

Inspection of Walsall College

Inspection dates:

26 to 29 November 2024

Overall effectiveness**Good**

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

Information about this provider

Walsall College is a large general further education college operating from six campuses in Walsall and a construction campus (CCM) in Kings Norton, Birmingham. The college offers a broad range of vocational, professional, technical and community education from entry level to level 6. The largest subject areas are construction and trades, health and social care, engineering, business and community learning.

At the time of inspection 4,244 learners aged 16 to 18, 75 part time 14 to 16 learners, 249 learners with high needs, 1,024 apprentices and 1,840 adults were studying at the college. Most learners aged 16 to 18 study vocational courses, of which less than half study at level 3. This includes 241 learners studying T-level courses. Adults study on courses from entry level to level 5. Apprentices study a wide range of courses from levels 2 to 6, with the majority at levels 2 and 3. More than a quarter of all high-needs learners study on courses specifically designed for them at the Hawbush Campus. The college works with three subcontractors.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy learning in interesting and varied classes. They are well motivated to learn and understand the benefit of achieving qualifications that allow them to progress in their lives. Almost all learners and apprentices who complete their studies and achieve their qualifications move into employment or further studies.

Learners and apprentices recognise the commitment and support of teachers and support staff to help them learn. Staff have high expectations of learners and create supportive, safe and motivating environments for learning. Learners and apprentices feel safe and develop their knowledge and skills rapidly.

Learners benefit from high-quality industry-standard resources throughout the college. T-level maintenance, installation and repair for engineering and manufacturing learners safely work with high-voltage vehicles in the Digital Engineering Skills Centre workshops. Level 2 scaffolder apprentices work at height in specialised workshops at the CCM campus to simulate accurately the workplace. Learners are able to practise and develop the skills needed for employment.

Teachers and staff support young learners in building their resilience and understanding the modern world. Throughout their studies, learners learn about respect for others and how to keep themselves safe and well. They learn how to communicate effectively and how to flourish in life and work. Learners' behaviour is exemplary.

Learners benefit from a wide range of activities inside and outside the college that help them support their local communities and develop their individuality and skills. Media students work with a local charity to create a film about local residents who lived the Windrush experience. Learners with high needs make and sell Christmas decorations to raise money for charitable projects.

Adult learners develop skills for employment and language skills that enable them to integrate into diverse communities. Leaders plan adult courses around local school hours to allow parents to attend. Adult learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses develop English language skills to support their children with homework, book medical appointments and complete paperwork.

Apprentices study in key local skills shortage areas such as scaffolding, dental nursing and pharmacy technicians. They rapidly develop skills that allow them to be extremely useful at their workplace. Level 3 pharmacy technician apprentices learn about patient-centred care, professional practice and the safe administration of drugs. From the start of their studies, they support customers in the workplace.

In most subjects, learners and apprentices attend classes on time. A small number of learners do not attend frequently enough. Leaders have focused on understanding the reasons for poor attendance and on improving overall attendance, which has increased in recent years. However, attendance is not high

enough for a small minority of learners. These learners do not recognise the importance of attending every class and, as a result, miss valuable learning.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders, managers and staff work closely and very effectively with a broad range of stakeholders, such as the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, Walsall Council, Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire, Walsall Together Organisational Development Board, local employers and higher education providers, to understand the local and regional skills need and priorities. Through this partnership work, leaders place themselves at the heart of key strategic conversations, decision-making and future planning for the Walsall Borough and, more broadly, the Black Country and West Midlands region.

Through their 'employer in every classroom' strategy, leaders and managers successfully shape their curriculums to respond to skills priorities. Curriculum areas benefit from employer and sector-expert input. Through their close links, college staff co-design and co-deliver the curriculum to meet sector needs. Learners learn useful skills for future employment and study and gain a clear line of sight to progression route options.

Leaders and governors have very clearly reflected the local skills needs in their accountability agreement and recognise their role in meeting some of the key priorities, for example, developing digital skills and increasing the number of learners with level 3 and above qualifications in sector priority area subjects such as health and social care, construction, manufacturing and engineering. Leaders and teachers work with stakeholders to ensure skills are woven throughout the curriculums. They effectively gather feedback and evaluate the effectiveness of their curriculums in meeting skills needs.

Leaders and teaching staff use their sector partnerships to understand fully current and emerging professional practice and technology. In areas such as digital, healthcare and engineering, leaders have invested heavily in industry-standard, innovative resources, equipment and staff training to be better equipped to meet the needs of local and regional employers. In digital, teachers are aware of key industry requirements such as the need for higher-level qualifications and the range of operational software employers use. Learners learn the skills they need to move on to jobs in priority skills sectors.

