

# Inspection of West Thames College

Inspection dates:

3 to 6 December 2024

## Overall effectiveness

## Outstanding

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

## Information about this provider

West Thames College is a medium-sized general further education college with two sites in the London Borough of Hounslow. The main campus is in Isleworth and there is a smaller skills centre in Feltham. The college offers a broad curriculum in most subject areas for full- and part-time learners. The largest subject is English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Other substantial provision includes courses in technical and skilled trades, hair and beauty, pre-employment training, business and information and communications technology, sport, creative and media, travel and public services. Learners study courses from entry level to level 4.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1,714 learners on education programmes for young people. There were 25 learners aged 14 to 16 on an ESOL course. Twenty-eight learners were on T-level courses in digital skills and in healthcare. A high proportion of learners also complete qualifications in English and mathematics.

There were 1,545 adult learners, of whom a high proportion study ESOL and pre-employment courses.

There were 45 apprentices studying level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships in a small number of areas, such as business administrator, express delivery, construction, and digital and technical standards.

There were 250 learners with high needs. Over half of these study a range of vocational and academic courses, and 118 study pre-vocational and personal development courses. A small proportion are on supported internships.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy learning and socialising in highly inclusive, calm and welcoming environments at both campuses. They have extensive opportunities to widen their skills and interests. They take part in an excellent range of sports, clubs, games and social activities. In social areas and around the college, they behave impeccably. They interact harmoniously and with respect. They enjoy each other's company and show friendly rivalry during activities such as table tennis and pool. They have a lot of fun and are proud to be part of the college community, where staff frequently celebrate their success.

Young learners enjoy a broad and challenging curriculum. Learners on ESOL courses, many of whom have never attended education or held a pen before, quickly settle. They make rapid progress, particularly with their writing skills. Learners benefit from the strong partnerships that leaders and teachers have with employers. Learners on animation courses work on projects set by employers. They visit museums and theatre productions to research designs. Learners on the digital T-level course attend highly relevant work placements to apply their skills in design software and using data tools. Learners on aviation courses visit Heathrow airport, which helps them understand the varied career opportunities available and the complex logistics involved behind the scenes.

Adult learners, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, thrive at college and say their experience has been life changing. They receive excellent support from their teachers, who motivate and encourage them to be the best. They feel part of a family and have a sense of belonging. Adult learners access a highly relevant curriculum that equips them with the skills they need to progress in their careers and lives. In make-up artistry, learners use high-quality make-up brands and up-to-date techniques to create impressive designs. On pre-employment courses, teachers give learners effective support and advice to help them apply for and secure jobs. Adult learners often use the college nursery for their childcare, which means they can access education easily.

Leaders and employers work effectively together to enable apprentices to gain relevant substantial new knowledge. Express delivery apprentices benefit from external sector experts who teach highly technical elements of the curriculum. Business administrator apprentices attend extra teaching about information technology because of requests from employers. Assessors give apprentices good support and advice to develop and apply the specific professional behaviours and skills they need. For example, assessors plan activities with employers to help team leading and business administrator apprentices practise their skills in conflict resolution and to lead meetings successfully.

Learners with high needs receive excellent support from staff across the college. This includes when they attend their external work experience and their employment activities at college. Teachers and support staff equip learners with the skills they need to self-regulate their behaviour and ask for help. They make sure that learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included in college life.

Learners have extensive opportunities to develop their independence, employability and life skills. For example, they run a second-hand shop at college, manage the reception in their area and work in cafes and arts centres. Most learners on the supported internship course gain employment. Learners are extremely proud of their work and confident to show it to unfamiliar people.

Learners and apprentices are enthusiastic about their learning, highly motivated and ambitious to do well. They understand very clearly the options available to them on completion of their course. Most attend their lessons and are on time. They are disciplined and happy to take notes in lessons and complete homework when it is set. They feel safe and secure at college, appreciate the presence of friendly security guards and know how to raise concerns. Learners and apprentices from diverse backgrounds do not experience bullying or harassment and understand the importance of behaving with respect and tolerance.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have a strong commitment to meeting skills needs. They are proactive and respected partners who play a lead role in the local borough and across west London. They co-chair the local higher and further education group and lead on the local skills improvement plan for creative industries. They have invested improvement planning funding carefully in a range of excellent and high-quality resources for learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers have developed well-established, strong strategic partnerships. Key partners include local authorities, universities, the chamber of commerce and the Jobcentre Plus. They use these partnerships very well to shape the curriculum offer and align the content of the curriculums closely to the regional and national skills needs and priorities. For example, they have designed courses with a strong focus on logistics, aviation and mental health for adults who work in the social care sector, as a direct request from their stakeholders. Leaders work very closely with the local virtual school to design and teach a highly effective ESOL curriculum for young unaccompanied asylum seekers. They have a thorough understanding of how the college contributes to meeting skills needs.

At both campuses and in all subjects, leaders and managers have established effective employer advisory boards. Board members frequently review and shape the curriculum in each subject. Leaders and teachers have a focused and consistent approach to including employers and stakeholders in designing and teaching the curriculum. Leaders have considered thoroughly how best to do this. For example, on the healthcare T-level course, staff from health and social care services provide clinicians for masterclasses and occupational therapy events. In sport, coaches from the local football club teach on the level 3 course. They have shaped the curriculum content to focus more on women in football to reflect the modern game. Learners and apprentices benefit from a highly relevant curriculum.

