

# Inspection of South Devon College

Inspection dates: 30 April to 3 May 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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

## Information about this provider

South Devon College (SDC) is a large general further education college that operates in Torbay and south Devon. The college provides a wide range of academic, vocational and higher education courses, including apprenticeships from entry level to level 7. The college provides T-levels in health, engineering, digital and childcare. It also has specialist training in maritime and sea fishery industries. At the time of inspection, there were around 2,300 students aged 16 to 18 years old, 2,200 adult students, 1,600 apprentices and 275 students in receipt of high-needs funding studying at the college. SDC also provides full-time education to around 200 14 to 16-year-olds through the South Devon High School.

The college has four main campuses. Most students and apprentices attend the Paignton campus. The Paignton campus is also the site of the university centre, hi-tech and digital centre and the South Devon High School.

The Newton Abbot campus provides specialist resources for training in automotive engineering. The marine academy is based at the Noss on Dart Marina, Kingswear, and provides specialist resources for maritime training. The Torquay campus provides training for health and care industries, as well as English and mathematics courses for adult students.

SDC does not work with any subcontractors and does not offer bootcamps.

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

Lecturers and tutors create a calm and exceptionally purposeful environment for students and apprentices to study in. Staff are highly effective at linking their expectations of behaviour to what is expected of students and apprentices in the workplace.

Lecturers are committed to providing high-quality training that develops skills, knowledge and behaviours that students and apprentices can use to achieve their goals or improve their life chances. Because of this, students and apprentices recognise the value of what they are learning and enjoy their time at college. They are highly motivated to do well, and many overcome significant socioeconomic barriers to make exceptional progress. Occasionally, however, assessment is not used as well as it could be to build teaching on what students can already do and help them make progress in their learning.

Staff have high expectations that they model and communicate very well. They create a safe environment in which students and apprentices feel valued and respected. Staff treat students and apprentices with care, courtesy and professionalism, inspiring them to achieve the best that they can. As a result, students and apprentices swiftly develop highly professional behaviours.

Leaders have developed a rich curriculum that helps students to understand why it is important to contribute actively to society and how their education journey prepares them to do this. Staff provide students and apprentices with many valuable opportunities to take part in skills competitions and charitable projects which help them develop their talents and interests. For example, leaders supported over 300 students and apprentices to take part in a 'young entrepreneurs' enrichment programme. Over half of these students were from disadvantaged backgrounds, half had special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and around a quarter were young carers. As a result, those who entered had the opportunity to gain valuable new knowledge by producing business plans, as well as developing their creative skills in an inclusive setting.

Staff work exceptionally well with students with high needs. This ensures these students have access to the adaptive technology or physical support they need to engage in learning. All students with high needs feel very well supported. They grow in confidence and resilience, and achieve at least as well as their peers.

Students studying at the pre-16 high school behave well during lessons and are well mannered and respectful. This is because staff develop highly effective relationships with students, whom they treat as young adults. The students also develop excellent levels of self-motivation, volunteering, for example, to promote courses at open evenings or to undertake further study after school.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have developed highly effective connections with stakeholders and have a comprehensive understanding of the local and regional skills landscape. They use this knowledge very well to identify and plan training in priority industries such as health, marine engineering, green construction, tourism and hospitality. For example, leaders worked with the local council to identify the need for a sea fisher apprenticeship to bring new people into the industry and to create a clear progression path through to vessel leadership. Leaders have also worked closely with local photonics employers to design a unique suite of accredited and non-accredited courses for adult students and employers to develop knowledge and skills in packaging microchips.

Leaders are highly effective at involving stakeholders in the planning and revision of existing curriculums across all provision types. All curriculum areas have highly relevant links to stakeholders. Lecturers engage very well with these stakeholders to review and shape the curriculum. For example, following input from a local NHS trust, tutors added content on initiatives such as a trial of 'no gloves infection control' into the apprenticeship curriculum. This supported the development of apprentices' understanding of current practice. This illustrates how leaders provide training which is thoroughly aligned to the needs of the community in which they work and has a significant positive impact on skills shortages across the south Devon area.

Leaders and managers have devised a highly effective strategy in partnership with the local authority to develop provision for students with high needs. The college works exceptionally well with an extensive group of stakeholders from local business and community organisations. These provide workplace opportunities that support these students towards appropriate employment and independent living.

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

Leaders and managers have successfully developed an ambitious curriculum for students and apprentices, including those with SEND. Almost all programmes go above and beyond the qualification specification. This enables students and apprentices to develop their knowledge and skills beyond the basics, thus making them more attractive to future employers. For example, students studying painting and decorating at level 2 learn how to use a spray gun, developing the valuable skills which local employers require. Tutors on the level 5 assistant practitioners in healthcare programme teach anatomy and physiology in a greater depth than required for the apprenticeship standard. Because of this, apprentices can apply their learning well in their workplace, developing their confidence as well as supporting their preparation for higher-level studies, such as degree programmes in adult nursing or occupational therapy.

Leaders continuously take well-considered actions to improve the quality of teaching. They have created a positive culture of support for evidence-informed teaching. Because of this, when improvements are needed, lecturers skilfully adapt how and what they teach, supporting their students well.

