

Stoke-on-Trent College

General further education college

Inspection dates

27 February – 2 March 2018

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement	Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement	Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Governors and senior leaders were slow to make the improvements recommended in the previous inspection report. This coincided with a period of significant turbulence in leadership and governance
- Too few teachers provide learners with sufficiently helpful feedback or challenging targets to help them improve their work further.
- Too few teachers use information about learners' and apprentices' starting points well enough, to set appropriately challenging work to motivate and engage them and help them achieve in line with their full potential.
- In the previous academic year, the proportion of learners and apprentices who completed and achieved their qualifications was too low, particularly on level 3 study programmes and in English and mathematics qualifications.
- Teachers on vocational courses and apprenticeships do not routinely develop learners' skills well enough in English and mathematics.
- Learners' attendance is too low. Actions to improve learners' attendance are beginning to take effect, but too few learners meet college expectations of high attendance, particularly in English and mathematics.

The provider has the following strengths

- The recent appointments of an experienced principal, senior post holders and governors have stabilised and strengthened the capacity of leadership within the college to improve the quality of provision and experience of learners.
- Teachers' strong vocational experience and specialist college resources enable learners to acquire good practical industry-standard skills.
- Leaders have maintained strong relationships with a range of local agencies to promote education and skills across the city. An increasing proportion of learners are now gaining the skills to progress to the next level of learning and employment.
- Leaders and managers have designed a wide and inclusive curriculum offer that links closely to local and regional employers' skill shortages.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Stoke-on-Trent College is a medium-sized further education college that offers vocational courses and apprenticeship programmes across its two main sites in Shelton and Burslem, and in the community. The proportion of pupils in Stoke-on-Trent leaving school with five GCSEs at grade 4 or above, including English and mathematics, is below the national average. The proportion of learners attending the college from minority ethnic heritage backgrounds is more than twice that of the local population.
- The main source of employment in Stoke-on-Trent is service industries, including education, health, hotel and restaurant work, and distribution. Employment in the town is lower than the West Midlands average. The proportion of adults with intermediate-level qualifications is significantly lower than the national average. Around 15% of the local population has no recognised qualifications, around twice the national rate.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Governors should hold the new leadership team to account relentlessly for the improvement of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, leading to a rapid and sustainable improvement in learners' progress and achievement.
- Leaders should improve learners' attendance and increase the proportion of learners and apprentices who achieve their qualifications by ensuring that:
 - managers use information about learners' progress and the outcomes of lesson observations to identify accurately what individual teachers need to do to improve their performance
 - managers resolve staffing shortages swiftly, particularly in English and mathematics, so that learners have consistency in the staff who teach them.
- Managers should improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that staff accurately assess their learners' starting points and use this information to plan and teach lessons that motivate and engage all learners and support them to make good or better progress
 - ensuring that teachers provide helpful feedback and challenging targets for their learners, so that they can improve the quality of their work and make good progress
 - enabling staff to improve their confidence, knowledge and skills to teach and promote the value of English and mathematics effectively.
- Teachers should increase the proportion of learners who make good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills by:
 - improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics lessons
 - using opportunities in vocational lessons to develop learners' English and mathematics skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Following the previous inspection, the actions that leaders and governors implemented to tackle areas for improvement were too slow and not sufficiently effective. A period of instability exacerbated by frequent changes in the strategic leadership of the college and of the governing body hindered improvement. However, following the appointment of a new experienced principal in July 2017 and the recruitment of a majority of new governors and a new chair of corporation, improvement actions are now beginning to take effect.
- The new principal has worked effectively to stabilise the leadership of the college and improve the organisation's reputation with key partners and stakeholders in the region. Leaders have set about tackling the college's weaknesses with vigour and determination. They have set realistic but challenging targets for improvement in raising performance and standards. They now hold managers to account for the quality of provision and financial control through regular quality review and budget meetings. The leadership team is determined to make the changes necessary to bring about rapid improvement to learners' outcomes and to the college's weak finances.
- Leaders have implemented well a revised process for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, based on a graded observation procedure and focused learning walks. Though this is at an early stage of development, leaders now have a more consistent focus on the impact of teaching on learning, learners' progress and what teachers need to do to improve. However, managers do not consistently link the results of lesson observations to key information such as learners' attendance or the proportions who are on target to achieve their qualifications or who leave their course early. Leaders recognise that further action is required to ensure that all teachers provide learners and apprentices with consistently good teaching. During joint observations, inspectors and college observers broadly agreed in their respective findings.
- Performance management is effective. Leaders have introduced a revised appraisal system for all staff, holding them to account for their performance. Managers now set teachers clear targets, which align closely to strategic business targets and also make better use of performance information, including learners' outcomes and results arising from internal observations of lessons. Leaders now apply performance management procedures well and take prompt action to deal with instances of underperformance. This has resulted in a number of staff leaving the college's employment.
- Leaders' and managers' evaluation of the quality of provision through self-assessment requires further improvement. Leaders have been overoptimistic in their assessment of the quality of adult provision and provision for learners with high needs. Actions detailed in the quality improvement plans have not resulted in improvement against all of the key recommendations identified at the previous inspection. Quality improvement plans do not set sufficiently challenging targets. However, newly appointed senior leaders and managers have revised the self-assessment process and implemented well-considered quality improvement strategies and performance monitoring.