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

Leaders and managers have high expectations of learners and apprentices. They are ambitious for them to do well. They are determined and committed to ensure that learners and apprentices reach their potential and progress seamlessly to their next steps. Their relentless focus on quality improvement permeates through all levels of staff. Teachers and staff share this ambition and determination. They fully engage in and implement the rigorous quality standards set by leaders to ensure there is a consistent approach to high-quality teaching and assessment. This leads to consistently high achievement rates for young learners, adult learners and learners with high needs. Most learners and apprentices move on to the next level of course, higher education or employment.

Leaders and managers have created an ambitious curriculum for young and adult learners. They have designed most courses with a high degree of challenge and extra content. In GCSE mathematics, learners attend over and above the required teaching time to help them develop their knowledge quickly and prepare them for their examinations. In plumbing, teachers extend learners' practical skills in topics such as how to build scaffolding. In the ESOL curriculum for learners aged 14 to 16, leaders include science, technology and engineering to help learners gain skills to move on to vocational courses. Consequently, learners make substantial progress in developing the skills they need.

Curriculum managers and teachers plan and sequence courses and lessons skilfully. Teachers include the development of highly relevant digital, English and mathematics skills in their teaching. Learners and apprentices develop key and technical vocabulary in their chosen subject. In aviation, teachers focus on geography early in the course and within that make sure learners have an understanding of meteorology and its relevance to the industry. Learners with high needs benefit from well-structured lessons in which they build their skills incrementally. For example, in cookery lessons they work in teams to design menus, prepare meals and apply their numeracy skills accurately when they calculate ingredients and sell their food.

Teachers and assessors have expert subject knowledge and excellent teaching skills. They use a range of particularly effective techniques to introduce new topics. They give clear explanations about complex information and use probing questions to challenge learners and apprentices to deepen their thinking. Teachers on adult ESOL and English courses use repetition and demonstration frequently to help learners consolidate their learning. Learners and apprentices remember and recall their learning accurately and with fluency.

Teachers and assessors use a wide range of assessment methods effectively. This includes the assessment of learners' and apprentices' strengths and weaknesses at the start and throughout the course. They use this information proficiently to track learners' and apprentices' progress, identify gaps in learning and challenge learners and apprentices to do more. Most teachers and assessors use questioning skilfully to

check understanding. They give learners and apprentices highly effective feedback on their work. Feedback is directive and clear, and it challenges learners and apprentices to aim high in their written and practical work. Learners' and apprentices' work is at least of a good standard and often higher.

Leaders and managers work collaboratively with local authorities to use the funding for learners with high needs particularly well. For example, leaders have created an inclusive independent hub at the college for learners with complex needs. They have designed high-quality supported internship courses at reputable workplaces, such as with the local rugby stadium and theme park. Teachers and support staff use learners' education, health and care plans diligently to allocate the appropriate support and teaching for learners. Learners develop their independence and self-efficacy extremely well.

Assessors use their constructive relationships with employers to enable apprentices to practise and apply their learning and skills at work. They set meaningful targets at progress reviews so that apprentices and employers understand what they need to do at work. This aligns well with apprentices' off-the-job training. Assessors give apprentices helpful and early support in preparation for their final assessments. Most current apprentices are on track to achieve and make timely progress. However, although the overall achievement rate for apprentices had improved in 2023/24, it was not high enough. This was due to a cohort of apprentices leaving their apprenticeship earlier due to redundancy.

Learners and apprentices enjoy a varied and interesting personal development curriculum. This includes highly effective careers advice and guidance. Employers frequently visit the college to give learners information about their industry and the opportunities available in their sector. Through the well-planned tutorial programme, teachers inform learners and apprentices about a range of useful topics to help them broaden their knowledge and skills. For example, learners know about the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism, the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how to identify and report inappropriate behaviour. Young learners benefit from good opportunities to complete work experience.

Leaders, managers and those responsible for governance pay close attention to the development, well-being and support for staff. They have in place comprehensive professional development and training opportunities for staff. This includes specific training and support through their 'teacher triangle' initiative to encourage staff to share best practice and learn from each other. Staff have access to a comfortable well-being room, well-being days, which includes health and beauty treatments, yoga and an employee assistance programme. Most staff appreciate this support and are proud to work at the college.

Governors share leaders' and managers' ambition and determination for continuous improvement. They know the college well and have extensive experience in education and business. They use this effectively in order to give leaders support and challenge when needed. They scrutinise the detailed information that they

receive from leaders to prioritise their activities with curriculum areas. Leaders and staff appreciate the input from governors.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130447
<b>Address</b>	London Road Isleworth Middlesex TW7 4HS
<b>Contact number</b>	020 8326 2000
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.west-thames.ac.uk">www.west-thames.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Tracy Aust
<b>Provider type</b>	Further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28 September to 1 October 2021
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	n/a



## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, curriculum quality and student experience, 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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