Governors provide effective scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the college well. They use their experience in, for example, local authorities and regional skills development bodies to help assure themselves that leaders are providing high-quality, relevant training that meets the needs of employers and the local community. Leaders provide governors with valuable reports which they use very effectively to hold leaders to account for the continued improvement of the quality of training.

Lecturers have constructed curriculums that are very effective in helping most students and apprentices build on prior learning and develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. For example, students studying GCSE English start with how to write simply and concisely. They then learn to use increasingly complex writing and, as a result, develop high-quality written skills. Adult students studying hairdressing learn basic cuts such as one-length cut before moving on to layering techniques and different ways of finishing a hairstyle. As a result, these students develop increasingly complex knowledge and skills for cutting different types of hair.

Tutors skilfully plan training that allows apprentices to use the valuable new skills and knowledge they develop. As a result, apprentices become more effective in their workplace. For example, tutors teaching the operations/department manager programme at level 5 teach apprentices about reflective practice at the start of their training so that they can use this to help identify the progress they make throughout their programmes. Because of this, the apprentices make swift progress and are able to apply their reflective skills to the workplace, supporting those whom they manage. However, occasionally tutors do not use information about what apprentices know and can do at the start of their course well enough to personalise teaching. As a result, a small minority of apprentices do not make progress at the pace they are capable of.

Leaders and managers ensure that lecturers and tutors have high levels of expertise in the industries which they teach. Staff complete annual professional development training to ensure that their knowledge of industry practice remains current and they use this to inform their teaching. As a result, students and apprentices gain valuable insights into the sectors for which they are training. For example, many staff who teach the assistant practitioner healthcare apprenticeship at level 5 remain employed in specialist practitioner roles, such as podiatry, alongside their college employment. They have an excellent understanding of current industry practice, which they use skilfully to inform the curriculum. As a result, students benefit from valuable insights into the different ways they might apply the new skills and knowledge they develop.

Lecturers at the high school have designed a high-quality, broad curriculum that meets the needs of their students. When appropriate, they make valuable adaptations to what they teach. For example, following feedback from an employer, lecturers teaching childcare introduced a babysitting and a safeguarding qualification. As a result, students gain valuable skills and are better prepared for the world of work and further study.

Leaders provide ambitious training for adults. They have an effective strategy for adult students, which covers three themes: upskilling, reskilling and re-engagement. Because of this, lecturers provide training which is well aligned to the needs of the local community, including a broad range of courses for adults to develop their work-life balance or earning potential. For example, lecturers teaching hairdressing at level 2 support adults to learn valuable new skills. Lecturers of adult students have also created an effective culture in which students feel valued. They respond well to students' needs, for example considering times when students need to manage commitments such as childcare, and ensure that there are opportunities for students to catch up on missed learning. Very occasionally, lecturers on adult courses do not check students' understanding of the taught topics well enough to identify any gaps in learning and inform subsequent teaching.

Lecturers and tutors of students aged 16 to 18, students with high needs and apprentices typically use assessment very skilfully to inform subsequent teaching. They expertly adjust learning sessions to ensure that students and apprentices have a solid understanding of new topics before moving on. For example, lecturers in computing at level 3 use online tools highly effectively to assess knowledge. They provide valuable feedback to students, addressing any misconceptions or gaps in students' knowledge. Staff who teach on T-levels use highly effective teaching methods to promote learning and prepare students for their exams. For example, lecturers use skilful questioning to draw out detailed knowledge, often guiding students to support each other in the development of full answers.

Lecturers and support staff for programmes specifically designed for students with high needs know their students very well. They liaise effectively with parents and carers to understand how best to support students' progress and ensure that any anxieties are swiftly addressed. Lecturers adapt their teaching with skill, ensuring that all students have ambitious goals and achievable targets. Employers are involved in both the planning and delivery of highly effective work placements that support students with high needs into both independent adulthood and employment. For example, lecturers work with a local hotel to provide students with well-planned skills assessment at the hotel site. Lecturers and employers use these assessments exceptionally well to identify students who are ready for longer work placements, as well as helping to develop teamwork, physical dexterity and mobility. Because of this, these students achieve most of their targets, including those identified in their education, health and care plans. They make excellent progress from their starting points, developing independence and often securing employment.

Staff who work with students with high needs on vocational or academic programmes have an excellent understanding of their support requirements. Lecturers work highly effectively with specialist staff to provide high-quality, personalised support for these students. As a result, staff give students the opportunity to learn in the way that suits them so that they can access all parts of the curriculum. Because of this, these students achieve at least as well as their peers, with many achieving high grades.

Leaders have developed highly effective methods of engaging and re-engaging students and apprentices who experience difficulties during their training. They have put in place a highly effective re-engagement process, through which staff support and retain students and apprentices who are at risk of leaving or are struggling with their studies. As a result, most of these students continue with their training, grow in confidence, become more motivated and successfully complete their studies.

Leaders and managers ensure that students and apprentices receive effective careers information and guidance. All students receive high-quality, contextualised careers advice as part of their training, as well as having access to the specialist college careers team. Because of this, students and apprentices are clear about the options they have for their next steps and how these link to the knowledge, skills and behaviours they are developing.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Ensure that knowledge about what apprentices know and can do at the start of their programme is used to plan their training effectively.
- Ensure that the assessment of adults' work is used to help plan subsequent teaching.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Laurence Frewin
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education provider
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	31 October to 3 November 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None



## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal and deputy chief executive officer, 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 students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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