

Halesowen College

General further education college

Inspection dates

18–21 September 2017

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Learners make good progress in improving their English and mathematical skills, and the proportion who successfully gain GCSE qualifications grade A to C/9 to 4 in English and mathematics has increased.
- Learners demonstrate a desire to succeed in their chosen course, through hard work, good behaviour and high attendance.
- Governors and leaders have managed the college's resources very effectively. As a result, learners benefit from industry-standard resources that enhance the skills they develop.
- Leaders and governors have established strong effective links with a range of partners to ensure that the curriculum offered by the college meets local and regional priorities.
- The college is a welcoming, friendly and inclusive environment where staff and learners work together well.
- A small minority of learners do not benefit fully from their work experience because it does not relate sufficiently to their career aspirations.
- Teachers do not make consistently good use of assessment information to plan effectively to challenge the most-able learners.
- Learners benefit from comprehensive advice that ensures career expectations are realistic and achievable.
- Learners benefit from an effective range of support that meets their individual needs and enables them to make good progress.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations that motivate and sustain learners' interest in learning.
- Teachers' reviews of learners' progress are often informal. It is not consistently clear enough what actions they have agreed with learners as a result, and what progress learners are making towards achieving them.
- Support for vulnerable learners including those children looked after ensures that they develop the skills and attitudes to support progression onto their intended destination.
- Leaders and managers make good use of the quality improvement plan to bring about rapid improvements in underperforming areas of the college.
- In a small minority of cases, observers of lessons do not focus sufficiently on the progress and learning that are the result of teaching activities, leading to an evaluation that is not sufficiently helpful in enabling the improvement of teachers' practice.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Halesowen College is a medium-sized general further education college operating from three sites close to the centre of Halesowen. The college provides education to over 4,500 learners. It primarily serves towns in the boroughs of Dudley and Sandwell but also, more widely, west Birmingham. The college offers over 130 vocational courses in 13 sector subject areas, from entry level to higher education. Over 80% of learners at the college study on full-time courses with the vast majority aged between 16 and 18. Approximately 800 learners follow A-level programmes. Adult learners attending the college study full-time courses such as those in accountancy and access to higher education. Some 30 learners who qualify for high-needs funding take part in study programmes alongside their peers who do not require this funding.
- Halesowen is in the bottom 20% for socio-economic deprivation nationally. The proportion of local residents with qualifications at level 2, or above, is below the regional and national averages. Unemployment rates are above the regional and national averages.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that more learners engage in a broader range of relevant activities where they can learn the skills necessary for work, such as working to deadlines, teamworking and occupational skills relevant to their career aspirations in order that they are well equipped as they progress into the next stage of their career.
- Ensure that teachers set more complex and challenging work for the most-able learners to ensure that they can fulfil their potential.
- When observing lessons, leaders and managers need to have a stronger focus on the impact of teaching on the progress that all learners make in lessons, in order to bring about sustained improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff need to monitor more closely the progress that all learners make, so that they can identify more quickly when learners fall behind with their work and put in place the appropriate support.

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Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors are ambitious for the college. They are committed to, and passionate about, improving the provision to achieve high standards. They set high expectations throughout the organisation. Following a decline in learners' performance in 2015/16, governors and leaders successfully communicated to staff their expectations for the quality of learning and the improvement in learners' outcomes. Achievement rates have improved quickly, and a high proportion of learners make the progress of which they are capable. The principal and governors set a clear and well-understood strategic direction. Financial management of the college is exceptionally strong, resulting in learners benefiting from ongoing investment in high-quality resources, facilities and estate.
- Leaders give strong commitment to improving the quality of provision in English and mathematics. They have prioritised additional staffing investment through the appointment of new managers and specialist teachers. Teaching staff have benefited from a range of support to extend their confidence and skills regarding the teaching of literacy and numeracy. This support has started to bring about improvements for learners, both in their levels of confidence in these skills and in their achievements.
- Leaders and managers have embedded equality well throughout the college, creating an inclusive and welcoming environment. As a result, learners feel safe and enjoy their time at the college.
- Leaders, managers and governors closely review performance regularly against expected milestones and success criteria both to monitor and to assure that good progress is being made in achieving agreed aims. However, some of the targets within the college plan are not sufficiently well focused or demanding.
- Staff who are not operating at the high levels that their managers expect are supported through effective staff development and mentoring. Leaders use appropriate procedures to respond to the very small numbers of staff whose performance does not improve, or is not at the expected college standard.
- Leaders and managers have implemented effective arrangements for observing teaching, learning and assessment. In the large majority of cases, the judgements from observations and learning walks provide managers with a clear understanding of the performance of individual teachers. Most observers draw on a wide range of evidence to inform their judgements. However, in a small minority of instances, observers' evaluation focuses too much on judgements relating to teaching activities and not enough emphasis is given to learning or the progress that learners make as a result of the teaching, leading to evaluations of teaching, learning and assessment that are not sufficiently helpful in improving the development of teachers' professional practice.
- Leaders and managers have a well-informed understanding of the college's key strengths and areas for improvement. Judgements made by managers closely match those found by inspectors. Leaders and managers evaluate the quality of provision effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. Information to support

improvement at both faculty and course level is extensive and used well, both to identify and inform improvement actions.

