

Inspection of East Sussex College Group

Inspection dates: 28 to 31 January 2025

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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| 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

East Sussex College Group is a large general further education college group. The college has three campuses in Hastings, Eastbourne and Lewes and a number of other specialist sites, including a green training hub in Hampden Park, a marine science site in Newhaven, an institute of technology in Ore and a creative skills studio with Charleston in Lewes.

Students follow a broad range of academic, professional, technical and vocational courses, including apprenticeships at levels 2 to 5. The college also has programmes for students with high needs and for full-time students aged 14 to 16. At the time of inspection, there were 5,117 students aged 16 to 18. There were 1,390 apprentices and over 7,000 adult students on a range of mainly part-time courses.

The college offers vocational courses from entry to level 4, including a broad range of A levels and extended diplomas in subjects such as public services, creative skills and childcare and education. The provision for adult students is offered in a range of locations and online. Courses include English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) from pre-entry to level 1 and access to higher education. There are a number of

courses designed to prepare students for work. These include rail track maintenance and childcare courses. Leaders work with three subcontractors: Glass and Fenestration Training Solutions Ltd, All Dimension Ltd and James Education Ltd which provide employer-based training for adults.

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

Students, apprentices and adult learners learn in an extremely supportive and aspirational college environment that inspires their future achievements. They have very positive attitudes to their learning and value the support they receive from highly professional staff, which motivates them to complete their studies and flourish.

Students and apprentices speak highly of their teachers and college leaders and confidently describe that they feel the college is a safe, welcoming and nurturing place to learn. Leaders and teachers set clear and high expectations for behaviour. Students and apprentices demonstrate consistently high levels of respect for their peers and value the chance to learn from each other. They behave well in their classes, at their work placements and around the college.

Students and apprentices appreciate the expertise of their teachers, who use their vocational and subject expertise well to support them to apply their learning to new concepts and to develop new skills. For example, teachers share their industry experience with gas engineering apprentices, enabling them to understand the potentially catastrophic consequences of not following appropriate health and safety procedures. Students studying the T level in childcare and education learn relevant terminology and critical thinking skills, which prepare them well for their work placements.

Students and apprentices participate in a comprehensive range of activities available to them, which broadens and deepens their personal development and enhances their employability. They gain valuable experiences which enhance their confidence. For example, in uniformed public services, students learn British Sign Language, which prepares them for communication with those who are hard of hearing. In construction, students participate in the restoration of a grade II listed building, where they learn about relevant legislation. Adult learners learn how to write targeted CVs and develop interview skills. This increases their confidence and skills in applying for jobs and their potential to be successful at interviews.

Students with high needs improve their confidence and independence through their studies. Staff support students through highly personalised programmes that are aspirational and encourage choice, preparing students for adulthood and work. Students with complex and profound disabilities benefit from effectively coordinated therapies and well-equipped and accessible classrooms. Students benefit from well-planned activities to introduce them to new activities and environments. Staff use the immersion suite effectively to create these environments. For example, students visited a virtual art gallery in preparation for their trip. This reduces students' anxieties and prepares them well for their visits.

Adult learners study courses that prepare them well for their next steps. Students who speak English as an additional language complete well-planned courses that prepare them well for recognised job vacancies in green construction skills, rail track engineering, healthcare and digital programming. As a result, students make

sustained progress towards appropriate next steps, including further study, higher education and employment.

Most students benefit from a well-planned tutorial curriculum that contains useful information to support them in their personal lives and future careers. Students benefit from learning in an inclusive environment where the college's 'PROUD' values support students and apprentices in making a positive contribution to their college experience and the community. Students learn about topics such as online safety, county lines and toxic relationships. They feel safe at college and in their placements and know how to report concerns.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work very effectively with a wide range of stakeholders to identify national and regional skills priorities, including in the communities the colleges serve. They gather valuable intelligence from civic stakeholders, employers, micro- to medium-sized enterprises, universities and community organisations to understand the region's needs. They work closely with East Sussex County Council, F E Sussex, employers and the Sussex Chamber of Commerce to address the priorities of the local skills improvement plan for the region. Leaders have developed a comprehensive curriculum to meet these needs.

Leaders use well-established relationships with employers, higher education establishments and industry bodies to support the successful design of the curriculum in all areas. For example, the input of Sussex police into the public services curriculum resulted in students developing the vital skills they need for work. Employers provide industry-standard, high-quality facilities such as air source pumps, ground source heat pumps and infrared heating sources at the green hub. Leaders successfully collaborate with regional stakeholders to access funding for immersive technology teaching resources for cross-campus teaching. These are used effectively in teaching courses such as health, sports science and construction. As a result, students develop the skills required of the future workforce.

Leaders collaborate widely with employers and other stakeholders to ensure that they clearly understand the local employment market and the priorities specific to their area and demographic. For example, they have worked with employers such as SGN to design the gas operative craftsperson apprenticeship. Leaders work with employers to design bespoke training to enable developments in local industries such as renewable energies. This includes establishing a marine-based campus in Newhaven, specialising in science and engineering curriculums aligned with the renewable energies sector.

Leaders are a primary partner in regeneration and community development. They work closely with East Sussex County Council and the Department for Work and Pensions to plan courses that support unemployed adults. They make excellent use of sector-based academy programmes to provide high-quality training and careers

guidance linked to job vacancies such as rail track engineering and childcare. This contributes to most adult learners progressing to employment or further learning.

