

Inspection of Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group

Inspection dates:

22–25 October 2019

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Education programmes for young people	Outstanding
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Newcastle and Stafford College is a large general further education college based on two campuses in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford. At the time of inspection, 5,244 learners were on education programmes for young people, 838 learners on adult learning programmes, 590 apprentices following apprenticeship frameworks and standards-based programmes, and 136 learners were in receipt of high-needs funding. Leaders offer courses in most subject areas, the largest being in A levels, health and care, business, engineering and construction, sport, and performing arts. Courses are offered from level 1 to level 4 with around 75% of the learners on study programmes at level 3 and below. Over 50% of apprentices were on level 3 apprenticeships. The college works with 11 subcontractors who deliver a range of qualifications including for employability, mathematics and English, the Prince's Trust, tennis coaching, and plant operations.

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

Learners enjoy their time at college very much. They rate highly the excellent facilities and the experienced and welcoming staff. Learners feel that all staff care about their futures and provide them with the support and motivation to succeed. As a result, learners thrive in a positive, stimulating and safe learning environment.

Teachers have high expectations that encourage learners to behave well and work together to achieve their best. Learners like the way teachers help them make sense of complex theories and topics through the use of the college's excellent resources and imaginative and interesting activities.

Learners and apprentices – including learners who have high needs – make very good and sustained progress from their starting points. They develop the specific knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for them to move into their intended next steps. Nearly all learners and apprentices achieve their qualifications and develop their English and mathematical skills.

Learners take part in high-quality work experience and work-related activities that help them to develop the skills employers value. They build up their confidence in various situations, such as working with customers and overcoming fears of performing in public. They show resilience – dusting themselves off when the going gets tough – and use the helpful feedback from peers and staff to perfect their skills.

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

Leaders and managers have very effectively brought about the merger of Newcastle College and Stafford College. They have integrated rapidly the two campuses, setting high expectations for both staff and learners. Direction from senior leaders is clear, supportive and challenging. As a result, staff are highly motivated and feel able to provide learners with an outstanding learning experience.

Leaders have exceptional links with local employers and regional business groups, including the local enterprise partnership and regional mayoral authorities. They collaborate with them to create a challenging curriculum designed to help learners and apprentices achieve their career ambitions.

Managers and teachers of subjects such as health and social care, and child development meet with local hospitals, schools, and care providers to identify their particular needs. Teachers and trainers design their curriculum to help learners and apprentices to develop the specific knowledge and skills employers demand. For example, during a real-life project, care learners gained a deep empathy and appreciation for their clients' needs when trying on a body suit to replicate the experience of a pregnant woman and an elderly person.

Employers value highly the way apprentices' curriculum helps them to develop the exact knowledge, skills and behaviours they need for their current and future job

roles.

Leaders ensure that teachers and trainers plan a coherent and challenging curriculum for all learners and apprentices, including those on subcontracted provision. Teachers of learners who have high needs, who are on foundation programmes, adapt the provision carefully into smaller, achievable chunks so learners develop – step-by-step – their knowledge and skills to live independent lives. For example, teachers on entry level English use accurately information from learners' education, health and care plans to arrange bite-size activities that enhance specifically their speaking, listening and confidence in self-expression. Trainers work exceptionally well with employers and curriculum teams, so that their work roles match to apprentices' studies. Employers and trainers change apprentices' learning routinely as their jobs evolve over time; for example, substituting a finance unit for a specific information technology unit to cover spreadsheet applications.

Teachers are highly qualified and use their expertise to inspire learners to think deeply about their subjects and to master complex skills. They explain and reinforce very effectively key concepts, often using interesting presentations and videos that engage learners, helping them to visualise and assess their knowledge and performance. They use questioning adeptly and a variety of revision activities such as digital quizzes to check and challenge learners' understanding. Teachers skilfully increase the levels of complexity over time to ensure that learners 'get it'. Often teachers use innovative resources that help to make theory more memorable for learners. Sports teachers use up-to-date location technology to produce a detailed post-match analysis for learners to scrutinise, so that they develop their tactical skills in football more rapidly.

Teachers use information about learners' starting points to plan accurately the activities and support needed for them to achieve their potential. They adapt lessons sensitively to ensure that all learners can make sense of challenging topics and situations. For example, teachers help adults on the Prince's Trust courses complete a residential and provide individualised coaching and mentoring to help them build friendships and develop their personal skills before moving on to work experience.

Teachers and trainers use a wide variety of assessment strategies to ensure that learners know well – and can remember long-term – new knowledge and skills. For example, learners benefit from continual recall assessments to help them retrieve detailed and complex information in areas such as anatomy, physiology, engineering and science for future examinations and tests. Teachers provide learners with tips and strategies such as mnemonics, quizzes and debates to help them demonstrate their knowledge fluently during examinations and end-point assessments. Trainers and employers set challenging distinction-level assignments and projects that require apprentices to recall, apply and synthesise previous learning. For example, an apprentice revised their employer's procedure manual for engraving. They were able to explain how this activity contributed to the apprenticeship standard and challenged them to apply theory into their work.