Early indications show that these initiatives are starting to have a positive impact; for example, teachers and managers now use data more consistently to monitor learners' attendance and to track their progress through monthly quality review meetings.

- Leaders and managers work effectively with community partners, including the local authority, higher education providers, employers and the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. They use these links very well to match the curriculum offer to local and regional skills priorities. Leaders have ensured that the college prioritises the needs of those individuals most disadvantaged in the local community. Senior leaders actively support this priority, working closely with the city-wide 'enterprising opportunities' initiative to increase social mobility in the region. Leaders and managers use labour market information well to identify where curriculum provision is required to fulfil local needs. For example, in partnership with the local university, college managers have designed a suite of apprenticeships, including one in games design, to meet employers' business requirements.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the college estate and specialist vocational training facilities are of good quality. With the support of key partners there are further development plans to ensure that the college meets the ongoing education and training needs of local residents and employers.
- Managers have revised the college's English and mathematics strategy so that the majority of learners develop their skills sufficiently in these subjects. However, they have not yet resolved challenges in recruiting English and mathematics teachers, the low attendance and the slow progress that learners aged 16 to 18 make in these essential subjects.
- The college's very small subcontracted provision is managed well. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of subcontracted provision are effective. Stringent monitoring arrangements have resulted in college leaders ending contracts with a few subcontractors, where the quality of training failed to improve.
- The college offers a very inclusive environment and attracts a high proportion of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and hard-to-reach groups, such as learners with few prior qualifications, carers, single parents and the unemployed. The promotion of equality and support for diversity are integral to college life. These are supported well through a calendar of events and guest speakers covering topics such as mental health, healthy relationships, and life in modern Britain. Group tutorials raise learners' awareness of topics such as harassment, bullying, safety and respect. As a result, learners quickly develop a secure understanding of each other's differences, including cultural and social differences and lifestyle choices.
- Managers use data on learners' performance effectively to identify differences in achievement between groups of learners and apprentices and to inform actions and narrow gaps in achievement. As a result, achievement gaps are narrowing for most key groups.

The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection, the composition of the college's corporation has changed substantially, with around half of the members being new appointments. The board now has a good range of expertise that they use well to help steer the college through turbulent times, especially recent financial difficulties.
- However, until recently, governors accepted too readily senior leaders' and managers' assessment of college performance. Consequently, they had an overoptimistic view of the

college's rate of progress against the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Governors now receive more detailed and reliable information regarding key aspects of college performance, including the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They use their collective expertise well to interrogate closely the information presented to them. Governors now provide good challenge and support to the new senior leadership team to accelerate the pace of change and the rate of improvement.
- Governors are ambitious for the college and have a thorough understanding of the local region. They recognise the pivotal role that education and skills play in supporting regeneration in the area. They are highly supportive of the college and are proud of its role in the community it serves.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Learners benefit from the support of a highly skilled safeguarding team. The team have clear notification procedures that ensure that relevant issues are reported and managed efficiently and that effective action is taken. Where necessary, the teams work closely with the support of relevant external agencies and partners to ensure learners' safety and well-being.
- All staff and governors have been trained to the appropriate level in safeguarding. Leaders have ensured that child protection and safeguarding training for all staff is up to date and in line with statutory requirements. This means that all staff in the college are clear on the procedures to follow if they have any concerns. Staff use their safeguarding training well to keep a 'watchful eye' on all learners – but particularly the most vulnerable, such as those who are looked after, and unaccompanied minors who have arrived from abroad. As a result of staff's ongoing vigilance, there has been an increase in the number of safeguarding referrals.
- Staff, including governors, are appropriately trained in all aspects of safeguarding and their responsibilities in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. Staff ensure that learners are aware of how to keep themselves safe while online and when using social media. Learners report that they feel safe and know to whom they would report concerns, including those concerning bullying and harassment, radicalisation and extremism.
- Managers and staff promote effectively health, well-being and safety. Senior leaders frequently review the safeguarding policy along with the annual safeguarding report. They have established detailed reporting process for the monitoring of accidents and near misses. They closely scrutinise reported incidents to identify trends and patterns. Access to college buildings is monitored closely both through CCTV and electronic swipe cards. Learners feel safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching and learning and assessment remains too variable, and is not yet good. The quality of provision for adults and learners with high needs has declined. Recently appointed leaders have devised appropriate

actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They now undertake frequent and useful short learning walks which are helping to bring about improvements. For example, during practical activities, teachers now link more effectively English and mathematics skills to develop learners' skills in these subjects.

- Staff use the initial assessment of learners' starting points well to place them on the correct programme and level of learning. Teachers, however, do not use these results well enough to plan work that matches learners' prior attainment and potential. In too many lessons teachers set work for the whole group. As a result, the least able learners fail to complete the task and fall behind, and the most able complete early and become bored. In these lessons, activities are frequently undemanding and do not motivate learners sufficiently. In a level 3 information technology lesson, learners spent 20 minutes cutting out images from magazines for a poster. The teacher did not challenge the first to complete with more complex activities, slowing their progress. Although the large majority of learners make the expected progress, too few receive work to help them reach their full potential.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have revised the teaching arrangements for English and mathematics for learners aged 16 to 18. Due to significant staff shortages, learners in English classes continue to make slow progress, though the college's data shows that their progress in mathematics is improving. Learners now develop the appropriate skills in English and mathematics in vocational lessons. However, it is too early to judge whether their qualification success in these subjects will improve.
- Adult learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses develop good English speaking and listening skills. This helps them to progress well and develop quickly towards their future careers and further learning. The pace of skill development in English and mathematics for other adult learners is too slow.
- Teachers plan and conduct learners' assessment well, and their written feedback is accurate. For example, in GCSE mathematics their feedback results in learners setting appropriate targets that result in improvement. However, in a minority of assessments, teachers' feedback is not helpful enough for learners to be able to make improvements to their work. Assessors, for example, confine their written feedback to ticks and cursory comments such as 'well done' for completing units. This does not support apprentices' progress well enough. Too few teachers on adult courses question learners frequently enough to check and develop their understanding, so as to ensure that they all make the progress that they should.
- The large majority of learners are making the progress expected of them. Most teachers assess learners frequently and monitor their progress against their expected grade. The majority use this information well to identify underperformance in study programmes such as childcare, travel and tourism, and information technology. However, in a minority of subjects, such as engineering and sport, the monitoring of learners' progress is less effective, slowing the rate of improvement for these learners.
- Learners on vocational courses and apprenticeships benefit from well-qualified tutors, who act as good role models. They help learners to prepare well for their chosen jobs, acquire industry-standard skills and produce work of a good standard. Learners in hairdressing and catering classes develop particularly strong skills that exceed their programme requirements. For instance, in hairdressing, learners on level 1 courses develop advanced skills in cutting and colouring.

- Learning resources are of good quality and provide industry-standard learning environments for learners on vocational courses such as catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, fitness and construction. Learners take pride in their accommodation and the wide range of equipment provided. They develop the practical skills expected in commercial businesses. In hairdressing and beauty therapy commercial sessions, learners practise additional customer service and sales skills. They provide their clients with personalised treatments and a range of products for use at home.
- Staff identify learners' support needs quickly and accurately. Learning support assistants provide particularly effective individualised support, in class and during individual drop-in sessions. Learners are able to contribute well in lessons and make at least the progress expected of them. In addition to academic support, many learners, who may have otherwise been unable to take part, receive the financial assistance to support costs for travel and the equipment they need to participate fully in their course.
- Learners know how to keep themselves safe from victimisation, harassment and exploitation as a result of a comprehensive tutorial programme. Teachers generally extend these subjects by reinforcing the key messages in learning sessions. Learners report that they feel safe and can confidently discuss these subjects. In performing arts courses, learners' awareness of diversity in the community is particularly strong. For example, during a session exploring make-up, skin tone and hair textures, they discussed how 'first impressions' determined how individuals are perceived and the risks of stereotyping.
- The support for learners who are children looked after, or who have special educational needs, is good. The level of support provided has increased since the previous inspection. Key college staff have established strong links with social and support workers, ensuring that these learners achieve well on their programmes and progress to their next steps in education, life or work.
- Staff use the community learning fund well. In 2017/18 nearly 800 adult learners entered mainstream college courses. Adults referred through community support workers access taster courses in English and mathematics, information technology and personal development. Most learners achieve their course, with the large majority progressing to further learning.
- Staff keep employers well informed about apprentices' and other work-based learners' progress. Additionally, for learners on study programmes, parents and carers receive records of their progress at parents' evenings and from report cards. Consequently, learners receive good support from others outside of the college, supporting their improved in-year retention and attendance.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Learners' attendance at lessons across the college, although improving, is too low. It does not meet college targets or support the college's aim of helping learners to develop a positive attitude to learning. Attendance is particularly poor in English and mathematics classes. Managers' actions to improve attendance have resulted in a marginal improvement compared to the same point in the previous year, but they recognise that attendance is not yet good. Learners on high-needs programmes attend well.

