

# Inspection of Abingdon and Witney College

Inspection dates: 30 April to 3 May 2024

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
<hr/>	
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</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>Outstanding</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Abingdon and Witney College is a further education college based in Oxfordshire, with campuses in Abingdon, Witney and Common Lees. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 2,000 learners studying education programmes for young people, 6,500 adult learners, 700 learners training as apprentices and 330 learners in receipt of high-needs funding.

The college offers a wide range of courses and training from entry level to level 6. Most learners aged 16 to 18 years old study vocational and T-level courses in a range of subjects, including creative media, art, digital and animal management. Adult learners study programmes including English for speakers of other languages, counselling and horticulture as well as a significant range of community learning courses. Apprentices train as carpenters at level 2, plumbers at level 3, business administrators at level 3 and chartered managers at level 6. Learners with high needs study courses that prepare them for independent living, employment and further learning, including at higher levels.

Abingdon and Witney College works with 11 subcontractors, including The Mill Arts Centre Trust, EMBS Community College and Better Training Limited.

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

Learners and apprentices are highly respectful and tolerant of staff and others in the college community. They value and celebrate diversity and individuality. Learners and apprentices are courteous towards all within the college and their behaviour is exemplary. Learners and apprentices are positive ambassadors for the college, equipped with the behaviours they need for study, work and life.

Learners and apprentices are highly motivated to succeed. They work hard in lessons and at work, taking pride in their achievements. Most learners and apprentices attend well and demonstrate high levels of commitment to their studies. In the small number of instances where this is not the case, staff provide learners with effective support and work closely in partnership with colleagues and parents successfully to intervene. Consequently, learners develop strategies to overcome challenges and are persistent in the face of difficulties.

Learners and apprentices benefit greatly from calm, well-equipped classrooms and other training environments. For example, learners at the Common Lees campus enjoy industry-standard equine facilities that enable them to develop their knowledge of equine breeding. Learners with high needs have specialist facilities and spaces they need to thrive. As a result, learners and apprentices become used to working in the professional environments they might expect to see in industry or higher education.

Learners and apprentices grow in character and become more confident over time. They develop their understanding of strategies they can use to keep themselves mentally and physically healthy. They learn about the differences between healthy and coercive relationships. As a result, learners and apprentices develop the knowledge to help them live positively.

Many learners take part in plentiful, high-quality college and community activities, including educational trips, community events, social action projects and competitions. Learners at the Common Lees campus take part in countryside fairs, community dog shows and events open to the public. Learners training in hairdressing and barbering compete in national competitions. GCSE English learners write short pieces for publication. Learners value the knowledge and experiences they gain and learn how to make a positive contribution to their communities. Learners and apprentices at the smaller Witney and Common Lees campuses do not have access to as wide a range of activities that develop their interests and talents. While leaders are taking action to resolve this, it is too early to see the impact.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college, online and at work. They understand the risks of extremist views and know how to keep themselves safe from radicalisation. Learners and apprentices, including those with additional needs, understand the risks of speaking with strangers online. Learners and apprentices are confident that staff will act quickly and appropriately if they have any welfare concerns.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have established and maintain a wide range of very effective partnerships to identify and respond to national, regional and local skills needs. They work closely with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce to meet the priorities of the local skills improvement plan (LSIP) successfully. As a result, leaders and managers have a clear and secure understanding of skills sector priorities and provide a relevant curriculum offer to meet these needs.

Leaders and managers play a central role in LSIP development groups and stakeholder networks to respond to skills priorities in construction, green skills and sustainability, adult social care, engineering and agriculture. They design programmes of learning such as T levels and higher technical qualifications to meet the skills needs of learners moving on to higher education courses. Employers and stakeholders value highly the detailed knowledge leaders and managers bring and the skills developments they coordinate in response.

Leaders know the needs of their local communities very well. They use their well-established partnerships with local councils, schools and community groups to offer people in Oxfordshire valuable opportunities to learn and socialise. For example, they offer courses to improve parenting skills along with programmes to support the education and well-being of carers. With their clear understanding of the needs and challenges of their communities, leaders fulfil their commitment to social responsibility effectively.

Managers and staff work with employers and stakeholders effectively to ensure that the design and teaching of courses provide learners and apprentices with the education and training their chosen sectors demand. For example, in the plumbing and domestic heating apprenticeship, manufacturers provide training in central heating systems and wiring, ahead of apprentices' assessments in vented systems. As a result, learners and apprentices acquire up-to-date knowledge, skills and behaviours to prepare them well for their next steps.

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

Leaders and managers have successfully established a culture of inclusion. They are passionate about providing learners and communities with opportunities to 'be extraordinary'. Disadvantaged learners value highly the learning and social opportunities as well as the breadth of community learning that courses offer. Learners with high needs and those with previously poor experiences in education are supported well to learn and become independent. Learners are often able to progress to higher levels of learning where they show a strong commitment to their studies. Staff embrace the inclusive culture and, together with leaders, they serve their communities well.

Teachers benefit from helpful and high-quality training to develop their teaching skills and remain current within their industries. Staff with extensive industry experience and those new to teaching develop their teaching skills quickly with the help of teaching specialists. As a result, most learners and apprentices are taught well by staff who have up-to-date knowledge and experience.

