

Stoke-on-Trent College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130815

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Type of provider: General Further Education College
Cauldon Campus
Stoke Road

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Information about the provider

1. Stoke-on-Trent College is a large general further education college which serves the city of Stoke-on-Trent, much of north Staffordshire and parts of south Cheshire. The college operates from two main campuses in Burslem and Shelton, and two neighbourhood colleges in Longton and Tunstall. The college offers a wide range of provision in 13 of the 15 subject areas. Over half of all learners are adults, studying mainly on a part-time basis. Most learners aged 16 to 18 study on a full-time basis. The proportion of learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds has increased in recent years and was 18% in 2010/11. Some 717 learners aged 14 to 16 studied at the college last year. In 2010/11, some 1,050 learners were on apprenticeship programmes. The proportion of pupils aged 16 in Stoke-on-Trent who achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, in 2011, was well below the national average.
2. The college was last inspected in June 2007 when it was graded as satisfactory for outcomes for learners and good in all other aspects including equality of opportunity. The college mission is 'delivering excellence in learning and skills and employability'.
3. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Project Management (construction)
 - BT (telecommunications)
 - Total People (construction; engineering; motor vehicle)
 - CITB (construction)
4. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Transed (driving goods)
 - Eurosource (childcare)
 - Gateway (passenger transport)
 - Sangam (hospitality and catering)
 - Train 2 Aim (health and social care)
 - CRH (driving goods)
 - YMCA (Foundation learning)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to18)</p> <p>Foundation learning</p>	<p>717 part-time learners</p> <p>1,635 full-time learners 359 part-time learners</p> <p>654 full-time learners 66 part-time learners</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p>	<p>904 full-time learners 4,435 part-time learners</p>
<p>Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships</p>	<p>4,288 learners 1,050 apprentices</p>

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Health and social care	2
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3
Building and construction	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Literacy and numeracy	3
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

5. The percentage of learners successfully completing their programmes has declined significantly since the last inspection and was low in 2010/11 due mainly to very low retention rates. College data indicate that actions to improve retention have been successful in significantly improving retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and, to a lesser degree, those of adults in the current year. College data indicate that overall success rates match those of college's with similar intakes. Learners make at least satisfactory progress. A high percentage of learners progress to the next level within the college, and when they leave, the majority progress to further education or employment. Learners aged 14 to 16 have high success rates. Success rates for apprentices are generally satisfactory. Learners develop good practical skills and most programmes equip them well for employment.

6. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The college has prioritised the improvement of teaching and learning. It has a comprehensive observation system, which successfully balances subject specialist and generic observations, but tends to be overgenerous in its grading. The better lessons are very well planned, have a brisk pace and challenge learners well. In the less effective lessons, learners' individual needs are not well met and they make slow progress. Assessment practices are effective. The college offers an appropriate range of courses and its partnership working enhances learners' employment prospects. Support for learners is good. The college ensures that learners are on the right courses and that they receive the specific support they need to succeed.
7. The college has undergone major restructuring to address weaknesses both in its financial health and in the performance of learners. This has led to improvements. The college identifies, and acts to address, underperformance through self-assessment and quality improvement plans. Improvements are well informed by users' feedback. The college prioritises safeguarding well. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The college has yet to close the gap between the achievement of minority ethnic learners and white British learners. Governance is good.

Main findings

- College actions are addressing the low retention rates of previous years. However, success rates for adult learners on long programmes are low. Most learners make at least satisfactory progress, and some make good progress, given their prior attainment. Learners progress well between the different levels of provision in the college.
- Learners aged 14 to 16 have high success rates and the majority progress into the college. Success rates for functional skills were low in 2010/11, but are improving in the current year. The standard of learners' practical work is good.
- Males and females have similar success rates. Learners who receive additional support generally achieve better than others. However, minority ethnic learners do not succeed as well as white British learners. Success rates for apprenticeship provision are satisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The better lessons are planned well to engage learners and to support them in making good progress. In less effective lessons the differing needs of learners are not met, the pace is slow and the checking of learning is insufficient.
- Learners find feedback helpful. Information learning technologies (ILT) are used effectively to support learning and are used particularly well in some subjects. The college has a comprehensive system to improve the quality of teaching and learning, although there are examples of overgenerous grading and insufficient focus on the promotion of learning.
- The range of courses to meet learners' needs is satisfactory and provides suitable progression routes. The work-based learning curriculum is particularly responsive to employers' and employees' needs. The college provides its

courses flexibly, which improves access for learners. Increasing numbers of learners are accessing enrichment opportunities, many of which offer good leadership and volunteer training.