- Leaders use a range of successful approaches including the well-established student ambassador system to gather the views of learners. Managers and staff use this information to respond quickly to learners' comments and to enhance the quality of their learning experience.
- Leaders have developed strong and beneficial links with a number of partners, including effective engagement through the Black Country Colleges consortium, West Midlands Further Education and Skills and Productivity Group, the Local Enterprise Partnership and local authorities, and with business representatives and employer networks. These links enable leaders and managers to identify accurately the skill needs, and jointly to plan for and develop courses that meet the needs of the locality.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have the skills and expertise needed to provide the appropriate support, scrutiny and challenge to leaders and managers.
- Governors have established an appropriate set of key performance indicators with which they closely monitor the performance of the college. They receive accurate information that they use well to challenge leaders and managers.
- Governors have a good understanding of the safeguarding arrangements managers have put into place to keep learners safe while attending the college.
- Governors' attendance at board meetings has not been consistently strong.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders place a strong emphasis on ensuring that the college provides a safe, welcoming and harmonious learning environment. Learners feel safe at the college, and incidents of bullying are rare.
- Designated staff with responsibility for safeguarding are skilled at recognising risks to learners. They quickly identify learners whose behaviours may indicate a cause for concern. Staff keep accurate records regarding the actions taken to protect learners.
- The safeguarding team works closely with the local children's services department and a range of external agencies, including those that support learners with mental health issues, to promote and maintain learners' safety.
- There are effective systems to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with young people, and staff and governors receive regular training on safeguarding and their specific responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty.
- Leaders and managers promote e-safety very well and prioritise investment, both in staff training and cyber-security software, to protect learners from the risks associated with radicalism and extremism. Learners have a good awareness of how to make safe use of the internet both while attending their courses and in their personal lives.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Learners enjoy their learning and value the support they receive from staff. Teachers have high expectations for learners. They use learners' previous academic achievement to plan lessons that engage and motivate learners to learn.
- Teachers and assessors skilfully use activities that develop learners' written and spoken English skills and enable learners to develop independent learning and teamworking skills – essential for their successful transition into higher education or employment.
- Teachers know their learners well and provide good one-to-one support, but this is informal and not always recorded in learners' reviews. As a result, it is not always clear what actions have been agreed and what progress learners are making towards these targets.
- Most teachers provide learners with useful comments on coursework and homework on how they can improve their work. However, in a few cases, it is not always clear what learners need to do to improve. As a result, some learners do not make rapid enough progress.
- Support for learners in receipt of high-needs funding on study programmes is effective, and learning support assistants work effectively in lessons to reinforce learning.
- The majority of assessors review apprentices' progress regularly, set clear targets and keep learners on track to make the progress expected of them. In a few cases, targets set at apprenticeship reviews do motivate apprentices to make swift progress.
- Teachers' assessment of learners' skills at the start of their course is thorough and used effectively to plan learning and set targets for learners in GCSE and functional skills mathematics. As a result, learners develop these skills effectively and are confident in applying these newly acquired skills in their main subject. For example, catering learners confidently calculate the correct weight of ingredients, while music technology learners understand how frequency alters musical tone.
- Teachers and assessors use their industrial and vocational experience well to link theory to workplace practice, which motivates learners and apprentices to achieve and develop technical skills and other skills valuable for employment, such as problem-solving and working to deadlines.
- The learning environment is inclusive and harmonious. Learners demonstrate detailed knowledge of issues regarding race, religion, gender and stereotypes. Teachers challenge and extend learners' views, opinions and understanding through activities in lessons and participation in the tutorial programme.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners are confident, polite, articulate in lessons and enjoy their time at the college. They behave well in and around the college. They are respectful to each other and to staff.
- Learners' work is of a good standard and they take pride in their work. For example, learners in fashion and expressive arts speak confidently about their work and are proud

of their achievements. The work produced by learners studying art is of a high quality and displayed around the college.

