

Inspection of Northampton College

Inspection dates: 8 to 11 October 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Information about this provider

Northampton College is a very large further education college with three sites in the Northampton area. The largest campus at Booth Lane is to the northeast of the town centre and offers courses in a wide range of subjects. Lower Mounts campus is located close to the town centre and provides courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and for adults in English, mathematics and digital skills. A third campus is in the nearby town of Daventry and offers courses in a wide range of vocational subjects.

At the time of the inspection, there were just over 5,000 16- to 18-year-old students at the college, accounting for around three-quarters of the college's total funding. Of these, around 1,000 were studying at entry level or level 1, around 1,600 were studying level 2 courses and around 2,500 were studying at level 3. Most of these students were studying vocational courses, but a small number were taking the A-level courses in social sciences that managers have just reintroduced. A small number of students take T levels in health and social care, childcare, computing and construction.

There were around 1,500 adult students at the time of the inspection, studying access to higher education courses, vocational courses in subjects, such as hairdressing, and English and mathematics qualifications, including courses in English for speakers of other languages. The college also offers distance learning courses through a subcontractor, but these are offered later in the academic year and there were no distance learning students at the time of the inspection.

The college had just under 300 apprentices. Of these, around two-thirds were studying at level 3 and the remainder at level 2. Apprenticeship standards with the largest numbers of apprentices at level 3 are installation and maintenance electrician, engineering technician, metal fabricator, maintenance and operations engineering technician, early years educator, motor vehicle service and maintenance technician – light vehicle, general welder (arc processes), engineering fitter. At level 2 the autocare technician, and carpentry and joinery apprenticeships have the most apprentices.

There were 274 students with high needs. Of these, 75 were undertaking supported learning programmes with the remaining 199 enrolled on academic and vocational courses across the college.

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

Leaders and managers create a welcoming, calm and supportive environment for students and apprentices. Most students and apprentices, including those with high needs, feel valued and able to succeed.

Students and apprentices are satisfied with the standard of education that they receive. They enjoy attending college and are often proud of the work that they do. In most cases, they study courses and qualifications that have been chosen to match available career opportunities. As a result, most develop the skills and knowledge they need for future success. At the end of their courses, many move on to further study at the college or at university, while others secure or sustain employment.

Most students and apprentices are well motivated and benefit from positive relationships with their teachers. Teachers help students to recognise their strengths and to build their confidence and this helps them to deal with adversity as they progress through their courses.

Students and apprentices feel safe at the college. They are aware of the college's safeguarding arrangements and are confident that staff will take any concerns seriously and deal with them appropriately. Those who have reported concerns say that they were resolved swiftly.

Young people benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities that help them to explore their talents and interests. They participate in work experience that helps them to gain an insight into the world of work and the skills and attributes they need to have a successful career. Students in a small number of curriculum areas benefit from participation in skills competitions. Young students participate in a tutorial programme that helps them to understand the world around them so that they can be active and responsible citizens. They develop an understanding of fundamental British values and the risks of radicalisation. They also develop their knowledge of topics such as healthy relationships and healthy lifestyles.

Students with high needs, who participate in academic and vocational courses, receive effective support that helps them to have similar experiences to other young people at the college. They benefit from the expertise of staff who have received specialist training in topics, like trauma. A small number of students on supported learning courses do not have enough opportunities to participate in work experience or to practise the skills that they need to live independently.

Adult students benefit from the work that staff do with stakeholders. Working with the local authority, for example, college staff have developed their English for speakers of other languages provision to help Ukrainian and Afghan refugees integrate quickly into their new surroundings.

Most apprentices benefit from the close working relationships that college staff have with their employers. This means that the work that apprentices complete at college is usually coordinated well with the things that they do in the workplace. In many cases, curriculums are organised to ensure that apprentices can rapidly become useful to their employers.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work with stakeholders very successfully to understand the skills needs of the local, regional and national economy. However, the work that managers and teachers undertake with employers and other stakeholders to shape the curriculum is not always fully effective.

Leaders have developed highly specialised new courses to meet the skills needs in Northamptonshire. For example, they have developed full-time level 2 and level 3 logistics courses for young people in Daventry to meet the need for trained logistics employees. They have introduced footwear apprenticeships that meet the particular needs of the local high-end footwear industry. Leaders have invested in high-quality specialist facilities to support their work, including a footwear training facility and a 'green' technologies centre. Leaders have placed the college at the centre of the local community. They are key members of arts stakeholder groups within the town and provide workshop space for community groups preparing for the Northampton carnival. They also provide venues for events, such as those for young entrepreneurs and for women in engineering and construction. Leaders and managers work with stakeholders to provide students with a wide range of valuable work-related experiences. For example, students on logistics courses visit logistics sites to gain an understanding of the working environment and employers speak to students at the college to inform them about the range of roles within the sector. Students who study hairdressing and beauty therapy undertake a digital project with Digital Northants to develop social media content to promote their services.