- The college works very effectively with a wide range of partners to develop learners' vocational, personal and employability skills. Work with young learners who are not in education, employment or training, or adults who are unemployed, is particularly successful. Many of the college's partnership arrangements support local regeneration.
- Arrangements for advice, guidance and support have improved and are good. Learners are generally on the right course and are supported by a comprehensive range of student services. Financial support is particularly effective in enabling many learners to attend college. Learners' attendance is thoroughly monitored and their targets are regularly reviewed. An electronic reporting system allows staff and learners to check and understand learners' progress.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college is successfully implementing a recovery plan, following a period of declining success rates and financial issues. The financial health of the college improved significantly in 2010/11. It is too early to see the impact of measures to improve success rates, but retention is higher in the current year and inspectors found improvements in a number of curriculum areas. Performance management has improved and the college has a clear strategy for the future, which is well supported by staff.
- The safety and well-being of learners takes a high priority in the college. Staff training in safeguarding is good, and learners have a clear understanding of what to do if they have any concerns. Improvements to site security are welcomed by learners. The college has very good links with external agencies to support its safeguarding procedures.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff receive appropriate training. Learners are encouraged to discuss equality and diversity themes in tutorials and in some lessons. A culture of tolerance and respect for others is evident. The college has identified underachievement by some minority ethnic groups and has taken actions to address this.
- College self-assessment processes improved in 2010/11. The college now has a clear understanding of which courses are underperforming and quality improvement plans to address this are monitored regularly. The college listens well to the views of its learners and to employers in developing its provision. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's own judgements, but found the proportion of lessons that are good or better to be not as high as the college's findings.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the impact of strategies to improve retention are closely monitored so that adult success rates match those of learners aged 16 to 18.
- Further develop teaching and learning so that all lessons achieve the same high quality, with full engagement of learners, brisk pace and effective checking of learning.
- Further develop the system for the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure there is a clear focus on the promotion of learning and all reports accurately reflect grades.
- Ensure that more robust self-assessment and quality improvement processes are sustained and that actions being taken to improve underperforming courses are effective.
- Ensure that curriculum teams closely monitor the progress of groups of learners, set clear targets, and take prompt action to address differences so that gaps in achievement diminish rapidly.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the skills and qualifications they gain that sets them up for working life
- the supportive tutors who are generous with their time and the extra support to help achieve qualifications
- feeling safe at college
- the exciting enrichment opportunities
- the commercial and realistic working environments in some areas
- the insight into new technologies
- being able to understand their progress online
- the fact that their opinions count in the college.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the disruption to lessons caused by latecomers
- the availability of air conditioning in some buildings
- the amount of social space for students – so they can relax from time to time
- the availability of a vending machine for drinks nearer the workshop.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- teachers and assessors have current experience and understand the needs of the business well
- the good training and support provided to their apprentices
- the college is highly responsive to their needs
- the college has developed the right culture to work with private industry.

What employers would like to see improved:

- be provided with the details of college based training so that they can organise on-site training to be more complementary.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

8. Since the last inspection, the college has undergone a period of financial difficulty and declining success rates. Within the last eighteen months, it has taken successful action to address the financial situation. The college has initiated significant restructuring and efficiency savings in line with a revised strategy that is based on a clear plan for future sustainability. Management and governance arrangements have been strengthened. Self-assessment processes improved in 2010/11 and now ensure that the college identifies reasons for underperformance in particular curriculum areas. Robust action plans are in place and are well monitored. Staff have good ownership of these processes. Performance management is now strong. Improvements to retention in the current year demonstrate the impact of actions taken, though this is more marked for learners aged 16 to 18 than for adults.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

9. In both 2010/11 and in the preceding year, success rates were low, having declined from around the average in 2008/9. The college has begun to address the decline, which was mainly due to very low retention, by introducing a number of significant changes, which have led to substantial improvements to retention for learners aged 16 to 18 and a slight improvement for adult learners. In 2010/11 success rates for learners on long courses were low for all ages and at all levels. College data for in-year retention indicate that learners aged 16 to 18 on foundation and intermediate level courses, and adults on intermediate courses, are on track to achieve success rates in line with the respective national averages. However, success rates for adult learners on long courses, especially at foundation and advanced levels are still below the most recent national average, as are those of learners aged 16 to 18 on foundation courses. Given the low prior attainment of learners entering the college, and the fact that learners are drawn from areas of high levels of deprivation, overall college success rates are in line with colleges of similar intakes.
10. Outcomes for learners aged 14 to 16 are good. Success rates were high in 2010/11 and progression into the college is very good. Generally, progression to the next level within the college is good. The majority of learners aged 16 to 18 progress on to further education or employment. Success rates for functional skills were low in 2010/11. However, in the current year, college data based on the majority of learners who have completed the programme to date, indicate success rates are in line with the average. Success rates on short courses are below the average for all learners. The standard of learners' practical work is generally good in both employer and learner responsive provision. The standard of their written work is generally satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory.

11. Overall success rates are similar for female and male learners. In 2010/11 learners with a declared disability or learning difficulty generally have similar success to other learners. College data indicate that learners in receipt of additional learning support have higher success rates than those not in receipt of such support. Success rates for minority ethnic learners were significantly below that of white British learners in 2010/11. In the current year, college data indicate that similar improvements in retention for both groups has hardly diminished the gap. Outcomes for apprenticeships are satisfactory. Overall framework completions are slightly below the average. Completions within the planned period have improved and are now slightly above the average. Completions within the planned period for workforce development programmes are just below the national average.
12. Learners gain appropriate employability skills. They are involved in an increasing range of external competitions which raises their confidence and prepares them for working in their industry. Most learners benefit from a good range of work placement opportunities. Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of how to protect themselves from bullying and harassment. Good attention is paid to health and safety with teachers carrying out thorough risk assessments and implementing safe working practices in lessons. Healthy lifestyle choices are covered well in tutorials and learners are often actively engaged in promoting college-wide health related activities. Learners make a positive contribution to the college community through the student council and course representation system. They are involved in organising cross-college events and in fundraising for international charities. Curriculum areas have good links with local bodies and learners are often engaged in voluntary work to both support local projects and enhance their skills.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory with a range of practice observed across and within subjects. College staff are aware of this and are working hard to raise the overall standard to the high levels of practice seen in the best areas. In the better lessons, teachers use initial assessment information to plan and manage learning very well. Learners are fully engaged throughout the session and make good progress in developing their skills and understanding. The pace of learning is brisk and teachers use questioning well to check understanding, to probe and to challenge. In addition teachers use resources very effectively to stimulate learners' interest and motivate them to achieve. Learning support assistants are used well to help learners and to develop their independent learning skills.
14. In the less effective sessions the planning does not take sufficient account of initial assessment to ensure the differing needs of all learners in the group are met effectively and the pace of the session is too slow, which hampers the progress learners make. Learners are not fully engaged, the checking of learning is less effective, and the work of learning support assistants is not fully integrated into the session.

