

Inspection of Moulton College

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 February 2025

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

Moulton College is a specialist land-based further education college based in Northamptonshire. Leaders provide education programmes for young people, apprenticeships, adult learning programmes and courses for learners with high needs at the college's main site in Moulton. The college also has a campus in Higham Ferrers. This has dedicated construction facilities, where learners study brickwork, carpentry, and plumbing.

At the time of the inspection, there were 2,005 learners who were 16 to 18 years old. The majority study at the college on full-time courses in animal management, equine studies, sport, agriculture and construction. Almost all learners study at level 1, 2 or 3. There were 60 learners who study T Levels in subjects such as arboriculture, construction and electrotechnical engineering. There were 156 learners with high needs, of whom 112 were studying a foundation pathway. Around 750 learners continue to study English and mathematics qualifications as part of their studies.

There were 972 adult learners. Adult learners study full time alongside young people, on part-time vocational courses or online programmes. They mainly study subjects such as business, English and mathematics, dog grooming, stonemasonry,

veterinary skills, floristry, and horticulture. Adults following business and distance learning courses can study remotely. Leaders offer a Skills Bootcamp in SolarPro skills but at the time of the inspection there were fewer than five learners on the course.

There were 165 apprentices. They follow apprenticeship standards at level 2 and level 3. Most apprentices are aged 16 to 18 and study subjects such as bakery, plumbing, veterinary nursing, construction and stonemasonry.

The college does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Staff create a calm environment where learners and apprentices demonstrate respect for the campus and its resources, such as animals and workshops. Learners are at ease in their surroundings. All learners are polite, courteous to each other and to staff. Resources and practical environments are clean and safe. Learners and apprentices take joint responsibility for this with staff.

Learners with high needs benefit from classes where teachers and learning support staff use humour and redirection well when learners have become distressed. Staff create a calm and safe learning environment for learners with the most complex needs.

Learners and apprentices have positive attitudes to their studies. They enjoy their time at college and, in most cases, attend well. However, young learners do not attend GCSE English at the same high rate as their vocational courses.

Learners mostly develop their knowledge and skills well. They improve their practical skills at an appropriate pace and produce work of the expected standard. For example, second-year equine learners demonstrate suitable riding standards, have correct and well-balanced positions, and are competent and able to ride a range of horses well.

Apprentices on bakery and carpentry courses develop skills beyond those required in their places of work. Carpentry apprentices learn to hang internal doors, and fit bay windows and complex architrave. Bakery apprentices learn about the science of additives and develop their creative skills to make rainbow croissants.

Most learners take part in meaningful enrichment activities beyond the academic and vocational components of their course. They take part in litter picking in the community, volunteer as coaches in local schools and participate in Remembrance events. Learners on furniture making courses compete successfully in World Skills competitions.

Learners and apprentices develop their confidence because of their time at college. Adult learners on Royal Horticultural Society courses hold meaningful and informed discussions with their peers and external stakeholders with their knowledge of horticulture practice. Learners on level 2 furniture making courses develop their confidence and ability to work independently in the workshop.

Leaders and staff work closely with employers to ensure that learners and apprentices develop appropriate knowledge and skills. Young learners undertake meaningful work experience placements. Learners with high needs are supported on a two-week international work experience placement in Seville to work independently in a Spanish café. Bakery apprentices study a course that has been specifically codesigned with the employer.

Most learners are well prepared for their next steps. Many move on to higher-level

study or employment. Learners with high needs achieve their education, health and care plan outcomes, and young learners on study programmes report improved behaviour and respect since starting college.

Apprentices and learners feel safe in work and college and know that concerns will be listened to and actioned appropriately. Learners work safely and correctly in practical lessons and workshops. They demonstrate good health and safety and wear the appropriate personal protective equipment. Learners with high needs are confident to access all areas of the site. They know who to ask for support and how to use the 'safezone' application on their phones, and they are familiar with the safeguarding and security team.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers actively engage with various stakeholders, including the Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, local councils, Jobcentre Plus (JCP), professional bodies, charities, and membership organisations. They collaborate effectively with local and regional civic bodies, contributing to the local skills improvement plan (LSIP) to align curriculums with identified skills gaps, particularly in agriculture and green skills.

Leaders work closely with regional colleges and universities on initiatives like the Inter-College Green Future Challenge for Further Education. They plan progression routes and coordinate courses to avoid overlap. However, some engagements with employers and stakeholders are recent, making it too early to judge their effectiveness.

In most curriculum areas, leaders ensure employers and stakeholders are involved in curriculum design. They have introduced industry skills boards (ISBs) to formalise engagement with employers and stakeholders. Staff use ISB information to adapt curriculum content to meet current and future skills needs. For example, they collaborate with Jobcentre Plus and a renewable energy firm to offer a solar photovoltaic installer foundation course. There is notable curriculum involvement from employers and stakeholders in sport, land-based studies, and food and drink.

Leaders use labour market intelligence to provide specialist courses that meet the needs of large and small employers, such as stonemasonry, furniture making and arboriculture.

Leaders and managers understand their contribution to local, regional, and national skills needs. They invest in staff training and resources to provide high-quality training. For example, they secured LSIP funding to purchase commercial drones for building and land surveying courses. Students benefit from exposure to cutting-edge technology used in construction and data collection. Leaders plan to use these resources for ongoing ecological surveys in partnership with conservation organisations and key employers.