- Too many learners and apprentices make slow progress in developing their English and mathematical skills. Attendance in English and mathematics lessons is particularly low. As a result, too few learners make good and prompt progress in these essential work-related skills. Adult learners on ESOL courses develop their speaking and listening skills well.
- The standard of learners' practical work is good. Learners aged 16 to 18 on higher-level teaching assistants' courses work confidently with teachers to support young children during lessons at school. Apprentices develop good practical skills as a result of their work-based training. Learners in receipt of high-needs funding at the college's specialist subcontracted provision develop good employability skills. Learners on a painting and decorating programme carefully compare the quality of different paints against cost, with a focus on making a profit as if they were running a business. As a result, most learners and apprentices develop the necessary skills for future employment.
- The large majority of learners on study programmes have either completed purposeful work experience or have planned opportunities in the current year. As a result, most learners develop valuable work-related skills that benefit them when planning their career pathways. Too few learners with high needs benefit from meaningful external work experience to extend their skills for employment.
- Learners benefit from effective additional support. Managers have extended the available resource to ensure that learners with a variety of needs receive specialist support. This includes support for learners requiring mental health support and access to the college counselling service. Learners with very high needs at the college's specialist subcontracted provision benefit from highly effective one-to-one support, such as speech and language therapy. As a result, learners gain significantly in confidence and become more independent.
- Most learners receive good information, advice and guidance at the start of their programmes. A series of well-planned events provide timely and useful information to learners. As a result, most learners are on the right course at the right level. The large majority of learners make good use of this information to plan their next steps to achieve their career aspirations. Apprentices do not receive sufficient careers guidance to enable them to make informed choices about their future work and study options. Most learners progress to higher levels of study or into employment. Most apprentices progress to sustained employment.
- Most learners aged 16 to 18 benefit from an extensive range of trips and visits that enhance their learning and develop their personal and social skills well. Learners involved in a 'Challenge South Africa' programme travel to Africa and volunteer for various projects in the local community. Before travelling, learners undertake fundraising activities and buy food parcels on arrival to deliver to disadvantaged families in the country.
- Learners' behaviour in lessons and around the college campuses is good. They are respectful towards each other, their teachers and their environment. They work well together and support each other well in lessons. The standard of learners' work is appropriate to their level of study.
- Most learners and apprentices have a good understanding of extremism and fundamental British values, and speak confidently about tolerance and respect. They benefit from an extensive 'big tutorial' programme that deepens their knowledge on topics such as helping young people to consider issues around sexual exploitation, mental health and hate

crime. This helps prepare learners well for life in modern Britain.

- Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have. They are clear about the college's 'lock down' procedure in response to a potential threat. Apprentices work safely in the workplace. Learners and apprentices speak confidently about how to keep themselves safe when using social media.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- In 2016/17, the proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 achieving vocational qualifications declined and was below that of other similar providers in subjects such as level 3 applied science, business, sport, art, public services and media. Achievement rates for adult learners have improved over three years and are around the national rate, although they have declined since the previous inspection. Their achievement on level 2 subjects in healthcare, business administration and taxi-driving is similar to other providers. Adults studying level 3 courses in subjects such as access to higher education courses and accountancy do not achieve as well as their peers. Most adults studying employability courses make good progress and achieve their qualifications.
- In 2016/17, the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications in the planned timescales stagnated and remained marginally below the low national rate. Although most apprentices studying intermediate qualifications achieve similarly to their peers, too few of those studying at advanced level achieve in the time allocated. Too many apprentices meet only minimum requirements.
- In 2016/17, too few learners aged 16 to 18 made the progress expected of them, based on their starting points. They did not achieve or, where relevant, make the grades of which they were capable, limiting their progression to the next level of learning. In the current year, the large majority of learners are now making better – and at least expected – progress due to teachers' increased monitoring and focus on high standards. Progress is particularly good in applied science, beauty therapy, media, public services and games development.
- Too few learners studying English and mathematics qualifications make the progress expected of them. The proportion of learners achieving level 1 and level 2 functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics is low. The proportion of learners achieving GCSE qualifications with grades from 4 to 9 in these subjects is also below that of similar providers. It is very low for learners aged 16 to 18. Adult learners studying functional skills English at entry 2 achieve marginally better than most.
- The college provides ESOL classes for a large number of adults from the local community. Although learners are making good progress in the current year, too few achieved their course compared to similar providers in the previous year.
- In 2016/17, too much variation existed in the achievement of learners from different ethnic backgrounds. A higher proportion of learners are now continuing with their courses in the current year and so these gaps are closing. Male and female learners have similar achievement rates overall. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds now achieve broadly in line with their peers.
- College managers use well the information about learners' destinations on leaving the college to improve the design of the curriculum to improve the provision. For example,

managers have ensured that all courses, such as access to higher education and sports performance, enable learners to progress either to further learning or employment in the region. Consequently, most learners and apprentices progress either to higher or further education, employment or apprenticeships. Only a very small minority of previous learners are not in education, employment or training. Managers do not routinely collect this information for most adult learners, for use in improving their provision further.

- Nearly all learners and apprentices produce work and develop practical skills at the standard expected of them. In most cases, their work meets awarding organisation expectations and enables them to achieve appropriate standards in the current year. A small minority of learners, particularly in hairdressing, beauty therapy, catering and sport, are producing work of a high standard. A majority of apprentices in business administration, engineering, health and social care and warehousing develop high-level skills that their employers value.
- Learners with high needs develop good personal and social skills that help them to live more independently. Most learners with high needs progress to the next level of learning, although too few progress into employment or supported internships.
- In the current academic year, managers monitor closely learners' attendance and progress towards planned targets. Most learners remain on their programme, and the large majority make at least the progress expected of them. However, although improving, too few learners meet college attendance targets.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- There are 1,415 learners on study programmes. The college offers courses in 12 of the 15 subject areas from entry level to level 3. The largest areas include health and care, arts and media, public services and construction.
- Since the previous inspection, managers and staff have recently introduced a number of new initiatives so that they can monitor learners' progress and performance more effectively. They use the information to identify more accurately support requirements for individual learners. As a result of improvement in teaching practices, the proportion of learners who are now making the progress expected of them is increasing. However, a minority of learners in areas such as sport and engineering continue to make slow progress in their learning. For these learners, the targets set by personal tutors and teachers are not specific enough to assist them to make consistently rapid progress and improve their performance.
- In too many lessons, teachers fail to plan activities that challenge and motivate the most able learners so that they make swift progress. In these lessons, most learners achieve the planned tasks and targets easily, with too few learners challenged to extend their learning. This is especially apparent in classroom-based lessons, where learners complete undemanding activities which contribute little to their learning. For example, in a level 3 health and social care lesson, the majority of learners completed easily a research activity on children's play activities. However, the teacher failed to question or set extension activities for the most able learners, and so they did not explore the topic as widely as they could.