15. In employer responsive provision, training, coaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. In the better sessions there is good stretch and challenge through highly effective use of probing questions directed at individuals and well planned activities to support and engage individual learners. In the less effective sessions assessors use closed questions and sometimes answer their own questions. Resources are limited and learners are not encouraged to research for themselves. The provision for the development of literacy and numeracy skills is good. Assessment and coaching are overly based on workbooks and standardised checklists and sometimes lack variety.
16. Teachers use information and learning technology (ILT) effectively to support learning. In some subjects it is used very well to extend and develop learning, for example with the use of interactive babies in childcare. The college has effective systems to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills, and any additional learning needs they may have. These start as soon as a learner applies for a course and can be accessed any point in a learner's studies. Once additional learning needs are identified support is quickly put in place.
17. Assessment practices are effective. Learners are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However, in one subject area feedback is too sharply focussed on praise with insufficient detail on what exactly learners need to do to improve. Staff use the electronic system to track the progress of learners very effectively.
18. Staff are keen to develop their practice in teaching and learning and appreciate the high priority it has in the college. Changes to the organisation of continuing professional development have improved links to subject areas and the sharing of good practice. As this is a recent development it is too early to gauge its full impact. The college has a clear focus on the teaching and learning observation system. Staff appreciate having an external subject specialist as an observer for part of the process. The system is comprehensive and records are kept online, facilitating access by different staff members at different levels. Some of the observation reports are of a very high standard. However, there are also examples of poor practice, where the grade is not justified by the details recorded, and there is insufficient focus on learning and how it is being promoted. Some grades are also overgenerous.
19. The college provision meets the needs of learners and employers satisfactorily. The college carried out a complete curriculum review in 2010/11, removing or replacing many underperforming courses. There remains a wide range of provision in the majority of subject areas with clear progression routes from entry level to advanced level and, in some areas, to the higher level. Managers continue to use learners' and employers' feedback and local labour market information to refine the college's offer, significantly increasing the proportion of provision which meets government priorities. The college's flexible delivery arrangements make the provision highly accessible.

20. The college offers an appropriate range of enrichment activities which engages an increasing number of learners. The provision includes good opportunities for building skills in leadership and voluntary work, some involving foreign visits. Subject-based enrichment is good in many areas and work placement opportunities are generally appropriate.
21. The college works very effectively with a wide range of partners. Employers are very positive about the college's professional and flexible approach which successfully supports good workforce training and the engagement of young learners in key areas of the local labour market. The college works very effectively to reduce the number of learners not in education, employment or training through the school links programme and by working with pupil referral units and the Prince's Trust. Through a partnership with Jobcentre Plus the college has developed a series of programmes which are successfully helping the long term unemployed back into work. Co-operation with schools, the sixth form college and the local university is leading to the development of an educational partnership to support local regeneration.
22. Advice, guidance and support are good overall and satisfactory in work-based learning. The college has improved its enrolment procedures and includes a summer school and a range of taster courses to engage learners and help them choose an appropriate programme. Almost all learners are on the right course. Student services on both sites are comprehensive and welcoming and the college has good links with an appropriate range of external support services. Well qualified staff work with learners to identify and support their needs. Induction is thorough. The college fully recognises the economic barriers that many of its learners face and allocates sufficient financial resources to support them, including allowing those who qualify to access free nursery provision.
23. Progress coaches work very effectively with learners to set their short-term targets and carry out regular monitoring and review of their progress. Full learner records are available electronically and staff and learners maintain and add to appropriate sections of the report so that accurate information is available to all. Attendance monitoring is thorough.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

24. The college is undergoing a period of recovery following a decline in success rates and financial instability. Robust action to address these issues has led to a significant improvement in the financial health of the college last year. The college has undertaken a major restructuring exercise to improve accountability and communication as well as to reduce costs. This was informed by a review of the college's mission, and a clear vision for the college's priorities is in place that is focussed well on learners' and employers' needs. Effective action has been taken to clarify roles and responsibilities across the college; in a small number of areas roles are yet to be finalised. Performance management has been strengthened and data are used well to inform this process. Staff are very committed to the changes in the college.