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 and apprentices to progress into employment and support the local and regional economy. Teachers plan A-level courses that help students progress to university and into careers aligned with major employers in areas such as allied health. Vocational training is allied to key shortage sectors such as creative industries, health and social and early years. Employers support the design and delivery of apprenticeships that meet their needs and fill national skills gaps, such as gas fitters and plumbers. Leaders are committed to providing education for some of the most disadvantaged members of their local communities, including students aged 14 to 16, in partnership with East Sussex County Council.

Leaders and managers have put in place a clear structure for identifying and implementing additional learning support. Students' support needs are reviewed effectively and updated as required throughout their time at college. Students with additional needs benefit from the dedicated support of staff in the well-being team, library services and a small team of speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. As a result, students with additional learning support needs studying academic or vocational subjects are well supported. Students with additional learning needs achieve in line with their peers.

Leaders and managers ensure that teachers are professionally qualified and experienced in the subjects they teach. Teachers have sector expertise and are supported by leaders to keep their sector knowledge and skills up to date through, for example, industry days. They develop their teaching skills through well-planned training activities on topics that enable them to provide students with additional support that meets their needs. Staff working with students with high needs have completed training in maintaining professional boundaries and managing difficult conversations. Consequently, they feel better prepared to manage challenging behaviours as they arise.

Leaders and managers support staff who are new to teaching or learning support effectively. Staff are supported to gain appropriate teaching qualifications. They are provided with subject mentors and attend helpful professional development workshops. As a result, they quickly build the skills and confidence they need to teach well.

Teachers use effective teaching strategies that enable students and apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills. They break down complex topics and skills into smaller more manageable parts, so students and apprentices understand how to approach challenging concepts rationally. For example, carpentry apprentices start with basic hand tools before working with power tools such as circular saws and bench saws. Creative media students learn how to use industry-standard software to

record and edit video and audio recordings and how to use these tools when conducting an interview.

Most students and apprentices receive useful careers advice and guidance on their potential next steps, which include opportunities to listen to guest speakers from industry, have one-to-one discussions and attend external visits. They are enabled to evaluate the range of options open to them such as the breadth of employment opportunities and how they will need to develop their skills and knowledge to secure their preferred next steps. For example, motor vehicle students visit dealerships and service centres to talk to staff and apprentices about their experiences. A-level students build an understanding of what university study would be like.

Teachers use assessment well to check students' and apprentices' understanding and adjust their teaching as necessary. Assessment is planned frequently throughout the year, and teachers use the results to plan further learning. This helps to ensure that students and apprentices can apply their learning and achieve their best. GCSE English teachers use outcomes of assessment to improve students' knowledge. For example, students learn about and practise sentence and paragraph structure, including the use of language devices such as ellipsis. Each student works purposefully on their own area of weakness.

Students studying non-accredited ESOL courses complete a detailed initial assessment. Teachers carefully use the information to plan learning, set appropriate targets and track students' progress. Most students make substantial and sustained progress.

Leaders and managers have good oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of the college and of the subcontractors 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.

Governors know the strengths of the college and recognise where improvement is needed. They support leaders and hold them to account where further improvement is required. They rightly recognise the need to improve the quality of the apprenticeships offered by the college and have worked closely with leaders to review the provision and agree improvement priorities. This has contributed to an increase in the proportion of apprentices who complete their programme and pass their final assessment. Governors rightly recognise that work continues to be required in this area and are monitoring leaders' progress closely.

Most students and apprentices make expected progress through their courses. Where apprentices are working past the planned end date of the apprenticeship, most have completed all their work and are awaiting final assessment. Students and apprentices know how they are getting on and the targets and milestones they need to meet. When students fall behind, staff intervene and put in place helpful action plans. As a result, more students, including adult students studying online, now stay on programme and are working well towards completing their course.

Leaders have taken appropriate actions to improve the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeships on time. However, too many apprentices on the gas network apprenticeship complete their apprenticeship later than the planned timescale. This is due to delays with the assessment, which are outside of leaders' control.

Leaders have managed a significant increase in the numbers of students retaking GCSE mathematics and English qualifications. Students on GCSE resits perform broadly in line with the low national rate. Achievement rates for GCSE English are improving. However, in mathematics, there has been no improvement. Leaders have put strategies in place to improve students' attendance at these lessons, but it remains too low.

Too many adult students studying online do not complete their courses. Most of the students who remain on their course achieve their qualifications. Leaders and managers have taken appropriate actions to monitor student participation and engagement. This has enabled them to make swift interventions when students are at risk of leaving their course early. As a result, early indications are that these changes are having a positive impact. However, it is too soon to know if this is sustainable.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Further embed and strengthen strategies to increase attendance in English and mathematics lessons.
- Improve retention and achievement in online adult courses through more structured and focused careers information, advice and guidance for students.
- Ensure that apprentices complete their programmes within expected timeframes.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 130665 |
| Address | Cross Levels Way Eastbourne East Sussex BN21 2UF |
| Contact number | 03030039400 |
| Website | www.escg.ac.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Rebecca Conroy |
| Provider type | General further education college |
| Date of previous inspection | 23 to 26 November 2021 |
| Main subcontractors | Glass and Fenestration Training Solutions Ltd All Dimension Ltd James Education Ltd |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, 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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|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Carolyn Brownsea, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Roland White | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Darren James-Mitchell | Ofsted Inspector |
| Ben Sheridan | Ofsted Inspector |
| Emma Barrett-Peel | Ofsted Inspector |
| Nicholas Allen | Ofsted Inspector |
| Kay Hedges | Ofsted Inspector |
| Ally Bell | Ofsted Inspector |
| Clare Hood | Ofsted Inspector |
| Philida Schellekens | Ofsted Inspector |
| Mark Hillman | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Jo-Ann Henderson | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Viki Faulkner | His Majesty's 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
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