

Central Bedfordshire College

General further education college

Inspection dates

15–18 May 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	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement	Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient action to prevent a decline in learners' achievements. Consequently, the proportion of learners and apprentices who achieve their qualifications is low.
- Too much teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Too often, teachers do not have high expectations of what learners can achieve and do not provide activities that challenge learners to make good progress.
- Staff do not ensure that learners attend regularly and this adversely affects the progress they make.
- Teachers place insufficient focus on the development of younger learners' English and mathematics skills.
- Governance arrangements are insufficiently robust to hold senior leaders to account and assure the quality of the provision.

The provider has the following strengths

- Staff work hard to assure the well-being of all learners. As a result, most learners enjoy their time at college and they feel safe in an environment that is both inclusive and welcoming.
- Learners' behaviour around the college is good and they show high levels of respect for staff, each other and visitors.
- Teachers ensure that learners develop their industry-specific practical skills and technical language well.
- Leaders forge strong relevant strategic partnerships that inform curriculum development and build links with a range of prestigious local employers.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Central Bedfordshire College is a general further education college with a main site in the town of Dunstable, another in Leighton Buzzard and a further five satellite campuses in the local area. The college provides a wide range of post-16 education and training including study programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs. The college recruits most of its learners from the most deprived areas of Central Bedfordshire and Luton. The college works with one subcontractor to deliver a very small number of learning programmes and apprenticeships.
- Central Bedfordshire is a relatively prosperous area, although there are areas of deprivation within the locality. Unemployment is below the national rate. Around half of school leavers gain five or more GCSE passes at grades 9 to 4; this proportion is below the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers need to work with teachers and learners to reverse the decline in learners' achievements and ensure that learners and apprentices are successful in achieving their qualifications within the allocated time.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all learners can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers plan challenging and interesting work, both in lessons and for independent study, which broadens learners' knowledge and deepens their understanding
 - ensuring that teachers use detailed information about their learners' existing skills and abilities to monitor learners' progress rigorously and to set clear and meaningful targets for improvement
 - making sure all teachers provide learners with effective and timely feedback which enables them to improve the standard of their work and their use of English and mathematics.
- As a matter of urgency, ensure that all learners attend their lessons regularly.
- Increase the number of governors who are involved in the oversight of the quality of provision and ensure that they hold leaders to account by their scrutiny of achievement and progress data.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient action to prevent a decline in learners' achievements since the last inspection. Consequently, outcomes for learners are low. Work to improve outcomes for apprentices is beginning to show success, but the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications within the allocated time remains low.
- Leaders and managers do not check that staff consistently promote high expectations of what learners can achieve. As a consequence, not enough teachers challenge learners to attain standards beyond the minimum expectations of the qualifications, and too many learners make only adequate progress.
- Leaders do not ensure that learners attend regularly or on time, particularly to English and mathematics lessons.
- The self-assessment process does not identify or evaluate areas for improvement well enough. Too often reports are overly descriptive. They lack clear focus and judgements on what needs to be improved and how best to achieve it. The resulting improvement action plans focus too much on systems improvement, rather than identifying what would benefit learners most effectively. Leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are too generous.
- Performance management actions do not bring about swift improvement to teaching, learning and assessment or outcomes for younger learners and apprentices.
- Teaching and learning conferences are a regular feature of the college's calendar. However, the activities and themes covered do not sufficiently link to areas identified as needing improvement, either in curriculum area self-assessments or in college action plans.
- Staff at all levels promote an inclusive and tolerant culture. Learners demonstrate their understanding of British values through their attitudes and behaviours. They are respectful and considerate of each other and work well with college staff.
- Leaders forge strong relevant strategic partnerships that inform curriculum development and build links with a range of prestigious local employers. These links are of particular benefit to learners who can access a range of work-related activities, such as work placements, master classes, project briefs and also job opportunities when they complete their programmes.
- Leaders work well with both Central Bedfordshire and Luton Councils. For example, their chairing of strategic boards to develop local skills strategies enhances the reputation of the college locally, and provides increased opportunities for learners to be involved in their community.
- Leaders ensure that impartial careers advice and guidance for the majority of full-time learners are good. Learners have a good understanding of the choices available to them. They access a range of careers and work-related activities to inform their next steps. Leaders' progression and destination data indicates that the majority of learners on study programmes progress to positive destinations, including higher levels of study,

apprenticeships and full-time employment.