25. Governance is good. Significant changes have taken place to governance arrangements within the last two years. Board membership includes a good range of educational and business expertise and is representative of the college's stakeholders. The governing body provides clear strategic direction. Attendance at meetings is high, and governors have taken part in extensive training. The governing body monitors well the performance of the college, and provides a good balance between support and challenge for senior managers. Governors receive good information to support this role. They listen well to the views of learners and staff. They are very clear about the areas for further improvement as well as the strengths of the college. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties well.
26. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The college has very effective links with the local safeguarding board, and with other agencies such as social services and the police. Staff with key safeguarding roles have a high level of expertise. Training for staff is good and effective promotion of safeguarding with learners ensures they are clear about their rights and responsibilities and how to voice any concerns. A culture of respect for others permeates the college, which contributes to learners' safety and well-being. Safeguarding policies and procedures are monitored well and reported regularly to senior managers and governors. Learners appreciate actions taken to improve safety, such as extra lighting in car parks and increased numbers of security staff. The promotion of health and safety is good in most curriculum areas.
27. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff receive appropriate training. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is well developed in most curriculum areas and through tutorials, but apprentices are not always given sufficient opportunities to explore these themes. Data are used well to inform equality action plans and the college monitors the impact of these plans regularly. The college has taken appropriate action to identify the reasons for underachievement by some minority ethnic groups, and actions are in place to address this. It is too early to see the impact of these measures on success rates; retention has improved for some groups in the current year but this is not consistent. The college has good links with external agencies to support its work on equality and diversity.
28. User engagement is good. In addition to regular questionnaires, learners are encouraged to give their views through feedback meetings in all directorates. Students are represented on key college committees and effective training ensures they are confident enough to contribute in meetings, including at governing body level. The 'Students with Disabilities' group and the 'Black and Asian Voice' group contribute their views via the student council. The college has customised methods of collecting feedback from specific groups of learners, for example for learners whose first language is not English. Senior leaders and managers at all levels take seriously the views of learners and there are many examples of changes made as a result. Employer engagement is good. Employers welcome the responsiveness of the college and opportunities to contribute to programme development.

29. The self-assessment process improved significantly in 2010/11. It enabled the college to identify clearly courses that were underperforming. Rigorous action took place to identify the reasons for underperformance. Quality improvement plans put in place are being monitored regularly in the current year and inspectors found evidence of improvement in many areas. Inspection findings are broadly in line with the college's self-assessment report, though there are some examples of college judgements being higher, in particular the college's judgement on the proportion of teaching and learning that is good or better.
30. The college provides satisfactory value for money. Major efficiency savings in the last two years have enabled the college to make significant improvements to accommodation and learning resources.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 2

Context

31. The college offers courses in health and social care, access to higher education, and childcare. One new course offers childcare combined with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Of 970 learners, 333 are aged 16 to 18 and 637 are adults. Some 542 learners follow full-time courses and 428 are part-time learners. In total, 168 learners are at foundation level, 193 at intermediate level and 609 at advanced level.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates for 2010/11 were slightly below the national average. However, learners' progress towards completion of their qualifications during 2011/12 is now good. Many learners progress from school to foundation level. Learners make good progress in developing skills which equip them well for employment. Attendance is good. Learners enjoy developing care and childcare skills, supported effectively by teachers.
- Learners feel extremely safe. They are able to apply health, safety and safeguarding knowledge effectively during classroom and work placement activity. Learners demonstrate high confidence levels, as well as effective communication and interpersonal skills in most classes. Good links between theory and practice are evidenced in learners' portfolios, building on knowledge, understanding and work-related skills' development.
- Learners make well-informed choices about their health and well-being and apply their knowledge effectively in care settings. They are actively involved in a range of community projects and voluntary work to enhance individual service users' enjoyment and to support local charities. They apply their knowledge well to case studies and work placement scenarios.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers plan lessons well taking good account of learners' prior learning and achievement information. They make good use of learning support assistants who help and support learners well in class. Progress coaches and mentors are allocated to learners to provide an additional supportive layer of help, advice and guidance.
- The majority of teachers make good use of individually planned learning activities, which promote additional individual research and develop learners' ownership of their work. Interactive learning technology and innovative teaching strategies are used well to enhance and support learning in sessions. However, a few lessons would have benefitted from the use of a wider range of teaching methods to engage learners.
- Teachers use effective questioning techniques to encourage independent and reflective learning. Learners receive clear verbal feedback from tutors during progress reviews. They take ownership of their course work, and their personal

and social development. Effective use of group tasks and activities foster good opportunities for building relationships and informal peer support amongst learners.

- The recording, monitoring and evaluation of learners' progress are good in many lessons and are appropriately matched against course units. Teachers set targets which challenge learners to extend their knowledge and understanding and to further develop their skills for the workplace. Assessment planning, review and feedback records are completed well in partnership with learners.
- Learners work well towards the achievement of English and mathematics qualifications for functional skills. Advisers provide additional learning support to help learners develop the literacy, numeracy and ESOL skills they need to succeed. Initial assessment is generally used well accurately to plan teaching strategies, learning and assessment and ensure that all learners are on the appropriate programme.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff are very approachable, extremely considerate and highly flexible in accommodating learners' needs. New courses have been introduced to meet identified needs of learners, employers and the local community. Learners appreciate the high quality care and guidance they receive. Class timetables and tutorials are effectively planned to fit around personal commitments and work schedules.
- Staff are very highly qualified, experienced and committed to helping learners to succeed in their chosen course of study. Learners appreciate the individual help, support, flexibility and guidance that staff provide. A flexible approach to continuing professional development, including occupational secondment and placement opportunities, enables staff to update their skills.
- The promotion of safeguarding is very good. Issues are integrated well into teaching and learning activities. Learners demonstrate a good understanding, and application of, safe working practices, risk assessment procedures and legal requirements. Equality and diversity are integrated well through case studies and use of workplace scenarios.
- The college carries out observation of teaching and learning. However, the college grading profile is overgenerous. Teachers and team leaders actively contribute to the self- assessment process, taking responsibility for their course data. Although the positive impact of improvement strategies has been seen during the last ten months, it is too early to judge the full impact.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Use a wider range of more effective and innovative teaching and learning methods and encourage more independent learning to take place in lessons to improve retention and pass rates.
- Improve the internal lesson observation process to ensure that grading outcomes accurately reflect the session observed and the quality of learning taking place.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 3

