

Inspection of Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 1 to 4 October 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

Newcastle and Stafford College Group (NSCG) is a large general further education college based on two campuses in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford. The college offers a broad range of academic, technical and vocational courses from entry level to level 5. The largest subject areas are health and care, business, engineering, construction, sport, and performing arts.

At the time of inspection, 6,293 learners aged 16 to 18, 535 adults, 1,003 apprentices and 203 learners with high needs were studying at the college. Three quarters of learners aged 16 to 18 study at level 3, a third of them on A levels, and most A-level learners study at the Newcastle-under-Lyme site. Almost 600 learners study T levels. Adults study on courses from entry level to level 3. Apprentices study a wide range of apprenticeships, from level 2 to level 5, with more than half studying at level 3. Most learners with high needs study on academic and vocational courses, with around a third studying on courses specifically designed for them at entry level and level 1. The college currently works with one subcontractor who delivers courses in plant operations to adult learners.

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

Learners and apprentices quickly learn substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Teachers have extremely high expectations of them and plan their teaching sessions skilfully. Learners value the knowledge and support offered by teachers and can recall their learning exceptionally well.

Learners and apprentices enjoy learning at college. They are enthusiastic and motivated about their education and futures. Learners' and apprentices' behaviours mirror the high expectations set by staff. Teachers create highly supportive, calm and highly aspirational environments in which learners and apprentices thrive. Learners' and apprentices' attendance and punctuality is exemplary.

Learners and apprentices treat each other and the college staff with due respect. Staff are excellent role models; they are professional, friendly, incredibly supportive and work tirelessly to meet the needs of their learners and apprentices. Learners know how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views and are aware of risks relevant to where they study and work.

Younger learners make excellent progress on their courses. They develop extensive knowledge beyond the requirements of the course they are studying. Teachers deliver a breadth of personal development topics in the curriculum. Learners can talk fluently about healthy relationships and mental health awareness. They take part in sports teams and sports for all abilities. Learners participate in a wide range of enrichment activities, which suit their own talents and interests and support their career aspirations.

Adult learners benefit from courses which provide the skills they need for their next steps. Learners studying on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses gain in confidence through improved communication in their daily lives. Learners on the access to health courses gain the skills and knowledge they need to prepare them for higher level study and working in the health sector. Learners in electrical installation gain the specific skills that local employers require and, therefore, have enhanced job prospects.

Apprentices make outstanding progress. Apprentices at all levels, develop the knowledge skills and behaviours that they need to be highly effective at work. They quickly become valued members of their workplace. Apprentices put their new learning into practice quickly. Apprentices studying early years practitioner at level 2 conduct observations using their knowledge of play, and stages of children's development. Most apprentices take on additional responsibilities at work early on in their training.

Staff have high aspirations for learners with high needs. Learners make rapid progress from their starting points. Learners on foundation courses receive the specialist support they need to develop greater independence, and the knowledge and skills to move on to higher level courses, supported internships and

employment. Learners on vocational and academic courses make progress at least in line with their peers.

Learners, including those with high needs, take advantage of the well-planned and plentiful opportunities for encounters with the world of work, including work experience. Staff provide learners with access to support from an expert careers guidance team. The combination of good planning, relevant experiences, and high achievements means that learners frequently move on to the place of their choice.

Learners feel safe at NSCG. New learners benefit from exceptional transition arrangements, which swiftly make them feel comfortable and familiar in new surroundings. Leaders and managers are visible and familiar to learners. College leaders and staff have created a positive environment, and they never tolerate bullying and harassment.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have exceptional links with local employers, universities and regional business groups. They collaborate effectively with partners and are agile in the way they create a challenging curriculum to help learners achieve ambitious career goals. Leaders have developed a curriculum which strongly reflects the knowledge and skills required in the local skills improvement plan. They prioritise the health and care, engineering, construction, and digital sectors. Leaders have been swift to successfully implement T levels within these priority sectors.

Leaders have taken a lead role in planning, developing and the build of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Institute of Technology. They have worked alongside the local university, national employers and local colleges to offer courses which will develop the technical skills most needed in the region.

Staff at all levels work highly collaboratively with important stakeholders, including local authorities and the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, to understand the local economy, job market and priorities. Staff are working with the Borough Councils of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford to develop premises in the town centres to reach the most disadvantaged learners. Leaders have adapted ESOL courses to meet the needs of adults working in the care sector in Stafford, and those in the community who are most disadvantaged.

The principal chairs the Association of Staffordshire Colleges. This group has secured local skills improvement funding to increase the courses available in local colleges to meet skills priorities.