The governance of the provider

- Processes to ensure that governors challenge and hold senior leaders to account require improvement. The information governors receive is often too descriptive, lacks focus and does not provide a clear overview of the impact on improving learners' outcomes. Too often, standards committee meetings are inquorate. As a result, the opportunity to debate and challenge senior leaders' views on learners' progress and standards of provision is too limited.
- Governors demonstrate a clear commitment to the college. They have an ambitious vision to strengthen and safeguard the future of the college. They use their wide range of professional skills and appropriate expertise to develop and enhance strategic external partnerships, which enable learners to access a range of high-quality local opportunities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have ensured that the recording and reporting of safeguarding concerns are timely and comprehensive, and clearly demonstrate actions taken to keep learners safe. Managers make highly effective use of a range of external agencies to respond swiftly and effectively to individual safeguarding cases as they arise.
- Leaders have created a culture in which learners feel confident to seek help and support whenever needed. They ensure that most learners have a good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Staff and learners are aware of any local threats to their well-being and they seek help and advice where necessary.
- Leaders have ensured that staff and governors have taken up appropriate training. Annual mandatory training ensures that staff keep up to date with their understanding and responsibilities with regard to the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding and health and safety practices.
- Managers with responsibilities for recruiting staff follow safer recruitment practices. They maintain an accurate single central register and carry out thorough checks on new staff to ensure that learners are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Too few teachers make good use of information on learners' starting points to identify how they can improve younger learners' and apprentices' knowledge and skills. Teachers and assessors do not have sufficiently high expectations of what study programmes learners and apprentices can achieve.
- Not enough teachers provide activities that involve and challenge all learners. As a result, learners are too often easily distracted. They too readily disengage from lesson activities, for example, by using their mobile phones inappropriately. Often teachers fail to challenge such behaviours and consequently, too many learners fail to make swift progress.
- In theory lessons, teachers are often too quick to progress to new topics without checking

that learners have grasped the original theme. As a result, some learners make slow progress during lessons and too many do not secure a good understanding of the subject.

- Too many teachers, both in discrete lessons and in vocational subject teaching, do not provide demanding tasks and activities that motivate their learners to improve their English and mathematics skills.
- The quality of feedback provided to learners on study programmes and to apprentices is often too superficial. It gives learners insufficient guidance on how to improve their work. Not enough teachers provide feedback to learners to enable them to address weaknesses in their spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Not enough managers ensure that staff apply assessment practices and internal quality assurance procedures consistently. As a result, some learners had to resubmit assignments because their submitted work did not meet the awarding body criteria. Not enough assessors carry out regular workplace assessment of apprentices.
- Teaching is most effective in practical lessons. Teachers are suitably qualified and they use their experience effectively to enable learners to acquire new skills. A high proportion of learners on vocational courses and apprentices develop an appropriate range of technical language and industry-specific skills. Managers have ensured that the quality of accommodation and teaching resources is of a good standard. Vocational learning workshops reflect industry standards.
- Teachers quickly identify and provide additional learning support to learners. Learning support assistants work closely with the teacher and have a good awareness of the needs of individual learners. They are skilled at providing sensitive and thoughtful support. Learners with significant personal and social issues receive particularly good assistance, and as result make good progress.
- Teachers often make good use of mobile devices in lessons and provide appropriate online reference materials to learners. For example, in a health and social care lesson, learners devised an online, interactive quiz that challenged their peers to effectively explore and promote healthy lifestyles.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too many learners do not attend their lessons regularly. During inspection, only around two thirds of learners were present at observed lessons. In particular, attendance at English and mathematics functional skills and GCSE lessons was exceptionally low with fewer than half the learners present.
- Teachers of learners on study programmes do not always challenge lateness. Learners who are late receive inconsistent messages about the importance of timekeeping and of arriving at lessons punctually and prepared to learn. As a consequence, some learners continue to not be punctual and their late arrival to lessons disrupts others' learning.
- In vocational lessons, teachers do not provide enough opportunities to promote broader literacy and numeracy skills. As a result of this, and the low attendance in English and mathematics lessons, too few learners make sufficient progress in these subjects.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the majority of learners receive good and impartial careers advice and guidance. Staff regularly organise meetings between

representatives from local employers and learners to demonstrate the opportunities available to them. Learners on study programmes and adults on access to higher education courses receive detailed guidance on progression to university.