Context

32. Full-time and part-time courses are available from foundation to advanced levels in engineering and manufacturing technologies, including motor vehicle. Some 222 learners are full-time and 351 study part-time. Approximately 8% of learners are female and 31% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. An additional 109 pupils aged 14 to 16 follow introductory courses in engineering and motor vehicle as part of their key stage 4 curriculum.. All of the provision is based at the Burslem campus.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Success rates for both adults and learners aged 16 to 18 were low in 2010/11, after three years of decline. Low success rates were mainly due to low retention. Current in-year data indicate improvements in retention rates, particularly on intermediate programmes, where the improvement is significant. Most current learners are making at least satisfactory progress, and a significant number are making good progress.
- The standard of learners' work is satisfactory overall. A minority of learners produce work of a high standard that will enhance their employment prospects, however other learners are not developing sufficient higher-level skills to enable them to progress to a more advanced course with confidence. Attendance is satisfactory but punctuality in some classes is poor and is not challenged sufficiently by teachers.
- Learners feel safe and mainly adopt safe working practices. Health and safety are often referred to during lessons, but requirements could be more rigorously applied in some practical sessions. Risk assessments for workshop activities have been completed, but are not on display in the workshops, or shared with the learners.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, learners make good progress, working independently and demonstrating good skills. These sessions are well planned and learners are keen to contribute. However, in less successful lessons, teachers do not plan well enough to raise expectations or challenge the more able learners, or vary activities sufficiently to keep learners engaged.
- The tracking and recording of learners' progress at course level are good. There are good information technology systems in place to provide accurate data relating to learners' progress, and staff also have independent tracking processes. Regular quality board meetings are held to look in detail at learners' progress, and to take action where needed.
- The range of provision is good with an increasing emphasis on opportunities that are more relevant to the needs of the local area. Some of the more academic provision has been replaced with vocational provision. The college has good links with local employers who provide good opportunities for work

experience. External partnerships overall are satisfactory and are currently being further developed.

- Support for learners is good. The provision of additional learning support extends both to classroom and workshop activities. Learners value the high levels of support from teachers. Staff provide additional learning assistance sensitively on an individual or group basis. Success rates for learners who receive additional learning support are almost at the college rate.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Changes to the management team and structure have had a positive impact on the provision. New managers have taken strong actions to raise success rates. Staff are well supported to meet departmental targets and the indications are that retention rates are improving. Managers and staff are now using data and management information effectively to improve the provision. Staff fully support the changes, and are keen to contribute to implementing the changes.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory overall. Learners have a good understanding of health and safety matters and usually wear appropriate personal protective equipment. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. However, teachers do not always use opportunities which arise in lessons to reinforce and extend learners understanding of equality issues.
- Self-assessment and the ability of managers to evaluate critically the quality of provision are now good. Managers have identified key areas for improvement across all aspects of the provision, and are implementing them through very effective quality improvement planning. The use of data to provide an analysis of all aspects of learners' performance has significantly improved.
- Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Workshops are tidy, well maintained and contain a good range of training areas, tools and equipment and consumable materials. Teachers in most areas are able to access ILT to support teaching and learning. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in their vocational area. Staff receive support to gain relevant qualifications and undertake continuing professional development.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Increase retention rates by continuing to monitor closely progress and attendance rates. Ensure that initial advice and guidance make clear the requirements and expectations of courses and of the engineering industry.
- Improve the standards of teaching and learning by extending the good practice that exists in some areas, and by planning activities which are challenging for all learners.
- Raise the aspirations of all learners, particularly at foundation level, by setting higher standards and expectations, challenging poor punctuality, and ensuring that learners produce and submit work that meets industry standards.
- Enhance learners' understanding of equality and diversity by developing staff awareness and confidence to promote and reinforce key messages in lessons whenever opportunities arise.

Building and construction

Grade 3

Context

33. The college offers apprenticeship training in construction crafts at intermediate and advanced levels in bricklaying, concreting, construction operations, plastering, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, plumbing and gas installation. There are 107 apprentices and 43 advanced apprentices. On-the-job training is provided by employers. Assessment is carried out on site by college staff. Off-the-job training is provided in college. The college also offers apprenticeship training for construction skills and project management. Approximately 1% of apprentices are female and 0.5% are from minority ethnic groups.

Key findings

- Overall success rates for construction and plumbing apprentices in 2010/11 have declined but remain in line with national averages. Success rates for advanced apprentices in construction and plumbing have improved, but are slightly below average. Success rates for advanced apprentices in gas installation and servicing have declined and are low.
- Completions within the planned time period have improved substantially but around one third of learners leave without achieving their qualifications. In-year data provided by the college indicate that the overall success rate for all construction apprentices is improving during 2011/12. Success rates for apprenticeships delivered under subcontracting arrangements in 2010/11, are high for learners in construction skills but are low for those in project management.
- Success rates for Train to Gain learners were maintained at high levels and have been further improved on the current workforce development programme. Both in-year achievement and completions within the planned time period are currently high according to college data. Success rates for apprentices taking key skills are low. Most learners make good progress and achieve their qualifications within the planned period of their training.
- Learners develop good industry skills. Many are able to work independently and produce work of a trade standard. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of construction processes and materials. Learners feel safe in college and in the workplace. They adopt safe working practices and carry out risk assessments of their work. Most learners have a good understanding of health and safety on construction sites.
- Most learners benefit from good work placements. Employers carry out a wide range of new build, refurbishment and repairs and maintenance projects which provide good training opportunities. Employers are not systematically provided with details of practical and theory training carried out in college to help them complement the training. Key skills training is contextualised to construction so that learners can see its relevance.