- Learners are motivated and respect their teachers and their peers. They come to lessons on time and ready to learn. In lessons, they participate fully and make good progress.
- Learners on level 2 and 3 programmes complete short qualifications in employability skills during tutorials. Level 1 learners complete a 'Steps to Success' qualification. As a result, learners in hospitality are more confident in serving customers in the restaurant, while drama learners develop their teamworking skills when putting on performances for local schools.
- Learners on a range of courses successfully complete additional qualifications that enhance their job prospects – for example, food hygiene, cabin crew qualifications and an award in customer service. All learners complete a qualification on the safe use of the internet and social media within the first few weeks of their programme. As a result, learners know how to keep themselves safe online.
- The majority of learners on study programmes participate in a work placement. For most, the placement is a positive experience. They develop their skills such as time management, working to deadlines and subject-related skills. Learners on travel, tourism, catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes develop sector-standard skills through relevant work placements. Learners can identify the skills they have learned on placement and how these will enable them to progress into work.
- For a minority of learners, their work experience is not linked closely enough to their career aspirations and so they do not draw sufficient benefit from this.
- Learners' attendance improved in the previous year, including at English and mathematics lessons. Teachers reinforce for learners the importance of attendance in order that learners develop the skills necessary to progress into further study or employment.
- Teachers provide accurate information and guidance to help learners make informed choices prior to starting on their programme. Subject teachers are involved in the recruitment process to ensure that learners make an informed choice of course. This has reduced the numbers of learners changing course at the start of the year.
- Careers advice from the specialist and highly experienced careers team is good and starts in the recruitment process. Equal emphasis is given to university opportunities and employment and apprenticeship opportunities. As a result, most learners progress to higher levels of learning, higher education or to employment.
- Learners feel safe at college. They understand the dangers posed by extremism and radicalisation and to whom they should report concerns. Learners identify the values of the college with those required for life in modern Britain: fundamental values such as respect, rule of law and democracy.
- Learners demonstrate detailed knowledge of issues regarding race, religion, gender and stereotypes. Learners studying on level 2 and 3 media and performing arts programmes identified issues regarding equality and diversity, while graphic design learners designed the college Christmas card to reflect fundamental British values. A comprehensive induction programme introduces these subjects, which teachers reinforce through lessons and by challenging learners' views through a range of activities.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications at the college has improved since 2015/16 and is now high.
- Leaders and managers have successfully reversed a historical decline in achievements of learners aged 16 to 18. In 2016/17, these learners achieved well. The overall achievement of learners aged 19+ continues to improve and is high.
- Learners on study programmes at levels 1 and 2 achieve well. In addition, a high number of learners take additional qualifications at levels 1 or 2 to enhance their prospects of employment, and the proportion who successfully complete these is very high.
- The proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 achieving grades A to C/9 to 4 in GCSE English has improved and significantly improved in mathematics. The number of learners completing functional skills English and mathematics has increased in 2016/17 and is good. This continues the improvement seen since 2014/15. As a result, learners are developing the skills necessary to be successful on their course.
- The achievement of learners aged 16 to 18 on A-level and vocational courses continues to improve and is good. The large majority of learners on A-level courses achieve or exceed the grades expected of them, based on their starting points. The very large majority of learners on level 3 vocational courses achieve or exceed their target grades.
- Learners make good progress towards achieving their apprenticeships. Apprenticeship achievement rates are increasing. The achievement of apprentices aged 16 to 18 and 19 to 23 continues to improve from previous years. Of the small number of apprentices over the age of 24, too few achieve their qualifications.
- Most learners progress on to further study, apprenticeships or employment. For those progressing into further study, the vast majority do so at a higher level.
- Too few apprentices achieve their apprenticeship within the planned time frame. After a decline in 2015/16, there has been an improvement in 2016/17. However, a minority of apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship in a timely manner.
- The small number of apprentices from ethnic minority groups do not achieve as well as learners from white British backgrounds.
- On a small minority of level 3 courses, learners do not make the expected level of progress based on their starting points. Leaders and managers have taken actions to address this underperformance, but it is too early to determine the impact of these actions.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- At the time of inspection, there were almost 4,000 learners aged 16 to 19 on study programmes at the college. Around two thirds were studying at level 3. The largest number of learners were studying in health and care, science and maths, arts media and

publishing, and business administration. Study programmes equate to around 80% of the college's provision.

