

Inspection of Stoke-on-Trent College

Inspection dates:

8–11 October 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Education programmes for young people	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Stoke-on-Trent College is a medium general further education college based in Stoke-on-Trent across two campuses: Caudon campus and Burslem campus. At the time of inspection 1,372 learners were on education programmes for young people, 1,232 learners on adult learning programmes, 583 apprentices following apprenticeship frameworks and standards-based programmes, and 46 learners were in receipt of high-needs funding. Leaders offer courses in most subject areas, the largest being in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), health and social care, business, engineering and construction. Courses are offered from level 1 to level 4, with around two-thirds of the learners on study programmes at level 3 and below. Around two-thirds of apprentices were on level 2 apprenticeships. The college works with one subcontractor for the delivery of performing arts qualifications.

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

Most learners enjoy their time at college and appreciate how teachers make them feel welcome and respond to their individual needs. Young learners feel that they are treated like adults and that staff care about their well-being. Learners and apprentices work well together and respect each other's needs. Learners feel safe at the college.

Learners and apprentices like the way teachers use their expert knowledge of their subjects to help them understand complex topics. Too often they have cover tutors and experience timetabling and other changes to their course that slow their progress.

Learners and apprentices acquire the knowledge and skills for them to achieve their qualifications and move towards further learning or employment. Learners on access to higher education courses do not develop well enough their independent learning skills, such as effective research techniques and academic writing, to enable them to move confidently into their chosen higher education course.

Learners and apprentices who work with employers develop the technical and trade skills needed to be effective in their roles and future careers. Because of their experience of work, learners who have high needs become more independent and gain the confidence to talk with customers.

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

Leaders have now created a sound financial basis to improve the quality of provision. They have undertaken a thorough organisational restructure to align staff skills to support the achievement of their curriculum plans. Leaders work productively with local business, the local authority and other education providers to position the college as a centre for 'trade skills'. They have designed clear technical pathways that include engineering, construction, health and social care, and information technology (IT) to help learners and apprentices meet the identified skills gaps in the region. Leaders have yet to ensure that standards of provision are of a consistently high quality.

Leaders and managers have not had enough time to develop fully their curriculum plans for young people and apprentices. Too many courses are not sufficiently challenging for learners' ambitions. Although teachers know the content they plan to teach, they have not devised enough opportunities for all learners and apprentices fulfil their potential. For example, while learners – including those who have high needs – in health and social care, sport, and media follow a curriculum that is consistently demanding, learners and apprentices in engineering and business do not. In these subjects, teachers and trainers do not deliver more complex and challenging content well enough to ensure that learners and apprentices master the skills and knowledge to achieve the highest grades. The broad range of adult programmes helps learners to improve their English and interpersonal skills, so that

they can live more productive lives and move closer to employment.

Teachers of young people fail to help learners remember long-term concepts and ideas consistently well. As a result, too many learners struggle to remember knowledge from previous sessions, slowing their progress. Trainers do not help apprentices sufficiently to remember the important knowledge needed for their end-point assessment. A minority of teachers of young people and adults consolidate learners' understanding well. In media and health, teachers use short-recall activities effectively, including mobile-phone quizzes; in catering, learners who have high needs practise making dough until they master the skill. Consequently, these learners show that they know and remember more before moving on to new topics.

Too few teachers and trainers plan the content and order of their lessons in a logical manner. In these lessons, teachers do not link thoroughly the lesson content to previous learning and how learners will be expected to apply the information in the future. As a result, learners find it difficult to make sense of new topics quickly. Additionally, teachers do not check sufficiently that learners have a sound understanding of new knowledge. For example, learners in access to higher education lack confidence in remembering key terminology and theories before moving on to the next subject. Trainers do not routinely show apprentices how each component of their training fits together to help them link theory into practice. In media, health and hairdressing, teachers link together learning topics imaginatively to help learners make sense of what they have learned. For example, level 2 media, learners created high-quality short films because they knew a lot about filming in a variety of settings, video-editing techniques, and creative thinking through storyboarding.

Teachers and trainers do not consistently provide learners and apprentices with sufficiently helpful feedback to help them improve specific aspects of their work. For example, in engineering and hairdressing, teachers encourage learners to assess their own work but fail to challenge their misconceptions and identify gaps in their knowledge. Trainers mostly provide apprentices with only basic feedback on their achievements. They fail to teach apprentices the necessary knowledge and skills – such as presentations and examination techniques – required to perform well in their final assessments. Consequently, apprentices do not know what they need to do to achieve the highest grades in their end-point assessments. Adults and learners who have high needs receive helpful feedback that enables them to produce good work.