- Assessment is mainly well planned and meets the requirements of the qualification. Assessment decisions are accurate and the evidence is normally well recorded. The frequency of assessment visits varies significantly across the trades. In plumbing, insufficient assessment is carried out in the workplace. Feedback to learners is satisfactory for on site and practical assessment but is good for theory work completed in college.
- Learners' progress towards their qualifications is reviewed regularly. However, a few reviewers use too many closed questions, which restricts the learner's participation in reviews. Most targets set are task-based about the completion of work or the collection of evidence. Targets are time bound but are not always specific enough. An effective tracking process is in place which records progress against the framework qualifications.
- The college offers a wide range of apprenticeships in construction which are well matched to the needs of learners and employers. Learners in most trades have had success in regional and national skills' competitions which has encouraged others to aspire to high standards. Progression into advanced apprenticeships is satisfactory. Good partnerships are in place with employers, which includes the establishment of a construction forum.
- Information advice and guidance are satisfactory. Initial assessment identifies the need for additional support but is not used well to inform teaching. Learners receiving additional learning support achieve less well than other learners. All staff have been trained to intermediate level in literacy and numeracy and are able to support learners' needs. Assessors provide good one-to-one coaching and support on site, which is highly valued by learners.
- Managers have raised the expectations and ambition of staff to improve the outcomes for learners. Staff have responded positively to this challenge. The monitoring of learners' progress is thorough. Learners at risk of leaving early are followed up promptly and effectively. Greater flexibility in training has benefitted learners and employers. Appropriate targets have been set to improve success rates but these are not known by all staff.
- Suitable arrangements are in place to safeguard learners in college and in the workplace. However, discussions on safeguarding within reviews are often cursory and a frequent comment is 'no issues'. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is not well developed during reviews. Females and young people from minority ethnic groups are underrepresented in apprenticeships but those who join the programme achieve well.
- Formal arrangements to listen and respond to learners' views are insufficiently developed. Staff are effectively involved in the self-assessment process at course level. Evaluative commentary in each of the subject area self-assessment reports on apprenticeships is insufficient. Learners benefit from high quality workshops which are well equipped with a wide range of industry standard plant, equipment and information learning technology.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices so that they are all well above national averages by reducing the proportion of learners who leave early. Maintain the thorough monitoring, prompt action of issues and flexibility in the training to meet individual needs.
- Increase the reliability and sufficiency of on site assessments in plumbing apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships so that they meet the awarding body requirements and that learners begin to make good progress.
- Increase the participation of learners within their progress reviews by asking more open questions. Use progress reviews more effectively to develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity. Improve the quality of target-setting within progress reviews so that it is consistently good.
- Improve the critical evaluation of apprenticeships so that more Common Inspection Framework aspects are covered within the subject area self-assessment reports.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

34. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. On learner responsive provision, 230 learners are aged 16 to 18 and 201 are adults. Some 316 learners follow full-time courses and 115 follow part-time courses. In total, 97 learners are at foundation level, 246 are at intermediate level and 88 are at advanced level. An additional 31 pupils aged 14 to 16 follow a hair and beauty course as part of their Key Stage 4 curriculum. In employer responsive provision, the college provides apprenticeships for 63 learners and workplace learning for 178 learners.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall, but success rates vary across courses. Success rates are outstanding on advanced spa, complementary therapies and make-up, and on foundation hairdressing courses. Success rates have declined on intermediate and advanced beauty therapy courses, and on advanced hairdressing courses and are below national rates. Success rates on intermediate hairdressing courses are satisfactory. Overall, adult success rates have declined to below the national average. Success rates for school pupils are high and most progress to the college.
- Learners make good progress. They develop good practical skills and demonstrate a high standard of customer service and communication skills in commercial classes. Foundation learners display self confidence and a high standard of work. Advanced hairdressing learners skilfully complete colouring techniques and learners on advanced nail services produce creative designs. Learners' professional standards of appearance and uniform reflect the high expectations of the industry and their attention to safe working practices is good.
- Learners are motivated to succeed and enjoy attending college. Courses have a strong emphasis on employability and progression to the next level of study. Learners are successful in national skills' competitions and many are involved in local fundraising events and skills' demonstrations in the community.
- Teaching and learning are good. Learning activities are well planned and learners are clear about the work they are required to undertake and the progress they make. Most lessons meet the needs of learners well and provide a level of challenge that encourages independent thinking. Consolidation of learning and probing questioning are used very effectively. In a minority of lessons teachers dominate, use closed questioning and the slow pace to learning does not challenge learners sufficiently.
- Assessment is good. Much effort has been put in to ensure that assessment is timely to improve completion rates and raise success rates. The college provides additional assessment opportunities for learners on Saturdays, which has been particularly well received by adults. Progress tracking is effective and undertaken electronically with learners and teachers contributing to target

setting. Most targets are specific and timely but, in a minority of cases, they are not sufficiently detailed. The feedback learners receive following assessment is useful in planning for improvement.