Learners and apprentices develop consistently high-level practical and technical skills at college, during competitions, and their work experience. Teachers and mentors set learners specific tasks for them to hone their skills and behaviours and to practise their subject and technical language. For example, during their employer-based 'future leaders programme', business learners interviewed staff in areas such as finance, human resources and marketing, to assess their role in improving their company's productivity. Teachers review learners' work carefully and use their expertise and up-to-date knowledge of their sectors to provide learners with very helpful feedback to improve their skills.

Learners on foundation studies programmes participate in an extensive range of high-quality work placements. As a result, these learners gain the skills they need to live and work confidently in society and in future employment. For example, learners take part in skills competitions, enterprise events, volunteering and internal work placements in the college kitchen and coffee shop.

Learners who have high needs receive highly effective specialist support. Managers and teachers coordinate their transition and specialist support very well. They use learners' education, health and care plans to identify accurately the individual support necessary including transport, personal care and a variety of adaptive equipment to support very well individuals' learning needs. Learning support assistants liaise routinely with teachers, so that learners have individual targets and receive the help they need to access learning materials and activities effectively.

Learners and apprentices benefit greatly from the high-quality and unbiased careers information, advice and guidance they receive throughout their time at college. They make informed choices about their course and future career options, with only a few learners opting to change their course or leave the college. Most learners visit universities to find the best course for their needs. Teachers help learners to prepare and develop the confidence and techniques for successful interviews with both education institutions and employers. A few learners join an 'honours programme' to help them realise their ambition to achieve a place at high-performing universities. As a result, most learners move on to their intended next steps.

Leaders, managers and teachers have developed an extensive and high-quality enrichment offer at both campuses that enhances learners' curriculum. Learners plan and support charity events and projects and take part in numerous fundraising appeals. Many compete in vocational and sporting competitions and visit local and national employers and other organisations, including universities. As a result, learners extend their technical, practical and life skills so that they can live productive lives and make very good progress towards their career ambitions. They develop a strong understanding of life in modern Britain, their responsibilities at college and in their communities. For example, learners on music and acting courses perform extensively at college and in community settings, recently performing '50s music for the elderly in conjunction with the local fire station community team. Consequently, learners are highly motivated and collaborate very effectively together. They listen carefully and respect each other's ideas, opinions and values.

Learners develop very well their confidence, resilience and well-being. All learners undertake and value highly a programme that helps them to protect their mental health. They learn effective strategies to cope with stressful situations and know who to contact if needed. Most learners take part in a wide variety of fitness and sporting activities. During their comprehensive tutorial programme, learners develop a strong understanding of age-appropriate relationships, helping them to recognise and avoid sexual exploitation.

Learners' – including those who have high needs – and apprentices' behaviour and attitudes to learning at college and at work are exemplary. They attend lessons on time, and their attendance at lessons is high. Learners work collaboratively with teachers and are keen to show their best and achieve the challenging targets set for them. Staff tackle immediately any signs of poor behaviour, and therefore learners flourish in a calm, orderly, positive and safe environment.

Governors bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the board, including business, finance and expertise from education. Governors scrutinise closely the work of the college, including subcontracted provision. As a result, they have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and provide very effective support to leaders and managers in their drive for continuous quality improvement.

Most learners and apprentices – including those who have high needs – make good progress based on their starting points and achieve their qualifications. Learners on vocational courses develop high-quality technical and practical skills to enable them to move into further learning or employment. Learners and apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills well and most achieve their qualifications in these subjects. A-level learners develop thoroughly the knowledge to be successful in their final examinations. The standard of learners' and apprentices' work is high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff work together to create a strong culture of safeguarding in the college. They use the memorable phrase, 'notice, check and share' to maintain a vigilant oversight of the health, welfare and safety of learners and apprentices. Managers ensure that learners know how to keep themselves safe online and have very effective internet monitoring filters to provide additional protection. Staff have strong relations with agencies, such as social services and the police. They identify vulnerable learners quickly and ensure that they are protected from harm and supported to continue with their studies. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of the potential threats posed from extremist groups and know who to contact if needed. Learners and staff feel safe.

Provider details

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Principal/CEO	Karen Dobson OBE
Provider type	General further education

Main subcontractors

Martec Training
Finance & Management Business School
Staffordshire Operator Training
The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire
Safer Communities Community Interest
Company
Axia Solutions
UCoach Limited
Inspire2Coach Limited
University of Warwick Tennis Centre,
Virtus Leisure Limited
Impactful Limited
Exeter University
The Coach Academy

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of curriculum and performance, 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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