- Learners benefit from a wide range of work-related learning activities and good opportunities to work with employers. The majority of learners enrolled on study programmes diligently record the content and impact of the work placement and work-related activities that they complete. This enables them to gain a greater understanding of the expectations of the vocational area they aspire to work in. For example, childcare and health and social care learners are able to accurately describe how their theory learning relates to the demands in the workplace.
- Staff work effectively to ensure that the behaviour of learners around the college is good. Most learners who attend regularly are keen to learn. They work well together in lessons and treat each other with courtesy and respect. Staff ensure that learners are safe and learners consider the college environment to be inclusive and welcoming.
- Teachers ensure that most learners improve their skills for employment. This is particularly so for adults on employability courses, who develop a good understanding of employers' expectations. Most apprentices and adult learners work hard to gain the skills and knowledge required to make positive contributions to their employers' businesses.
- Teachers skilfully promote learners' understanding of well-being and awareness of safety and safe working practices, such as in workshop environments and around the college.
- Most learners have a sound understanding of the importance of British values, in particular the rule of law and principles of democracy. However, too many engineering apprentices have a poor knowledge of British values.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The proportion of young learners who successfully achieve their qualifications has declined over time and is low. Too few learners enrolled on business, hairdressing, electrical installation and plumbing courses achieve their qualifications. However, most learners who study childcare, health and social care, catering and public services achieve.
- Not enough younger learners make progress beyond the minimum expectations of the qualifications; few excel. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications within the allocated time is low. In the previous year, the proportion of adults achieving their qualifications decreased to below that nationally. However, the majority of adults in the current year are making better progress and on track to succeed. Most learners in receipt of high-needs funding make good progress from their starting points.
- Not enough learners make good progress in developing their English and mathematics skills. Too few achieve their functional skills qualifications or secure higher grades at GCSE.
- Learners with experience of local authority care achieve as well as their peers. However, those learners who identify as Asian or of mixed race do not achieve as well as their peers. Leaders' data indicates that learners previously in receipt of free school meals fare as well as their peers.
- Leaders' data indicates that the majority of learners progress to employment,

apprenticeships or higher levels of study including university. However, not enough learners enrolled on courses at level 2 progress to study at level 3. Too many apprentices who successfully complete their programmes do not secure permanent employment.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Study programmes make up the majority of the provision. The college offers a broad range of vocational study programmes across thirteen subject areas. Almost half of the learners study at level 3 with a third studying at level 2. The remaining learners study at entry levels and level 1.
- Leaders have not ensured that the study programmes provision builds on learners' prior attainment and enables them to make good progress. Too many learners do not undertake challenging learning that prepares them well for their future career aspirations. Not enough learners make substantial and sustained progress in all aspects of their study programme, particularly in theory lessons. Learners' attendance and punctuality require improvement.
- Too many learners do not sufficiently improve their English and mathematics skills. Not enough learners studying functional skills or GCSE courses make swift progress. For example, too many learners studying English GCSE courses do not ameliorate their descriptive writing or creative reading skills. For example, too few learners enrolled on mathematics GCSE qualifications are able to confidently problem-solve questions involving algebra and geometry.
- Teachers seldom set high expectations of what learners can achieve in theory lessons. As a result, not enough learners are challenged to develop their higher-level thinking skills or regularly produce high standards of work.
- Target-setting requires improvement. Teachers do not make sufficient use of information on learners' starting points to set challenging targets that demand the very best of learners. Too many targets are too general and lack specificity. For example, learners often have the same targets, such as 'complete the unit', 'make an appointment with careers team' and 'research UCAS sites'.
- Most learners complete the 30 hours of work experience that managers expect as a minimum. Learners also take part in a broad range of work-related learning and frequently meet with employers to learn about the world of work. As a consequence, learners improve their understanding of the expectations of the work environment and enhance their industry-specific skills.
- Relevant work experience often complements good practical teaching that enables most learners to improve their practical vocational skills and produce products to commercial industry standards.
- The enrichment and tutorial programme enables most learners to develop good personal and social skills. Learners understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy, both physically and emotionally.

Adult learning programmes

Good

- Adult learning accounts for approximately one third of the college's provision. Courses offered include vocational learning, access to higher education programmes, English and mathematics qualifications and community learning programmes.
- Leaders have ensured that the adult curriculum serves the community well. They work effectively with Jobcentre Plus in a number of settings to ensure that those least likely to participate in education and training receive a good experience. Staff work with learners to improve their personal self-esteem and skills for employment. Teachers provide well-designed learning activities that enable learners to improve their confidence in communication and increase their understanding of the expectations of potential employers. Consequently, the majority of these learners progress to employment or full-time education.
- Leaders and managers evaluate the effectiveness and suitability of the curriculum well. They have secured improvements in the quality of provision for adults. As a result, the proportion of adults who stay on their courses has increased on previous years and most now make at least the progress expected of them.
- The majority of vocational teachers use their specialist vocational knowledge effectively to link theory well to the world of work. As a result, the large majority of adult learners improve their vocational knowledge, skills and technical language. For example, in a science lesson, learners discussed incisively the effects of parallax on experiments they might conduct and how they can minimise errors. Media learners created highly developed three-dimensional simulations of smartphones, including animated representations of the purpose of their applications.
- In most subjects, teachers provide adult learners with good timely written and verbal feedback that enables them to improve their work. For example, learners on access to higher education courses receive feedback that identifies clearly what works well and that provides appropriate recommendations for improvement. However, adults studying on part-time courses receive feedback that is too brief and does not challenge them to improve their skills or deepen their understanding.
- Some teachers do not challenge their learners to work hard, fulfil their potential and produce high standards of work. They do not check that their learners' knowledge and understanding are secure before they move to the next topic. They set targets that are too general and that fail to challenge learners to improve specific areas of their work. As a result, some learners make slower progress than that of which they are capable.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- At the time of the inspection, 215 apprentices were studying on intermediate and advanced apprenticeships. Of these, the large majority are on frameworks with only a few apprentices enrolled on the new standards. Just over two thirds of apprentices follow advanced programmes. Most apprentices study engineering, business administration, health and social care and early years.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have made significant changes to improve the quality of the apprenticeship provision. These changes include the recruitment of a new