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

Leaders have designed curriculums that support adults and learners with high needs to become independent in their lives and studies. Course leaders and tutors build curriculums that meet the individual personal needs of high-needs learners such as building relationships, communication skills, looking after themselves in the

community and social skill development. Learners gain the skills that prepare them well for adulthood.

Leaders have ensured that courses are well structured, planned and sequenced to ensure learners and apprentices build the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful. In GCSE mathematics, teachers plan learning that revisits key knowledge so that learners frequently practise the number skills that are most important for examination success. Learners build their confidence before moving on to more complex subjects such as solving equations.

Leaders ensure that learners and apprentices are taught by experienced and suitably qualified teaching staff. Teachers bring their vocational knowledge and experience into the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. Level 1 construction teachers are joinery experts and ensure that the quality of work learners produce in workshops meets both awarding organisation and industry standards. Learners develop the skills needed for the workplace rapidly.

Staff support learners with high needs very effectively before they start their course. Support workers engage with local schools to understand the needs of learners and develop a transition programme which meets their individual needs. They work with employers of supported interns to design and adapt curriculums to ensure both learners' and employer's needs are met. Learning mentors and teachers ensure learners settle into work and study quickly and successfully.

Teachers use a range of activities to create interesting lessons that help learners understand new and difficult concepts. Level 2 childcare teachers use case studies to develop professional curiosity in learners by discussing children's development. Level 3 pharmacy technician apprentices bring their experiences from the workplace into discussions on the prevention of unprofessional behaviours.

Most teachers carefully check, through questioning and recall activities, that learners and apprentices understand what they are learning. Teachers prompt adult ESOL learners to use more complex words in their descriptions of shopping trips. Level 3 access to healthcare learners develop their depth of explanations. However, in a few cases in GCSE English and mathematics, teachers do not check gaps in young learners' understanding closely enough to ensure that learners fully understand previous topics. In these instances, they struggle to answer more complex questions correctly.

Teachers assess carefully the starting points of apprentices to establish what they already know and can do. For level 3 pharmacy technicians, teachers adapt the curriculum to meet apprentices' needs and ensure they do not repeat what they have already learned. In level 1 construction, teachers accurately assess the hand tool skills of young learners in workshops at the start of learning. They identify learners who need additional support in developing their skills.

Learners on supported learning courses gain significantly in confidence and learn to overcome their anxieties. They gain life skills such as cooking basic meals and

money management. Learners work in teams and develop communication skills alongside English and mathematics skills. They learn to socialise with their peers and other learners across the college. Learners are prepared well for their next steps.

Most young and adult learners achieve their qualifications. Learners with high needs achieve at a rate greater than their peers. Apprentices achieve their qualification at above the national rate. This number has increased in recent years. However, leaders recognise that in a few courses and apprenticeships, achievement rates are not yet high enough. This includes grade 4 and above rates in GCSE English and mathematics. While leaders' actions have resulted in learners' and apprentices' rates of achievement improving, there remain a few courses where achievement rates are not yet high enough.

Staff provide learners with careers advice and guidance that helps improve their understanding of the breadth of careers options available to them. Learners listen to guest speakers from industry and higher education, attend careers fairs and university masterclasses and visit university sites. This builds their confidence in choosing their next steps. An increasing proportion of learners move into further education or employment.

Leaders and managers have established quality processes to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in the college. They work closely with subcontractors to ensure teaching quality is high. They have acted to improve the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive. However, several of these actions have not been established long enough for the full impact on learners' attendance and achievement to be seen.

Leaders and governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college provision. Governors suitably challenge leaders' decisions. They support leaders in developing the quality of information provided to governance boards. Governors play a key role in shaping the strategic direction. They contribute constructively to ensure strategic decisions are sensible, for example taking active roles in trying to reduce or mitigate risk and strategically planning the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase achievement rates for learners and apprentices.
- Increase attendance for young learners.
- Increase the achievement rates for GCSE English and mathematics at grade 4 and above.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130483
Address	Wisemore campus Littleton Street West Walsall West Midlands WS2 8ES
Contact number	01922657022
Website	walsallcollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jatinder Sharma
Provider type	Further education college
Date of previous inspection	3 to 6 March 2020
Main subcontractors	Learning curve Embark (Fairway Training) 3EEs

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 visiting 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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