The extent to which managers involve stakeholders in the design of courses varies and a few courses include too little input from stakeholders. Where this work is undertaken it enhances the curriculum and ensures that students develop the skills and knowledge that they need. Examples include the work that managers of courses in games design do with employers and university staff, to develop live briefs that enable students to work alongside professionals.

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

Leaders and managers consider carefully the national, regional and local landscape when planning the curriculum. They have introduced courses and content to fill local

skills gaps. For example, they have added heritage skills, such as making sash windows, to the level 2 carpentry and joinery apprenticeship.

Most teachers organise topics logically. They sensibly plan to revisit topics over the duration of courses. For example, in functional skills mathematics, teachers revisit each topic several times throughout the programme, each time at a deeper level. Most students and apprentices find their courses challenging and make suitable progress.

Most teachers, support workers and managers provide effective help for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Most students with SEND make good progress.

Teachers know their subjects well. Most have substantial industry experience that they draw on to enhance lessons. They make frequent, meaningful links between their teaching and the workplace. For example, many art and design teachers continue to work as artists and draw on their own experiences of participating in exhibitions or running a studio to bring their subject to life.

Most teachers use questioning and practical activities well to check students' and apprentices' understanding, and to help them to reflect on key concepts and theories. Occasionally, teachers do not check students' and apprentices' understanding well enough and move on to new topics too quickly.

A small number of teachers do not take sufficient account of what students and apprentices already know and can do when they prepare lessons. Consequently, they plan activities that are either too easy or too difficult and from which students do not benefit.

Most teachers plan and use assessment well to help students to gain fluency and consistency. For example, bricklaying teachers provide extensive opportunities for students to practise in environments that accurately reflect what happens in the workplace and this helps them to develop the quality and speed of their work. Most teachers frequently review students' and apprentices' work and provide clear and developmental feedback that helps them to make improvements.

Teachers prepare students and apprentices well for assessments and final examinations. A large majority of students benefit from additional activities, such as extra support sessions, to consolidate their knowledge. This helps them to produce work that meets at least the expected standard, and the vast majority pass their qualifications.

Most students and apprentices attend well and arrive to lessons on time and ready to learn. Managers prioritise good attendance and work closely with students and apprentices to overcome any challenges that they face.

Managers have developed a tutorial programme that helps students to develop their understanding of a range of personal development topics. Students discuss themes

such as fundamental British values, healthy living and healthy relationships. They learn about a range of safeguarding topics, including the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism. Most students understand these topics well and can, for example, discuss topics related to the rule of law and democracy.

Leaders and other staff ensure that students have access to a broad range of careers activities, including advice events, careers fairs, and talks by guest speakers. Students also receive careers guidance from their teachers. These arrangements help students to make good choices about their future.

Leaders are very ambitious and aspire to a culture of excellence. They use a broad and appropriate range of quality improvement activities that are mainly well thought out. In a few cases, these activities result in reports that paint an overly positive picture of the quality of education, which limits their contribution to quality improvement.

All teachers benefit from useful staff development that includes a focus on how to improve their teaching. They attend the college's professional development days and annual teaching conference. These events include important topics such as questioning and retrieval practice. Teachers also undertake helpful subject-specific training sessions. For example, the mathematics team undertook training about how to better teach calculator use so that students process new information more quickly.

New and underperforming teachers receive extensive and focused additional support to improve their teaching. Teachers who are performing well benefit from attendance at a range of professional development activities, but these are not always focused on any specific aspects of their teaching that would benefit from further improvement.

Governors are highly experienced in their fields, which include further and higher education, finance, and risk management. They know the college well and help to support and shape its strategic direction. In most cases, governors receive reports that help them to understand different aspects of the college's performance, and to provide leaders with suitable challenge.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Consistently take account of what students and apprentices already know and can do when planning the curriculum, to ensure that tasks and activities are suitably challenging.

- Provide high needs students on supported learning programmes with enough opportunities to practise their independent living skills and participate in work experience.
- Ensure that all quality assurance processes result in accurate judgements about the quality of education.
- Improve the professional development process for staff so that those staff who are doing well receive focused support to make them even better.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130769
Address	Main Campus Booth Lane Northampton Northamptonshire NN3 3RF
Contact number	01604734200
Website	http://www.northamptoncollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jason Lancaster
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	30 October to 2 November 2018
Main subcontractors	Learning Curve Group Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal and chief operating 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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

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