- A good range of provision meets the needs and interests of learners well with progression opportunities from foundation level to higher education. Internal progression rates are high. In addition to the core programme, learners can progress to holistic courses, nail courses and theatrical and media make-up.
- Learners participate well in a range of vocational enrichment such as master classes from product manufacturers, additional training and demonstrations. These enrichment activities extend learners' understanding of the breadth of the sector and enhance the development of their skills and knowledge. Learners also benefit from visits to exhibitions and extend the development of their skills through work experience. Partnership working is good. The curriculum area has extensive links with employers, local schools, trade suppliers and manufacturers, theatres and a local university, which enrich learners' experience.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners feel well supported and receive excellent developmental feedback from their teachers which they value highly. This support has been particularly effective across all levels of hairdressing and in advanced beauty therapy to help learners meet their personal targets. The impact of this support has been less effective on intermediate beauty therapy. Learners who receive additional support for their learning often achieve better than their peers who do not.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers and staff have a clear sense of the direction of travel for improvement. The team has high aspirations and expectations. Actions to address underperformance have had a positive impact on in-year progress on advanced courses but have been less effective on intermediate beauty therapy courses. Accountability for courses and performance management has been strengthened. Self-assessment accurately identifies the individual underperforming qualifications and the appropriate actions for improvement required to address them.
- Learners feel safe and well protected at the college. They welcome the use of swipe cards to access their area and the security presence provided by the college. The promotion of equality and diversity is demonstrated well in lessons to develop learners' understanding; a very good example relates to a series of activities in a foundation level group focused on gender stereotyping.
- Accommodation and resources are very good and include a suite of well equipped salons and a commercial spa which allow learners to gain practical experience and reach high standards of assessment in industry standard facilities.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Increase advanced level success rates by ensuring that planned strategies for improvement are sustained on courses by rigorously monitoring the progress of learners at risk of leaving early, and by setting individualised and challenging targets.
- Improve retention on intermediate beauty therapy courses through close monitoring at individual reviews with learners and reviewing recruitment processes to ensure appropriate placement of learners.
- Increase adult learners' success rates by evaluating the impact of current improvement strategies, ensuring learners receive individualised support and prompt interventions for assessment completions.

Literacy and numeracy

Grade 3

Context

35. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in literacy and numeracy. Of the learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 2,014 are aged 16 to 18 and 2,429 are adults. Some 243 learners follow full-time courses and 4,200 follow part-time courses. In total 3,307 learners are at foundation level, 1,127 learners are at intermediate level, and 9 learners are at advanced level. An additional 108 pupils aged 14 to 16 follow courses to include progression diploma, functional skills and a small number of learners are taking the 14 to 19 diplomas as part of their Key Stage 4 curriculum. In employer responsive provision, the college provides workplace learning for 202 learners.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates in 2010/11 were low on GCSE mathematics and English and on functional skills at foundation and intermediate level in English. No success rates exceed national averages. This year, improved recruitment and guidance arrangements have led to increased retention on the vast majority of programmes, including GCSE. College data, including functional skills pass rates to date, indicate that success rates have risen markedly this year.
- Learners make satisfactory progress in lessons. They benefit from improved confidence in areas such as helping their children, reading documents, and managing money. Around half the learners progress to higher level literacy or numeracy programmes. The college does not collect data showing how many learners progress to employment or vocational courses. Inspectors spoke to many learners who had progressed, or had aspirations to do so.
- Learners feel safe in college and in their lessons. They enjoy learning and being at college. They have a good understanding of how to protect themselves from harassment and bullying. Safe working practices and respect for each other's views are promoted in lessons. They have a good understanding of who to contact with any safeguarding queries.
- The quality of provision is satisfactory as are teaching, learning and assessment. Lessons are planned well so that they motivate and engage learners. Teachers, who are experienced and enthusiastic, design and adapt resources that are up-to-date and relevant. Often, learners gain an appropriate, subject specific vocabulary that they use confidently to participate fully in learning activities.
- Technology is used well to enhance lessons and stimulate discussions. Classrooms, including those in neighbourhood centres, are well equipped with up-to-date equipment that learners use well to support their learning. The college intranet is well supplied with material to support literacy and numeracy. Currently, staff are evaluating this material to provide the good materials in one location.

- Appropriate initial and diagnostic assessments are carried out when learners enrol and they are used to help place learners on the most suitable course, However, they are not always used sufficiently to plan individual learning or monitor learners' progress through the course.
- Assessment processes and internal verification are satisfactory. Teachers give much positive encouragement and praise on marked work. However, in too many instances, comments and targets set for the next piece of work do not reflect sufficiently the specific areas learners need to improve which have been identified through initial assessment or marking. This limits their ability to monitor their own progress.
- An appropriate range of levels, from entry level to intermediate level are offered in many community venues and at the main campuses. Most community programmes can be accessed throughout the year and learners take exams when they are ready. Specific progression awards and return to learn programmes help learners gain a range of skills, including literacy and numeracy, so that they can progress onto other college courses.
- The college has effective partnerships with a range of businesses and community groups throughout the area. They work closely with other organisations to engage hard to reach learners and with several trades unions to support workplace literacy and numeracy. Learners benefit from the joint work between the college and a local university to develop learning resources based on statistical information about Stoke-on-Trent.
- Support for learners is satisfactory. Teachers know their learners well. They act promptly to challenge poor attendance. The recruitment and induction process, including two week tasters before learners are placed on programmes, is effective in increasing retention. Learners are signposted appropriately to further study opportunities. Numerous links with a range of agencies offer specific and expert help on social, health and financial matters.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff support and are involved fully in the considerable changes the area is undergoing. Observation of teaching and learning records are used to plan staff development activities, and comprehensive training is in place for all staff moving to functional skills teaching. Staff request and receive specific training to improve their practice.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate. It includes the views of staff, partners and learners and leads to a detailed and appropriate action plan that is regularly updated. Recent actions have improved attendance, retention and outcomes. Co-location of all literacy and numeracy staff with all their managers has increased the sharing of good practice. Regular monitoring of courses has increased staff awareness of the importance of outcomes.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Set clear targets so that all learners' progress can be carefully monitored to ensure that they are making good progress in order to increase retention and success rates.
- Analyse the progression of all learners to other full-time courses and employment to evaluate better the impact on learners' economic and social well-being.
- Use initial diagnostic assessment results and marked work to plan activities that develop learners' skills in those areas identified as needing improvement. Record and monitor the improvements made.
- Ensure that all learners benefit from good resources and classroom practice by embedding further the sharing of good practice and resources between all those who teach literacy and numeracy.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

36. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in business, administration and law. Of the learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 246 are aged 16 to 18 and 482 are adults. Some 71 learners follow full-time courses and 657 follow part-time courses. In total, 42 learners are at foundation level, 509 learners are at intermediate level, 150 learners are at advanced level and 27 learners are at higher level. In employer responsive provision, the college provides apprenticeships for 137 learners, and workplace learning for 154 learners.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates have improved over the past three years to slightly below national averages. For learners aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses, success rates are higher than the national averages. Achievements for all learners are slightly above national averages. Although improving, retention has remained below national averages for three years.
- Learners make satisfactory progress. They develop good business skills, particularly in enterprise and financial awareness; however, a few learners have numeracy skills which are below the required level. Learners have appropriate opportunities for progression within the college from foundation level to higher education.
- Learners have good opportunities to improve their economic and financial well-being. All learners on long courses are able to do an additional enterprise course and they are encouraged to set up small enterprises to raise funds for charities. The college supports learners in finding part-time work and encourages them to share their employment experiences with other learners. Learners make good use of opportunities to increase their employability skills as well their experiences within the work environment.
- Learners feel safe in college. Safeguarding information is shared and reinforced in induction and staff training. E-safety is also well covered. Learners are aware of whom to contact if they have concerns about safety. Learners feel safe when going around the building and this is reinforced by the wearing of identity badges and the availability of security staff on the campus.
- Learners have good opportunities to make a positive contribution. They are actively engaged in all of the student forums within the college. They are encouraged to get involved in raising funds for charities and have the opportunity to organise cross college and departmental enrichment events as part of their courses. Learners can engage in additional projects such as Challenge South Africa.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better sessions, learners are fully engaged and given the opportunity to contribute to the development of other learners. Tracking is used well to record individual progress in many sessions. Assessment is systematic. In the less successful lessons, learners remain

unchallenged and insufficient use is made of learners' prior knowledge. Too many sessions are taught to meet only pass criteria, with insufficient guidance on how learners can achieve higher grades.

- The capacity for the provision to meet the needs of the learners is satisfactory. The area offers a good range of courses at intermediate level and above. However, opportunities to enter the college at foundation level are limited. Courses are offered flexibly to meet learners' and employers' needs. Practical work experience is available for some courses, especially for medical secretaries and customer services' learners.
- Partnership links are good. Educational visits, company seminars, work placements and business-related master classes are a direct result of these successful partnerships. Learners can work with local employers including local hairdressers, doctors' surgeries, charity organisations and the local chamber of commerce to improve their employability skills. A past student has established a company and has offered two business apprenticeships to the college.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners have access to an improved initial advice and guidance process. Detailed induction programmes successfully prepare learners for their courses. The college-wide tutorial system covers essential topics such as making healthy choices. Support in lessons is good; teachers, learning mentors and learning support assistants co-ordinate their efforts well to ensure those who require additional help make good progress.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Appropriate action plans are put in place and are closely monitored. Teachers are clear about their targets and take responsibility for achieving these challenging targets. These strategies show improvements in retention when compared to the same period in the previous year. Managers do not make best use of opportunities to share good practice within staff teams.
- Safeguarding of learners is satisfactory. Staff and learners are aware of the opportunities to speak to trained safeguarding managers when they have cause for concern. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners with additional learning needs are well supported and achieve in line with other learners. Teachers reinforce mutual respect and positive behaviour within lessons.
- Engagement with users to support and improve courses is good. Learners feel positive about the impact of their input. Learners' views have been used effectively to improve provision. Medical secretaries requested work experience opportunities and this has been arranged. Learners' work experiences are used effectively in some areas to highlight the industrial relevance of courses.
- Self-assessment has improved and is good. Teacher involvement in the self-assessment process is improving. Internal verification is detailed and leads to improvements in the assessment process. New strategies are improving outcomes for learners.

What does Stoke-on-Trent College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all learners have, or receive, the necessary skills to cope with the numeracy demands of courses, so that they make good progress and achieve higher grades.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by sharing of good practice and developing teachers' ability to plan and pace lessons in order to engage all learners.
- Provide more stretch and challenge for learners by restructuring courses to ensure more capable learners can work towards higher grades and have access to more extension activities at the appropriate level.

Information about the inspection

37. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the college's executive director of learning and standards, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
38. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Stoke-on-Trent College
Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	2,668	18	1,840	810	0
Part-time learners	6,900	379	470	4,679	1,372
Overall effectiveness	3	n/a	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	4	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	4				
How well do learners progress?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
Quality of provision	3	n/a	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	3	n/a	3	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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