Learners and apprentices develop their practical skills thoroughly. Apprentices become increasingly productive in their roles because of the high-quality training they receive in the workplace. Employers value highly the minority of apprentices who take on additional responsibilities. For example, an engineering apprentice maintained independently the machines in a food manufacturing plant. Young learners on IT courses develop up-to-date skills in creating 3D virtual environments by using an innovative virtual reality training system.

The quality of the GCSE English provision for young people is not yet good. At the

time of inspection, too few learners had developed the knowledge and skills expected of them. Although teachers know their subjects well and provide learners with interesting and engaging learning activities, problems with learners' timetables have resulted in low attendance that has slowed learners' progress. English and mathematics functional skills provision has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Functional skills teachers of mathematics use information about what learners already know and can do skilfully to identify gaps in learners' understanding. Consequently, they set learners specific work to build on their previous knowledge in areas such as percentages, fractions, and Pythagoras' theorem.

Leaders have improved the advice and guidance for most learners and apprentices to ensure that they follow the course of their choice. Staff ensure that learners have a good understanding of the university application process. For example, learners in health and social care visit universities and receive talks from university staff about their future options. However, a small minority of learners – including a few who have high needs – do not have sufficient opportunity to have meaningful encounters with the world of work to inform their career aspirations.

Teachers help learners to build their confidence and resilience throughout the curriculum. In media, learners feel increasingly comfortable in sharing their thoughts and ideas in discussions. Learners who have high needs develop their communication skills in commercial settings such as restaurants and hairdressing salons. All learners collaborate well, regardless of background or need. They feel comfortable and included in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. For example, learners take part in health and fitness sessions, discussion, and support groups and volunteering projects such as 'challenge South Africa'. These learners benefit greatly from developing trusting relationships, their social skills and insights into the lives and needs of individuals from diverse societies.

Teachers do not routinely develop access to higher education learners' independent learning skills well enough, whether in lessons or in tutorials. Although many of these learners move on to higher education courses, too often they rightly do not feel they have developed the academic writing and research skills to perform well at university.

Most learners attend class on time, but their attendance at lessons – in particular GCSE English – is too low. Leaders and managers have put a range of measures in place to improve attendance. For example, managers' increased monitoring, feedback to parents, and providing learners with incentives such as praise cards to reward them for good attendance. However, leaders and managers have not had sufficient time to see if these actions will improve attendance at lessons.

Since the previous inspection, the principal and chief operating officer has strengthened the governing body to ensure that governors have the relevant expertise for the role. Governors scrutinise the much-improved reports from senior leaders and challenge leaders with incisive questions about their intentions. They have realistic and considered expectations of the college and monitor closely leaders'

improvement actions, including those related to staff morale.

Most learners now achieve their functional skills English and mathematics skills qualifications. However, leaders and managers are yet to ensure that learners make good progress in their GCSE qualifications in these subjects. Most adults achieve their qualifications and move on into further learning or employment. The quality of education on programmes for young people is not yet consistently good. Too few learners and apprentices achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a positive safeguarding culture. All staff place a high priority on the safety of learners, consequently, learners are safe. Managers have recently introduced a 'My Concerns' programme that has brought outside agencies together effectively to help keep vulnerable learners from harm. Leaders ensure that staff including the designated safeguarding leads undertake appropriate training including in the 'Prevent' duty, working safely with electronic devices, child sexual exploitation and gang culture. Apprentices have only a cursory understanding of the risks of exposure to extremism and radicalisation, including knife crime and 'county lines' in the communities in which they live and work.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should set higher expectations of teaching quality and support managers and staff to improve curriculum design, planning and teaching, so that learners achieve the grades of which they are capable.
- Too few learners and apprentices make good progress and achieve their English and mathematics GCSE qualifications. Leaders must ensure that learners attend these sessions.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that teachers provide learners and apprentices with effective feedback so that they develop their skills, knowledge and behaviours according to their potential.
- Leaders need to ensure that learners who have high needs benefit from the new supported internship programme and can gain experience of work to help them decide on their future options.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices know specifically the threats posed locally from those with radical or extremist views.
- Governors must ensure that leaders' improvement actions lead quickly to learners and apprentices knowing more and achieving their best.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130815
Address	Cauldon Campus Stoke Road Shelton Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST4 2DG
Contact number	01782 208208
Website	www.stokecoll.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Denise Brown
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	27 February – 2 March 2018
Main subcontractors	Steelworks Academy

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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