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

Leaders take pride in the college's heritage and ensure courses meet the needs of the land-based industries they serve. They understand employers, learners, and the community well.

Learners benefit from high-quality resources such as a working farm, animal centre, sports halls, and an equine therapy centre with a pool, treadmill, and spa. Higham campus learners access specialist construction workshops and tools. Bakery apprentices use deck ovens, industrial mixers, rollers, and provers at work. Leaders recently invested in the 'Moulton hub' to support hard-to-reach learners, such as those who have been out of education for some time.

Leaders and staff have high aspirations for learners and apprentices, they rightly focus on independence and employability skills. Courses are planned with this in mind. Level 3 animal management learners work at the commercial animal centre, developing skills such as resilience and independence.

Leaders have significantly improved provision for learners with high needs, redesigning courses to offer clear pathways into adult life and work. They have developed courses such as level 1 hospitality and catering to provide work opportunities in the onsite café.

Teachers plan courses logically; they organise topics suitably to build learners' knowledge and skills over time. Level 2 sport teachers work with industry experts to sequence topics as therapists would, starting with the skeletal system, then muscular, respiratory, and nervous systems. Bakery apprentices learn hygiene and equipment first, then the history of baking and allergens. Adult learners in practical horticulture start with plant identification and establishment before moving to complex topics like nutrition deficiencies and pathogens.

On courses for learners with high needs, teachers gradually introduce new topics, allowing learners to recall and extend prior knowledge. However, some teachers rely too much on spoken instructions or complicated resources which can overload learners.

Learners and apprentices benefit from effective and varied teaching approaches and resources. In GCSE English, teachers use scaffolded past-paper questions to build understanding of language devices and examination techniques. However, in some level 3 equine courses, teachers do not always sequence topics well or explain them thoroughly, slowing learners' understanding and causing confusion.

In most lessons, teachers check learners' understanding well using in-class monitoring and effective questioning, providing clear feedback. However, some teachers rely too much on end-of-class assessments or move on too quickly, leaving some learners confused.

Staff delivering face-to-face adult learning courses use varied practices to ensure learners know more. However, adult distance learning courses rely mainly on e-learning resources and email communication, causing some learners to struggle with key concepts and in need of further support because of the limited teaching strategies.

Leaders have made suitable arrangements to identify and support learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers collaborate well with support staff to ensure learners with SEND receive the help they need. For example, GCSE English teachers brief learning support assistants on each lesson's focus so that they can provide support appropriately matched to the lesson.

Most learners' work is suitably demanding, with apprentices often exceeding requirements. Teachers of learners with high needs adjust challenges based on performance. However, some young learners are not always sufficiently challenged.

Learners generally develop their knowledge and skills well, improving practical skills at an appropriate pace and producing work of the expected standard. Most learners progress to higher education or employment. Historically, fewer learners achieved qualifications than expected, especially in agriculture and animal care, but this has improved. Of those apprentices that have reached their end-point assessment, many have achieved distinctions. However, leaders acknowledge that GCSE English and mathematics pass rates are still too low. They have taken steps to improve this, with early indications suggesting positive effects, though it is too early to be certain.

Most learners, including those with high needs, receive appropriate careers advice and guidance through the college careers service, external industry speakers, career pathway planning, and mock interviews. This prepares them well for their next stage in education, training, or employment. However, some carpentry apprentices at larger companies do not receive specific careers advice early enough to help them find alternative employment, should they require it, at the end of their course.

Leaders and managers have designed an effective personal development curriculum for younger learners, including those with high needs. However, some level 3 learners study these topics online and do not understand them as well as peers in face-to-face lessons. Adult learners on distance learning courses have access to personal development resources, but these are not well promoted, and many do not use them.

Senior leaders and governors have high aspirations for all students and apprentices, emphasising high-quality courses that focus on employment and progression. Staff share these aspirations and benefit from well-organised professional development opportunities, including three inset days each year and weekly 'golden hour' sessions tailored to departmental needs. However, leaders recognise that connections between areas for improvement and individual development plans could be more precise in some cases.

Leaders use various approaches to monitor and enhance course quality effectively, including performance board meetings, learning walks, and lesson observations. They have made significant improvements in animal care and provision for learners with high needs. Leaders also tackle attendance issues by arranging transport. They have taken a strategic decision to support learners with lower attendance rather than withdraw them and risk them not being in education, training or employment.

Governors have relevant backgrounds and experience, allowing them to provide valuable input on strategic priorities. They receive useful data to challenge and question leaders, ensuring high-quality education for students and apprentices.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the number of learners studying GCSE English and mathematics that achieve at least a grade 4.
- Ensure that teachers on all courses use suitable strategies to check understanding and provide appropriate challenge to learners.
- Improve attendance of young learners on the small number of courses, such as GCSE English, where it does not meet leaders' high expectations and is lower than the vast majority of courses.
- Ensure that learners on all courses access high-quality personal development opportunities and careers advice to prepare them for their next steps and life in Britain.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130772
Address	West Street Moulton Northampton Northamptonshire NN3 7RR
Contact number	01604 491131
Website	https://www.moulton.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Oliver Symons
Provider type	Specialist further education college
Date of previous inspection	2 to 5 November 2021
Main subcontractors	None

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 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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