- A minority of teachers plan challenging learning activities that motivate and sustain learners' interest by successfully linking theory to practice. For example, level 1 painting and decorating teachers refer to tips and techniques from their time in the workplace, such as keeping their equipment in 'tip-top' condition to save time and money. Learners in hairdressing and media make-up get ideas about running their own business from their teachers' understanding of the costings and overheads related to running a salon. The standard of learners' written work is appropriate for the level of study. In practical sessions, learners demonstrate good levels of employability skills such as: team-working and problem-solving in public services; working to industry standards using professional software to design a multimedia promotion TV advertisement in media; in media make-up, they use colours skilfully, to create visually attractive styles for clients.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not use information about learners' English and mathematics skills well enough to develop further their confidence and skills in subject-related terminology or in the application of mathematical techniques. Recently, managers have enabled teachers to plan activities with English and mathematics specialists to improve learners' skills in these subjects. However, it is too soon to assess the impact on learners' progress in these skills.
- In the majority of marked work, written feedback is not helpful enough to enable learners to make good progress. However, most teachers provide good constructive verbal feedback. For example, in applied science, beauty therapy, and media, learners benefited from precise 'bitesize' verbal feedback enabling them to correct their work swiftly and make good progress. While teachers focus keenly on improving learners' English skills, too often they focus solely on identifying spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes. As a result, learners do not receive sufficient support in improving other skills such as sentence structure, purpose, formal and informal writing style, and writing for a particular audience.
- Leaders and managers plan and manage work experience for learners effectively. In level 3 travel and tourism and theatre production, learners develop the specific customer service and technical skills required by employers during high-quality placements in hotels, retail and local theatres. Most learners have relevant work experience placements planned or will benefit from work-related activities that link closely to the demands of the workplace.
- Careers guidance is good. It is impartial and arrangements provide learners with the opportunity to participate in taster sessions prior to enrolment. They benefit from interviews with course specialists and inspirational advice from course tutors. This helps learners to set realistic and achievable goals for the future. Support for learners intending to go to university is good.
- Learners know well how to keep themselves safe and they understand the health and safety issues relevant to their subjects. Their behaviour in class and around the college is good. They have a positive relationship with teachers and staff and respect for each other that contributes to a positive college environment. Learners demonstrate a good awareness of the potential threats from extremism and radicalisation and know whom to contact, if they have a concern.

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

- At the time of inspection, the college provides courses for 1,868 adult learners, of which 247 are full time and 1,621 part time. The majority of learners follow entry level, level 1 and level 2 programmes in ESOL, and English and mathematics, with a very small minority on level 3 programmes – mainly in access to higher education and science. Additionally, 941 adults follow community learning programmes, 489 follow distance learning programmes, 169 follow employability programmes and 812 follow ESOL courses.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good across most adult programmes. In a minority of cases, teachers fail to use information about learners' starting points well enough, so that learning activities enable all learners to achieve their full potential – particularly for the most able. In too many lessons all learners complete the same activities irrespective of their starting points and potential. As a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable. For example, in a level 1 and level 2 mathematics lesson, learners worked through the same activity, converting percentages to fractions and decimals; however, the teacher did not challenge level 2 learners to answer more complex questions. A few teachers of ESOL programmes make good use of technology to assess frequently and support the development of learners' English and mathematics skills.
- For the majority of adult learners, the majority of teachers fail to develop their English and mathematics skills quickly enough. Attendance is too low in ESOL and English and mathematics classes, and too few of these learners achieve their qualifications.
- A minority of teachers do not monitor the progress of learners on ESOL, English and mathematics, and access to higher education courses well enough. Too often, learners do not receive sufficient feedback or targets, so that they can improve their work quickly. For these learners, targets are not specific or precise enough to motivate and inspire them to achieve their potential, or improve their work to get back on track. For example, ESOL learners' targets were 'improve my English' or 'progress to the next level'. In access to higher education, learners' awareness of targets was limited to the number of credits and merits/distinctions required for university, not promoting improvement in the quality of their work. Recent improvements in the tracking and monitoring of learners' progress show that the majority are now making at least the progress expected of them.
- A minority of teachers fail to check learners' understanding sufficiently before moving on to the next activity. Too few use questioning skilfully enough to assess learners' knowledge and understanding – especially where learners lack confidence. Consequently, the most able and confident learners dominate, answering questions, and the less confident remain silent, slowing their progress.
- A minority of teachers' written feedback is not sufficiently precise to help learners improve their work further. They provide appropriate feedback in adult English and mathematics, ESOL and employability programmes. Additionally, they identify inaccuracies in learners' work, including in spelling, punctuation and grammar, but do not provide sufficient guidance on what they need to do to improve. In access to health science, however, oral and written feedback is constructive and detailed. This helps learners to improve their work and achieve the grades required for entry to university courses.
- The majority of learners develop good vocational, personal, social and employability skills through enjoyable activities. ESOL learners use correct tenses in written and spoken work and continue their learning outside of lessons through the completion of homework,

which teachers mark frequently. Learners studying employability programmes improve their communication and confidence and develop their literacy skills – which helps them to engage within their community and progress to further study or employment. Learners in access to higher education programmes develop their skills for higher education, including referencing, personal organisation, time management and independent research skills. Learners on Prince’s Trust programmes develop their knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with drugs and alcohol through verbal presentations. They practise teamwork and leadership during a ‘live project’ refurbishing a local football club.