- Teachers have high expectations of their learners and support learners to meet professional and industry standards well. As a result, the large majority of learners make at least the progress expected of them and successfully progress into higher levels of learning, employment and apprenticeships, or secure a place at university.
- Learners benefit from a good programme of careers education and work-related activities that helps them to hone their choices as they discover more about their chosen careers. For example, learners studying the sciences attend subject-specific master classes, such as 'spectroscopy for chemistry learners'. Some 175 learners attended a higher education initiative called the University Access Project, which encourages learners to progress into higher education. Learners on modern foreign languages programmes use their skills to teach Spanish to local residents aged over 50.
- Learners make good progress in improving their English skills. Teachers make effective use of opportunities to reinforce the use of mathematics during lessons. Most learners studying qualifications in English and mathematics alongside their main programme of study are successful and progress to increasingly higher levels during their time at college.
- Learners enjoy their time at college. They attend well, arrive on time, complete tasks as required and respect each other's contributions, allowing learning to take place.
- Learners develop good vocational skills, accurately use relevant technical and professional language, and acquire the skills and attitudes they need to find and sustain employment in their chosen careers. For example, catering learners have very good hygiene practices and have quickly developed the skills needed to prepare and cook food.
- Level 3 learners develop good research skills through assignments and projects, although a minority of teachers do not ensure that assignments are challenging enough for all learners.
- Teachers have detailed information about each learner's abilities and development needs, but too few teachers make full use of this information when planning lessons or setting targets for individual learners. At times, teachers do not make it clear to learners the purpose of activities that they complete in class, and this occasionally leaves learners unsure about the purpose of the tasks they are set.
- Learners' written work is to an appropriate standard for their subject and level of study, and teachers routinely correct grammar and spelling, ensuring that learners do not repeat mistakes.
- Teachers provide effective verbal feedback in lessons. Written feedback from teachers refers to assessment criteria and mostly explains clearly to learners what they need to do to meet the criteria.

Apprenticeships

Good

- At the time of the inspection, 145 apprentices were in training. Some 40 apprentices study at advanced level and 38 study at intermediate level. Around 44 apprentices are undertaking a higher-level apprenticeship. There are 23 apprentices on the new

apprenticeship standards. The majority undertake programmes in business administration, accounting and IT, software, web and telecoms professions.

- Apprentices following the new apprenticeship standards in software development demonstrate good analytical and problem-solving skills when developing computer applications. As a result, apprentices develop software to a high standard, which meets the requirements of the apprenticeship standard.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the apprenticeship provision meets the principles of apprenticeship frameworks. Staff work closely with employers to ensure that they provide the most suitable opportunities for apprentices. On- and off-the-job training are coordinated well. The majority of employers are involved regularly in setting and monitoring meaningful short-term targets that ensure that apprentices complete work on time. As a result, apprentices contribute effectively to their employers' business.
- Teachers and assessors use their extensive industry experience well to support apprentices' development of good practical skills. As a result, most apprentices quickly develop and acquire a broad range of vocational skills. Apprentices on IT programmes provide good technical support to colleagues and efficiently maintain their employers' IT network. Hairdressing apprentices confidently complete client consultations. They shampoo and blow-dry clients' hair to a good industry standard.
- The majority of teachers use a variety of activities and good industry-standard resources in practical lessons. They maintain apprentices' interest well. As a result, apprentices work purposefully and produce a good standard of work.
- The majority of teachers and assessors monitor apprentices' progress well through regular and effective progress reviews. As a result, the large majority of current apprentices are on track to achieve their programmes on time. Trainers use their knowledge of apprentices' progress well to identify those at risk of not achieving, and take appropriate remedial action to help apprentices to catch up.
- Most teachers integrate English and mathematics into practical lessons effectively. Apprentices speak clearly and confidently, and use specialist terminology correctly in their vocational areas. As a result, apprentices learn to apply these skills effectively at work.
- Staff provide helpful advice and guidance. Apprentices have a clear understanding of the progression routes available to them and make informed decisions on their next steps. As a result, almost all apprentices remain in employment, gain promotion or continue to a higher-level apprenticeship.
- Apprentices feel safe and are appropriately aware of health and safety issues in the workplace. They know how to report any safeguarding concerns they may have at work. Apprentices know how to stay safe when using social media.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not challenge all apprentices to achieve their full potential. After introducing new concepts, they do not routinely ensure that all apprentices understand key points of learning. As a result, a minority of apprentices do not make sufficient progress.
- In a few cases, target setting and action planning do not drive progress well enough and motivate apprentices to make swift progress. Too often, assessors focus on the completion of qualification units with insufficient focus on apprentices' skills development. Targets focus on meeting competencies and do not support apprentices sufficiently to

make improvements in their work. As a result, not all apprentices are challenged sufficiently to achieve a higher standard.

- Feedback from a minority of teachers and assessors is not precise enough. It informs apprentices of what they have achieved but does not help them understand sufficiently how to improve and develop new skills. As a result, not all apprentices are clear about what they need to do to develop their skills further.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130476
Type of provider	General further education
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,500
Principal/CEO	David Williams
Telephone number	0121 602 7777
Website	www.halesowen.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)	285	23	920	245	2,709	418	47	67
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	22	21	14	38	-	48		
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	31							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	none							

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. 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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