Staff collaborate productively with employers and other stakeholders in the decisions made about the content of their curriculums. Staff adapt the curriculum for brick work apprentices to include working with timber frames, following requests from employers. Furthermore, a few courses have a curriculum that is co-taught with

academic experts. For example, in sport science, teachers run sessions within local universities to gather and analyse data from observations of the impact of intensive exercise on the body.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders have strengthened the development of skills in their curriculums and improved outcomes for learners. With clarity and passion, they set high expectations for staff and learners. They provide high-quality education through which most learners and apprentices move on to their aspirational next steps. Learners and apprentices do exceptionally well on both sites.

Leaders have invested extensively in state-of-the-art facilities at both sites, which supports the current skills priorities. Leaders have ensured there are high-quality resources available for learners to use, which helps them to develop their skills in professional environments. For example, the health room at Newcastle-under-Lyme is set up as a hospital ward with interactive manikins. This helps T-level learners to be competent prior to their work placement in topics, such as manual handling.

Governors are highly committed to the strategic vision of the NSCG. They have a detailed knowledge of the local and regional economic and educational context. They provide a strong oversight of, and useful insights into, the strategic developments. Governors know the college very well and make frequent visits. They understand the strengths and priorities for improvement and hold senior leaders to account very effectively.

Leaders and managers use management information and quality improvement processes exceptionally well. Managers at all levels focus on learners' progress and swiftly identify courses and learners who are underperforming. They quickly put in place actions to improve performance. Teachers improve their practice based on the support they receive from teaching and learning coaches and from visiting other high performing teachers. Such actions have contributed to improvements in learners' achievements in level 3 mathematics, biology and applied science.

Leaders and managers continuously improve teachers' subject and teaching knowledge. Leaders provide well-designed training courses, which focus on ways to plan and teach the curriculum, based on recent academic research. Leaders skilfully match the training to the needs and experience of teachers. Teachers on vocational courses regularly update their vocational skills and knowledge. Teachers' knowledge and skills build consistently over time, which improves the quality of education for learners.

Teachers plan the content of their curriculums highly effectively. Teachers use information about learners' starting points to plan accurately the activities and support they need to achieve their potential. Teachers plan the order of the content so that learners can build their knowledge from simple to complex ideas. For example, in business level 3, teachers ensure that younger learners understand

business costs and revenues, marketing, and legal structures and responsibilities before they produce a business plan as part of their end of year business project. Teachers ensure that learners with additional learning needs receive the support or adaptations to the curriculum that they need to make substantial progress.

Teachers select teaching techniques which suit the course content. In A-level biology, teachers present complex ideas clearly and demonstrate practical skills expertly. Teachers link questions skilfully to build knowledge and correct any misconceptions. In biology, teachers provide and discuss model answers to correct misunderstandings. Teachers plan lessons carefully and sensibly, building in frequent, valuable opportunities to recap prior learning. This helps learners to remember the curriculum content.

Teachers use assessment expertly to check on learning, and to adapt the curriculum when teaching has not been effective. A-level teachers in mathematics and biology, follow up assessments swiftly with opportunities for individual support sessions for learners. Teachers identify and plan their teaching to rectify gaps in learners' knowledge. Business teachers use case studies skilfully to ensure that learners not only remember business theory but know when to use it. Teachers' feedback is clear and constructive, which helps learners and apprentices to understand in detail how to improve their work further.

Learners develop high-level practical and technical skills during their studies. Teachers seamlessly link theory with practical work, so that learners can practise what they have learned and evidence that knowledge in a practical context. T-level digital learners combine their knowledge of cyber security with the skills to install firewalls in server rooms. Learners can remember both the knowledge and skills that they used.

Learners develop their English and mathematical skills and fluency extensively within the curriculum. They produce high-quality written work. Apprentices on level 4 professional accounting technician standard produce a sophisticated written analysis of a firm's financial statements, including the environmental and social impact.

Teachers demonstrate creativity, energy and passion for their subjects through the wide range of additional activities they include within the curriculum. These experiences inspire learners to produce excellent work. Fashion and design learners gain ideas for their projects on 'Oddities' by their visit to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, performing arts learners improve their practice due to visits to and from professional theatre companies.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130812
Address	Knutton Lane Newcastle-under-Lyme Staffordshire ST5 2GB
Contact number	01782715111
Website	www.nscg.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Craig Hodgson
Provider type	General further education
Date of previous inspection	22 to 25 October 2019
Main subcontractors	Staffordshire Operator Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of curriculum and performance, as nominee, and the director of employer partnerships and estates, as the skills 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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