- The college has well-established partnership arrangements, including with Jobcentre Plus. Leaders prioritise community funding to provide a range of flexible and high-quality adult programmes for the unemployed and those most disadvantaged in the local community. Programmes start at different times in the year and meet the needs and aspirations of adults well, including pre-employability courses, lone parent programmes and courses for taxi drivers. These courses are particularly successful in supporting learners returning to education, and into employment.
- Managers plan effectively distance learning programmes for learners within the health, care and business sectors. The wide range of courses, including dementia awareness, mental health and customer service, enables learners to update and improve their skills for the workplace and helps them make a positive contribution to their community. One learner confirmed that as a result of a mental health qualification, she has become more confident and can provide more effective support to individuals in her voluntary community work.
- Learners have a clear understanding of British values. ESOL learners confirm that this helps them to live productively within their communities. Learners appreciate the values of equality, freedom of speech and rule of law, demonstrate respect for others and are tolerant of each other’s beliefs, culture and lifestyles. They understand the risks and dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation and speak confidently about how to raise concerns and to whom to report these concerns. Learners confirm that they feel safe, and how the rigorous enforcement of wearing identification badges supports this.
- Learners benefit from the information, advice and guidance they receive at the start of their programmes to help them plan their next steps to further study or into employment. Specialist careers staff help learners with job search and UCAS applications. Learners on access programmes benefit from university visits and speakers to support their application to higher education providers.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Stoke-on-Trent College provides intermediate and advanced apprenticeship programmes in health and social care, pharmacy, engineering, construction, warehousing and storage, hospitality and catering, hairdressing and business administration. There were 679 apprentices in learning at the time of inspection, of which the large majority study intermediate-level apprenticeships. Engineering has the highest number of apprentices, followed by health and social care, and business administration. Some 27 apprentices study newly introduced apprenticeship standards. The majority of apprentices have the requisite qualifications in English and mathematics at the start of their apprenticeship.
- The college’s apprenticeship programmes meet the principles and requirements expected

by the Department for Education. Qualification achievement rates are broadly in line with the low national averages both for intermediate and advanced apprentices.

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have improved the planning and management of the apprenticeship programme. As a result, a greater proportion of apprentices are due to achieve within planned timescales. A significant minority of apprentices in engineering and construction continue to make slow progress and do not complete their qualifications in time.
- During the review of apprentices' progress, a small minority of assessors focus excessively on the completion of framework qualification criteria. These assessors fail to assess deeply enough apprentices' knowledge in relation to workplace roles and responsibilities. Consequently, their apprentices do not make rapid progress or extend their vocational knowledge and skills. For example, while assessing a technology apprentice, the assessor praised an apprentice for completing a unit of their qualification yet failed to question them on how they might apply their knowledge to changes facing the telecommunications industry.
- A minority of teachers and assessors fail to develop apprentices' higher-level English and mathematics skills for their current role and future careers. Instead, teachers focus on preparing apprentices for passing functional skills examinations. As a result, they do not have sufficient grasp of the written and analytical skills they need to progress as quickly as they could. For example, although a business administration apprentice recognised improvements to a sales ordering process, the assessor did not help them to explore the financial and business benefits further. Therefore the apprentice failed to develop more complex English and mathematics skills and provide a possible business solution for their employer.
- The information, advice and guidance that apprentices receive is not always helpful enough for them to make informed decisions about their future careers. Although apprentices know the entry requirements of their course, a small minority of staff do not routinely make them aware of the career pathways and opportunities open to them. For a few apprentices nearing completion of their course, information is not helpful enough to take advantage of the skills and qualifications that they have achieved. For example, one apprentice was not aware of the next level of learning and future career options available to them.
- Staff are experienced, qualified and skilled professionals who possess a good understanding of current industry practice. They use their expertise and vocational skills well to provide practical training that helps apprentices develop industry-standard technical skills. As a result, apprentices become confident, well prepared for work and – in the majority of cases – for the next level of training. For example, they develop email etiquette, are able to transcribe patients' medical notes accurately and digitally store patient records for doctors and managers' easy access. A joinery apprentice proudly demonstrated his high-level skills when making trusses for the fascia of a house. Nursing assistants use information about elderly patients' specific needs, so that they can provide them sensitively with high levels of personal care.
- Apprentices make a positive contribution to their employers' businesses. Employers regard them as valuable members of their team, providing them with the skills necessary for their future growth and success.
- Leaders and managers plan apprenticeship programmes effectively so that they address

the particular skills shortages locally and in the wider region. For example, managers plan apprenticeships with employers, providing, in many cases, bespoke training and expert guidance to meet their specific needs. Managers have worked closely with a few employers to deliver the apprenticeship standards in healthcare, engineering and business administration. At the time of the inspection, managers recognised that the provision is in the early stage of development, and that it was too early to measure the effectiveness of this provision.

