

Inspection of Bishop Auckland College

Inspection dates:

3 to 6 December 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Education programmes for young people

Good

Adult learning programmes

Good

Apprenticeships

Good

Provision for students with high needs

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

Bishop Auckland College is a small general further education college serving County Durham and parts of Darlington. The college provides education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships across a broad range of vocational subjects. The college also has programmes for students with high needs and for full-time students aged 14 to 16. At the time of the inspection, there were 652 students on education programmes for young people including 54 aged 14 to 16. The college provides T levels for a small number of students. There were 454 students on adult learning programmes, 100 apprentices and 54 students with high needs.

In addition to the main college campus in Bishop Auckland, leaders offer plumbing apprenticeships at their South West Durham Training Centre in Newton Aycliffe. Leaders work with one subcontractor, Gem Partnership Limited, which provides employer-based training for adults.

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

Students and apprentices benefit from the positive culture that staff promote in the college. Teachers ensure that classrooms are stimulating with well-presented displays and resources. Students and apprentices work professionally with staff, which helps to create a calm and respectful environment for learning. They value the support that they receive from staff, which motivates them to succeed and do their best.

Most students and apprentices attend well and are punctual. Attendance is particularly high for students with high needs. Teachers know the reasons for any student absence, and they address these quickly. However, despite marginal improvements from previous years, the attendance of 14- to 16-year-old students is too low.

Teachers of apprenticeships present information clearly, giving precise explanations and instructions. On the early years apprenticeship, teachers explain safeguarding thoroughly so that apprentices understand their responsibilities when protecting young children. This helps apprentices to accurately recognise signs of abuse and neglect, such as unexplained bruises or sudden changes in children's behaviour.

Apprentices benefit from high-quality off-the-job training at the college. For example, carpentry and joinery apprentices train in a well-equipped workshop where they have access to high-quality equipment and resources. Apprentices develop skills to construct accurate jigs that they can use with power tools to form accurate sink cut-outs in solid worktops and form bevelled and quarter round edge moulds.

Almost all students aged 16 to 18 participate in relevant and meaningful work experience. For example, students in hair and beauty work at the local Beamish Museum and learn about hairstyles from the past. On T levels in early years, managers conduct background checks on students at enrolment, which means that students can start placement quickly at the start of their course. In level 3 sports, students deliver over 20 events a year to school children with activities such as 'nerf' tournaments. As a result of their participation in work experience, students gain valuable knowledge of the employment opportunities to which they aspire.

Students have access to a comprehensive range of enrichment activities and visits, and a high proportion take part. Activities include sports such as football and badminton, video gaming and e-sports. Students take part in a wide range of trips. For example, they visit museums, theatres and workplaces linked to their areas of study. Students also participate in overseas trips to Portugal, France and Albania to take part in work-related projects, such as working in orphanages. These enrichment activities help students to develop their confidence and widen their interests.

Students and apprentices receive highly effective careers advice that is appropriate to their age and stage in education. This prepares them very well for their next steps in education and employment. Teachers talk to students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, about their future goals and career

aspirations from the very start of their course. Teachers liaise with curriculum staff across the college to offer a helpful taster programme where students can experience different subjects and explore potential areas for their next steps.

Students and apprentices feel safe. Staff have a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment. Students and apprentices understand clearly what they would need to do if they ever felt unsafe in college, at work or online. For example, in level 3 e-sports, staff ensure that the games platforms that young students study are suitable for their age. Students and apprentices know how to report any safeguarding concerns should they arise.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders engage well with stakeholders and have a secure understanding of local and regional skills priorities. In the past few months, they have increased their engagement with stakeholders and have substantially improved the visibility of the college in the community. This includes the recent opening of the McIntyre's Centre in Bishop Auckland town centre, which is a central hub for learning. The college is part of the recently formed Durham Learning Alliance, comprising four further education colleges and a university in the county. Leaders are well informed of the opportunities that arise in their area. For example, they know about the imminent developments at 'Kynren,' a major tourist attraction in the region, and the types of skills needed to fill job vacancies.

Managers and teachers ensure that stakeholders are involved in most curriculum areas. For example, they involve relevant stakeholders such as the North East Automotive Alliance in the design of the motor vehicle curriculum to include units covering electric vehicles. Stakeholders provide guest speakers and run events. For example, students of level 3 public services take part in an immersive simulated night shift with Durham Constabulary that provides an insight into a variety of roles in the police service.

Through their useful collaboration with stakeholders, leaders enable students to participate in large projects in the town including the Auckland Project, Bishop Auckland Pride and Education Enterprise Legacy. On the Auckland Project, students take responsibility for the management of the large deer park. Students in construction have recently restored pathways through the deer park and enhanced their accessibility, including designing and installing a wheelchair-friendly kissing gate. Students gain a good insight into community projects and tourism in the local area and the range of job roles available currently and in the future.

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

Leaders have a clear strategic intent to meet local needs, raise the aspirations of students to progress into employment and support the local and regional economy.

