

Leaders do not plan programmes well enough so that learners with high needs can benefit from a curriculum that extends beyond their main qualification. For example, teachers do not ensure that learners receive the support and guidance they need to develop the wider skills and knowledge required to help them to achieve their education, health and care plan (EHCP) targets, such as preparing to leave home or moving into employment. Consequently, a minority of learners with high needs are not sufficiently well prepared for adulthood.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that younger learners, including those with high needs, are prepared well enough for their next steps into work. For example, too many learners do not take part in meaningful work experience. They therefore do not develop important employability skills or gain deeper insights into relevant careers or job roles. On the minority of courses where learners do undertake purposeful work placements, they gain valuable knowledge about the workplace, develop their self-confidence and deepen their subject knowledge.

Learners' attendance at GCSE English classes is too low. Managers and teachers rightly recognise this and have put measures in place to improve learners' attendance. However, this is yet to have an impact. Consequently, learners do not receive the teaching and support they need to make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders do not ensure that they have the important information they need to know how effective the education and training they provide has been in enabling learners to achieve their career or education goals. As a result, leaders do not have an accurate understanding of how successful their curriculums are.

Leaders and managers have improved the processes they use to recruit and enrol apprentices to ensure that they are well matched to their job roles. For example, leaders have improved the information employers provide about vacant job roles to ensure that staff more carefully select and prepare apprentices to study an apprenticeship. As a result, apprentices develop relevant knowledge quickly alongside the practical skills while at work as well as at college. They make good progress towards achieving their career aims.

Teachers are well qualified and demonstrate expertise in the areas they teach. They use this intelligently to plan a variety of teaching activities to support learners' acquisition of new knowledge and skills. For example, teachers of A-level biology use card sorting activities to build flow diagrams, which help learners visualise and retain the knowledge they are taught about complex processes of immunity. Teachers of ESOL plan opportunities for adult learners to identify how the formal and informal language they are developing will help them in the workplace and in daily life. Teachers of the level 3 business administrator apprenticeship ensure that apprentices take part in a comprehensive programme of additional mandatory and optional workshops, such as how to organise their time more effectively and how to manage workloads more efficiently to support their off-the-job learning and give them new key skills.

Leaders and managers provide useful training to teachers so that they can improve their subject knowledge, their teaching and assessment practice and their planning of curriculums. Staff attend helpful weekly teaching and learning meetings led by their peers to discuss and reflect on different approaches, such as pre-reading strategies. Teachers are mentored effectively by managers and are signposted to teaching and learning training sessions, such as questioning techniques. Leaders support apprenticeship coaches well to undertake teaching qualifications. As a result, most

teaching is of a good quality, and teachers provide learners and apprentices with useful feedback on their coursework, so they know what they need to do to improve.

Leaders and teachers provide learners with well-designed course materials and resources to support them to practise and gain new knowledge and technical skills. For example, level 3 creative media students make good use of a fully equipped control room and TV studio which contains a range of technical tools, such as high specification cameras with teleprompting and professional pedestals. As a result, learners create high-quality and professional standard portfolios and final major projects. A-level psychology teachers provide learners with useful workbooks, which they value as reference material and for the tasks set within them. A-level politics students access subscriptions to recognised political review and economist publications and this supports them well to remain up to date with national and world developments in these subjects.

Leaders and teachers carefully create an inclusive environment for most learners with high needs. Teachers have a good understanding of the needs of learners who have EHCPs. They plan the curriculum and their teaching well to ensure learners' individual needs are taken into account. For example, teachers use effective teaching and learning strategies, such as providing learners with additional notes, breaking tasks into manageable steps and time management techniques. As a result, most learners with high needs are supported well in class to develop their skills.

The majority of young learners and learners with high needs are taught useful and appropriate topics by their tutors in order to give them useful knowledge to use in their personal lives. For example, tutorial sessions are planned well so that learners are taught about important subjects, such as how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism, fundamental British values and healthy relationships. However, learners' attendance at tutorial sessions is too low and, as a result, too many learners do not recognise and cannot recall information on how to keep themselves safe and lead a healthy lifestyle.

Teachers plan securely a range of useful assessments to check learners understanding of the topics they teach. For example, T-level management and administration teachers build a series of mock assessments into the curriculum to build learners' confidence for the final exams at the end of the second year. A-level politics teachers use weekly quizzes to retrieve knowledge, link to current affairs and create an interclass competitive element. Most teachers provide useful feedback on assessments so that learners know what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. However, feedback is not always timed well to maximise the impact and give learners time to respond. Consequently, too few learners make the progress expected of them.

Teachers plan the teaching of English, mathematics and digital skills well so that these subjects are relevant to the main subjects learners are studying. For example, A-level psychology learners are taught the statistical analysis they need for research methods and develop their essay writing skills. A-level biology learners are taught how to analyse experimental data and the importance of using the correct

terminology in their written work. Teachers ensure that learners on level 2 T-level business transition programmes study e-commerce and learn the skills they need to design a basic website within a project. Teachers ensure that apprentices who need functional skills English and mathematics qualifications are supported quickly with well-planned lessons from the start of their apprenticeship. As a result, learners and apprentices develop appropriate skills to support their next steps.

Leaders ensure that learners and apprentices receive effective careers advice and guidance. Staff supplement this with useful events, such as a careers fair, where universities and employers visit the college to provide learners with information to help them learn more about future careers and further and higher education courses. Tutors teach valuable content on careers information and most learners can recall topics they have covered in these tutorials, such as different careers and job roles, and routes leading to university or apprenticeships. However, apprentices are not always clear about the range of opportunities available to them after they complete their apprenticeship, such as higher apprenticeships or higher education.

Governors ensure that the college fulfils its legal duties and responsibilities. Governors are, however, too accepting of what leaders tell them about the quality of education. This means that governors do not hold leaders to account robustly enough for the education and training they provide and do not help to ensure continuous and sustainable improvement. This is in part because leaders do not provide sufficiently precise analysis on key weaknesses in the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the number of young learners who stay on their course, and the number of young learners and learners with high needs who pass their qualifications.
- Improve initial advice and guidance for learners so that they choose and study the right course.
- Improve the assessment of what learners know and can do when they begin studying their course, and the ongoing assessments of learners' knowledge and skills so that teachers and learners know whether they are making the progress of which they are capable, can identify their gaps in knowledge and can restructure the curriculum accordingly.
- Increase the number of young learners and learners with high needs taking part in high-quality work experience placements so that those who plan to move into employment are suitably prepared.
- Increase the attendance of young learners and learners with high needs for all parts of their programme, including GCSE English and mathematics classes and tutorial sessions.

- Increase and improve stakeholder engagement in the curriculum design for education programmes for young people and learners with high needs so that learners develop industry-relevant skills.
- Improve the focus of curriculum reports so that governors can more robustly challenge leaders on the progress made by learners in their learning and their achievement of qualifications.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130686
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Contact number	01285 640 994
Website	https://cirencester.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Matt Reynolds
Provider type	Sixth-form college
Dates of previous inspection	20 to 23 November 2018
Main subcontractors	Apricot Online Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal curriculum and 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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