- Of the apprentices who successfully complete their course, most progress into permanent employment, and a very small minority go on to advanced apprenticeships. Managers, however, do not measure routinely the extent to which apprentices secure roles with greater responsibility or enhanced salaries or go on to further training. As a result, managers are less able to evaluate fully the effectiveness of, and make further improvements to, their current provision.
- Apprentices feel safe in the college and their work environment. They understand the risks in their workplace and apply this knowledge to take precautions to protect themselves from danger and risks. Similarly, they have good awareness of the risks of internet use, of topics such as child sexual abuse, cybercrime, bullying and the risks of radicalisation. They know how to keep themselves safe and can cite examples of how they protect themselves.

Provision for learners with high needs

Requires improvement

- The college currently has 69 learners receiving high-needs funding from three local authorities. Levels range from pre-entry to level 3. Learners attend vocational programmes and foundation courses. A further group of learners with particularly complex needs attends specialist subcontracted provision off-site.
- Despite learners having comprehensive support plans, in a small minority of lessons, teachers do not routinely use this information about learners' starting points effectively to set work, so that all learners are able to make good progress. In these lessons, they receive the same task to complete, irrespective of their prior learning and potential, and this hinders the progress of the most able learners.
- The development of learners' employability skills for the majority of learners requires improvement. Too few learners are able to develop work skills such as time-keeping or relationship-building with colleagues in the workplace. Managers recognise that as a result of the limited number of external work placement and supported internship opportunities, learners do not develop these skills well enough to progress successfully into work.
- On most accredited courses, teachers monitor carefully learners' progress and provide them with feedback that helps them to improve. However, the targets set for learners on the minority of non-accredited learning are insufficiently precise and do not consistently capture information of learners' starting points well enough. Consequently, these targets are too broad or the language too complex to help learners understand for themselves what they have done well, and what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers mostly plan challenging activities that match closely to learners' individual needs, so that they develop useful communication and new practical skills for

independent living, for example learning how to travel independently or how to make friends, and those in catering lessons learn the importance of budgeting when shopping for ingredients and how to make a family meal. They become more confident in speaking out and making decisions.

- Managers have worked hard to implement strategies to improve retention, attendance and behaviour. These have had significant impact on improving the provision. For example, support staff meet weekly with learners and monitor their progress, helping them to evaluate their own performance. As a result, learners attend very well, demonstrate good attitudes to learning, and respect one another.
- In most lessons, teachers develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills effectively. In the college's subcontracted provision, learners studying painting and decorating calculate the area of walls in a room to establish how many tins of paint they need to buy. Additionally, learners on vocational programmes make progress with their spelling and grammar and can improve their work as a result of teachers' swift feedback.
- The information and guidance that learners and their families receive about their course and future opportunities are good. Teachers and support staff help them to settle quickly into college using the 'Find Your Feet' programme to allocate them the right course and appropriate support to match their individual needs.
- Staff know their learners well, manage their anxieties effectively and use their expertise to provide unobtrusive support at the point of need. At the college's specialist subcontracted provision, learners benefit from significant therapy support and make very good progress with their communication skills. For example, support staff encourage learners to make decisions for themselves, such as regulating the level and frequency of support they receive; they also choose how they use their communication device to respond to their peers. Consequently, learners make good progress with their independence skills.
- Managers use funding for learners with high needs effectively to meet their individual needs. They have ensured that learners benefit from a variety of methods of support that link closely with their education, health and care plans. These include speech and language coaches, specialist therapists and the use of assistive technology to support them in their activities.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130815
Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	7,984
Principal/CEO	Denise Brown
Telephone number	01782 208208
Website	www.stokecoll.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	572	913	375	684	468	263	–	8
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	205	251	106	229	–		1	
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	20		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	69							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Steelworks Academy Blackfriars School							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Richard Deane, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Victor Reid	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Dill-Russell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rebecca Gater	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Beaman	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Crilly	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Bramley	Ofsted Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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