They work closely with local stakeholders to respond to areas of need such as construction and the visitor economy, which are rapidly developing industries in the town. Leaders continue to show a strong commitment to providing education for some of the most disadvantaged members of their local communities through the Durham Gateway provision for students aged 14 to 16.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that provision for students with high needs is ambitious and supports students to make very good progress. They have appointed suitable managers who have developed the curriculum using best practice from the sector and have trained staff effectively to provide the support that students need. In the 'Aspire' specialist provision, there is a clear intent for the three pathways studied. Staff map the pathways very closely to the 'Preparation for Adulthood' framework. Pathways are designed to develop students' independence quickly and enable them to achieve their social, emotional and educational outcomes. Staff gradually reduce support for students where necessary to enable them to develop their independence. Students with high needs behave very maturely at college and rapidly develop the knowledge and skills that they need to progress.

Most students complete their programmes and achieve their qualifications. Almost all of those who progress in education do so to a higher level of study. Most adult students and young people progress to positive destinations such as work or further study. A significant proportion of apprentices achieve their apprenticeship and around a third achieve distinction grades. All apprentices who reach the end of their apprenticeship pass their end-point assessment. Most take on additional responsibility at work as a result of their new knowledge and skills.

Leaders and managers recruit staff who have expertise in their subjects and support them effectively to gain teaching qualifications. Staff teaching the early years curriculum have extensive experience in childcare settings, having worked as nursery managers, room leaders and practitioners in a variety of settings. Teachers make sure their vocational experience is current through frequent returns to industry supported by leaders and managers. Consequently, students and apprentices benefit by developing up-to-date vocational knowledge and skills.

Teachers plan and sequence curriculums effectively to enable students and apprentices to build on their knowledge and skills over time. Teachers consider the content of courses carefully and choose topics that provide students and apprentices with the knowledge that they need to succeed. Students on the T level early years course develop valuable knowledge of the stages of child development and then consider how children form relationships and attachments. This helps them to explore how children behave and respond to transitions in education and life throughout their development. In level 3 joinery, apprentices learn basic hand tool skills before applying these to complex aspects of site joinery. These include setting out and constructing a hipped roof with dormer window, fitting quarter turn and kite winder staircases and selecting and hanging fire doors.

Most teachers use effective teaching strategies that engage students and apprentices well and motivate them to participate fully and learn new concepts quickly. Teachers use successful starter activities in lessons to recap on previous topics and check what students and apprentices have remembered. They use repetition well to help reinforce key terminology and new knowledge.

Most teachers use a range of methods, including effective questioning, to check how students are progressing. This enables students to explain their thinking or identify where they are struggling. In GCSE mathematics, teachers use individual whiteboards to quickly check students' understanding of calculations and formulae. However, in a few instances, teachers in vocational subjects do not check students' understanding well enough before moving on, which slows the progress of a few students.

Teachers accurately assess students' and apprentices' progress on their course. They provide helpful developmental feedback to students and apprentices on what they can do to improve their work. They discuss with students and apprentices how they can improve their grades and examination marks. For example, in level 3 e-sports, teachers provide comments that guide students on what extra information to include in their work. Most students respond well to feedback and make improvements.

Leaders provide a full-time curriculum for students aged 14 to 16 from local schools with a range of vocational pathways. However, the curriculum does not meet the needs of students well enough because it does not enthuse or motivate them. Too many students are absent from their lessons, which leads to gaps in knowledge and results in low achievement. Leaders have recently reviewed the curriculum and have introduced a functional skills element to provide a more suitable English and mathematics curriculum for students. However, it is too soon to see the impact on students' achievement.

Teachers support students and apprentices effectively to improve their skills in English and mathematics. For example, teachers support business administrator apprentices to adapt their communication skills in different scenarios, such as contacting parents in school settings by telephone or email. Adult students in manufacturing develop their English skills by writing accurate risk assessments, incident audit reports and action logs. Carpentry and joinery apprentices use their mathematics skills to accurately convert scale diagrams when measuring and setting out complex roof structures.

Leaders and managers have good oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of the college and of the subcontractor that they work with. They conduct a wide range of quality assurance activities to identify accurately areas for improvement. They use the information from these activities to make improvements to the quality of education that students and apprentices receive. Teaching mentors provide helpful training for teachers to improve skills such as using effective assessment methods and setting individual targets for students to meet their needs.

Leaders have in place a well-structured governance model. Governors have relevant experience across a range of sectors including finance, business and education that they use effectively to advise and challenge leaders. Governors have a thorough understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. They receive helpful reports that enable them to monitor performance and quality effectively. Governors have a good understanding of the safeguarding needs of students and apprentices.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Provide an effective curriculum for students aged 14 to 16 that motivates them to attend and enables them to achieve well.
- Ensure that teachers consistently check on learning for all students and apprentices and encourage students to improve their work in response to feedback.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130657
Address	Woodhouse Lane Bishop Auckland County Durham DL14 6JZ
Contact number	01388443000
Website	www.bishopaucklandcollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Shaun Hope
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	16 to 19 November 2021
Main subcontractors	GEM Partnership Limited

Information about this inspection

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

Jonny Wright, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Chloe Rendall	His Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Lonsdale	His Majesty's Inspector
Mark Keen	His Majesty's Inspector
Joanne Stork	His Majesty's Inspector
Chris Carr	His Majesty's Inspector
Malcolm Fraser	His Majesty's Inspector
Karen Anderson	His Majesty's Inspector
Debra Forsythe-Conroy	Ofsted Inspector
Cath Jackson	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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