Teachers plan learning carefully. They ensure learners and apprentices have a firm understanding of fundamental topics and skills before moving on to more complex tasks and content. In the level 2 diploma in hairdressing, learners develop technical competence and improve their communication skills before undertaking work experience. Having learned about health and safety, level 2 carpentry apprentices complete risk assessments to define the level of ear protection needed when using power tools. Learners and apprentices build their knowledge and skills over time and demonstrate mastery in terms of knowledge and skills.

Teachers use teaching activities effectively so learners and apprentices become increasingly confident and competent in their studies. Level 3 plumbing and domestic heating technician apprentices correctly apply their understanding of technical gas standards when conducting tightness tests. Art foundation diploma learners apply what they have learned about budgetary constraints, planning restrictions and end-user needs when working on live community projects. As a result, learners understand how to put into practice what they learn at college in the workplace.

Most teachers check learners' and apprentices' understanding well. They quickly correct any misunderstandings that learners and apprentices form. As a result, the work that learners and apprentices produce and the terminology they use are accurate and appropriate.

Most teachers use assessment well to provide learners and apprentices with helpful feedback. Adults training in dog grooming use feedback to successfully adjust their animal holding techniques so that dogs are calmer. In the level 3 diploma in sport, teachers provide clear feedback so learners know how to plan and structure their assignments to secure better grades. Most learners act on the feedback teachers provide and the standard of their work improves.

Learners and apprentices benefit from a well-planned programme of careers education, advice and guidance. They value the presentations and information that employers and higher education institutions provide. They welcome advice about the sectors they are training in, from staff with significant industry experience. Consequently, learners and apprentices feel confident to make decisions about their next steps.

Leaders and staff provide purposeful courses and training for adults, many of whom are disadvantaged. Leaders ensure adult education courses meet the demands and needs of the local community well. Learners studying the level 3 diploma for the early years workforce develop the expertise needed to work in a skills shortage

sector. Those new to the country benefit from learning English which they use to access local services and build their lives in new communities successfully. Those at risk of isolation develop positive friendships through classes such as basic cookery. They learn essential skills to thrive in the community, such as how to manage household budgets. Most adult learners achieve well and value the opportunities to improve their careers, prospects and lives.

Staff use apprentices' starting points very well to design highly detailed training plans, including for those with additional needs. With employers, staff frequently and regularly review apprentices' progress and set challenging targets consistently well. Consequently, apprentices rapidly acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers value highly.

Apprentices benefit greatly from high-quality, industry-standard facilities which teachers use effectively. Level 2 carpentry apprentices learn about sustainable energy solutions such as solar thermal equipment and air source heat pumps. Level 3 plumbing and domestic heating apprentices learn to use gas flue analysers from a leading manufacturer. Nearly all apprentices move on to employment, drawing on additional knowledge they have learned beyond their main programme. Apprentices produce work to a high standard. Their written work is detailed and their practical skills are well honed. Apprentices achieve very well, often securing distinction grades.

Highly experienced staff work successfully with specialist staff to provide high-quality support and teaching for learners with high needs. They use their expertise skilfully to use carefully selected strategies to help learners with specific challenges. For example, learners with autism take part in extra activities to help them build relationships with others. Parents value highly the support that learners receive. As a result, learners with high needs achieve very well and often outperform their peers. A high proportion move on to further learning and paid or voluntary employment.

Teachers and specialist support staff provide valuable opportunities for learners with high needs to learn and practise the skills they need for greater independence and their next steps. Teachers and staff appropriately reduce support so learners develop strategies to cook and clean for themselves. Learners grow produce and make items to sell at local markets for social enterprise projects. In doing so, they develop the communication skills and confidence to take part in their local community. As a result, learners with high needs develop the skills for independent living and work.

Leaders and managers are well focused on continually improving the quality of education and training that they provide. Most staff value their role in making improvements to learners' and apprentices' experiences. Many of the actions leaders and managers take lead to sustained improvement. Subcontractors value and benefit from clear communication, strong partnerships and frequent links with curriculum managers. However, senior leaders and governors do not scrutinise subcontracted provision robustly enough to assure themselves of the quality of this education and training.

Leaders place high priority on staff well-being and workload. They help staff who need additional support, for example through wellness action plans that enable staff to appropriately manage their work and personal circumstances. Leaders carefully consider and review staff workload and make appropriate changes, such as adjusting managers' teaching loads depending on their responsibilities. As a result, most staff feel listened to and cared for by leaders.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the provision. They benefit from attending workshops and the annual student conference which helps them understand learners' experiences and achievements. They scrutinise the impact of leaders' and managers' improvement actions closely. Governors provide leaders with helpful support and challenge to ensure the strategy for the college remains relevant and that safeguarding arrangements remain effective.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Further develop enrichment opportunities for learners at the Witney and Common Lees campuses.
- Make sure leaders have clear and robust oversight of the quality of subcontracted provision.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130793
<b>Address</b>	Wootton Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 1GG
<b>Contact number</b>	01235555585
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://abingdon-witney.ac.uk">https://abingdon-witney.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Jacqui Canton
<b>Provider type</b>	Further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28 to 31 March 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	EMBS Community College Limited The Mill Arts Centre Trust Better Training Limited Castleview Group Training Limited

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-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

Mark Hillman, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jo-Ann Henderson	His Majesty's Inspector
Sara Woodward	His Majesty's Inspector
Ann Monaghan	His Majesty's Inspector
Stuart Allen	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Collinson-Bolles	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Dyson	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Folwell	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Giles	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Le-Good	Ofsted Inspector
Jenny Thorpe	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Wills	Ofsted Inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2024