manager and the appointment of a number of new assessors. They have also improved arrangements for the teaching of functional skills, with most apprentices now receiving tuition on a day-release basis. The monitoring of apprentices' progress is also more accurate than previously. However, although the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications is increasing, not enough complete within the planned timescale.

- The programmes offered meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. The planning of the apprenticeships provision aligns well to the needs of local employers. However, the proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes and then progress into permanent employment is low. Leaders have yet to put effective plans in place to rectify this weakness.
- Too many apprentices do not receive regular reviews of their progress. Managers have not ensured that there is good assessment of the skills they develop at work. As a result, too many apprentices make slow progress because they do not receive timely and effective guidance on how to improve the standards of their work.
- The frequency and the quality of communication between assessors and employers require improvement. Too many employers are not sufficiently involved in the target-setting, planning or reviewing of the work their apprentices need to do. As a result, they are unaware of the progress their apprentices are making, are not able to help ensure that their apprentices make swift progress or support those who have fallen behind with their theory or practical work.
- Some assessors provide good one-to-one coaching support for the development of apprentices' skills. They make effective use of questioning to check apprentices' understanding and encourage apprentices to improve their work. For example, they help information technology apprentices to think logically through the steps required before replacing a network server.
- Apprentices' written work in their portfolios is of an appropriate quality. Assessors routinely correct spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' work. Apprentices on business courses demonstrate high-level skills in using software to manipulate data.
- The majority of apprentices are articulate, confident and competent in their roles. They work industriously to develop good skills and knowledge of the businesses in which they work. Assessors ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of safe working practices and that they make effective use of appropriate personal protective equipment. For example, computing apprentices make good use of anti-static straps, to ensure that they undertake maintenance tasks effectively and do not damage computer hard drives.

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

- During the inspection, there were 71 learners who are in receipt of high-needs funding. These learners follow a range of work-related, personal development and vocational courses. The majority of learners are enrolled on well-considered specialist courses, with the remainder taking vocational courses alongside their peers. Sixteen learners are on supported internship programmes.
- Staff ensure that learners not only develop their independence and confidence but that they prepare well for adulthood. Staff work effectively to make sure learners have realistic plans and expectations about their future choices. These learners benefit from, and enjoy,

highly relevant activities, such as planning meals and then buying and preparing the food to eat, during their independent living lessons. They participate in valuable external residential activities that help improve their independence and resilience.

- In most specialist provision, staff have high expectations of their learners. Teachers use a broad range of approaches to challenge learners to develop new skills. Learners enjoy the challenges and are proud of their achievements. They make good progress against their individual targets. In a mathematics lesson, staff skilfully enabled learners to independently solve numeracy problems. Learners enjoy their mathematics lessons and almost all of them pass their examinations at their first attempt, achieving high marks.
- Learners in specialist provision develop good work-related skills and behaviours. Learners work diligently in the college's coffee shop, where they develop their customer service skills and effectively maintain the premises.
- Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The vast majority of learning support assistants are effective in helping learners independently develop new and existing skills that enable achievement.
- Transition arrangements are effective. Staff carry out a comprehensive matching of skills to potential job roles and learning pathways. This ensures that planned learning is meaningful and meets learners' needs and career aspirations. For example, on the supported internship programmes, staff use profiling carefully to match the key characteristics of learners to appropriate job roles and employers. As a result, the progress of learners is rapid and inspiring.
- Not enough learners enrolled on vocational programmes make good progress. Teachers do not challenge learners with high needs to achieve their full potential. Learners respond to questions with one word or short knowledge-based responses, without further prompting to develop their higher-level thinking. Teachers' feedback is too often insufficient and does not help learners improve the quality of their work.
- Managers with responsibility for learners with high needs lack sufficient involvement and information to oversee the quality of the experience for learners on vocational programmes. As a consequence, some teachers do not set high standards. For example, they allow lessons to finish very early or use resources and provide feedback that contains numerous spelling errors.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130598
Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,846
Principal/CEO	Ali Hadawi CBE
Telephone number	01582 477776
Website	www.centralbeds.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	303	604	482	365	713	510	0	56
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	32	29	67	87	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	71							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Sport Support, SSG Training Unit 2-4 The Old Ford Rushey Ford Business Park West End Road Bedford MK43 8RU							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal – teaching, learning and higher education, 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

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