

Inspection of Halesowen College

Inspection dates: 26 to 29 September 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Information about this provider

Halesowen College is a medium-sized general further education college. It operates from three sites close to the centre of Halesowen. The main college site is at Whittingham Road. This is where most programmes are based. The Coombs Wood site hosts apprenticeship provision, and some digital and media provision. The Shenstone House site hosts hair and beauty, health and social care and some adult provision, such as access to nursing and some level 2 counselling provision.

The college provides programmes from entry level to level 5. These include education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships, and provision for learners with high needs. At the time of the visit, there were approximately 6,000 learners.

There were 4,953 learners on education programmes for young people on a range of academic and vocational courses, including A levels, T levels and BTEC National Diplomas. Courses are from entry level to level 3, with the largest subject areas in digital technologies and computer science, business and accounting, and health. There were 103 learners studying towards T levels in education and childcare, accounts, digital support and services, management and administration and supporting healthcare.

There were approximately 1,300 adult learners studying full- and part-time courses from entry level to level 5. Around a third of these learners were on access to higher education courses in nursing, midwifery, science, health professionals, social science, animal management, business and law.

There were 72 learners who qualify for high-needs funding. Forty-six of these learners were on vocational courses learning alongside their peers and 26 were on programmes designed for learners with high needs.

There were 95 apprentices, 37 of whom were aged under 19. Apprenticeship subjects range from level 2 to level 4 in business and professional, health and science.

The college was not using any subcontractors.

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

Learners across all sites feel valued and included in the college community. They are respected by their peers and are confident to seek well-being support from staff should they need to. Leaders, managers, and staff have created a welcoming and inclusive environment that enables learners to thrive.

Learners show positive attitudes to their studies and are proud to study at the college. Through their studies they become more active citizens and, in a few cases, contribute positively to their communities. For example, learners on the T level in education and childcare programme take part in charitable events, such as collecting Christmas presents for distribution in the community.

Learners gain confidence and develop the skills they need for the workplace. These newly gained skills prepare them well for their next career steps. For example, learners aged 16 to 19 on health-related programmes learn to respond to value-based interview questions, to show empathy and the skills needed to work in the health sector.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college. All college sites are secure and welcoming. Learners and apprentices know how to refer any issues with their safety. They are confident that any concerns they may raise will be dealt with quickly and with integrity.

In most instances, learners and apprentices have good attendance to their lessons. Staff take sensible actions to help learners and apprentices to improve their attendance over time. For example, personal coaches follow up on learners aged 16 to 19 who are not attending their sessions. Personal coaches link with support staff who provide support to learners with any barriers they face coming to college. However, too many learners who study additional English and mathematics qualifications as part of their studies do not attend their learning sessions often

enough. Too few of these learners make rapid and sustained progress through their English and mathematics qualifications.

Learners benefit from a range of activities that develop their confidence, resilience, and knowledge so that they can succeed. Learners with high needs complete self-assessments to identify the skills they need to develop during their time at college. They review their skills, such as communication, resilience, confidence, and independence. Learners improve their self-confidence and cope better with anxiety. They can now deal with social situations, such as busy communal areas and large classes.

Learners are prepared for life in modern Britain. They develop an understanding of fundamental British values and how these apply to their personal lives and vocational settings. For example, at Shenstone House site, adult learners on the access to nursing programme explore concepts of mutual respect and tolerance. They take part in discussions about ethics and mutual respect when considering the nursing and midwifery council code of conduct and the professional values needed to work in nursing.

Most learners have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship. Personal coaches teach topics such as healthy relationships in tutorials. Learners have a good understanding of topics including consent. As a result, learners know what behaviours are inappropriate and feel confident to discuss concerns with their peers or members of staff.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers successfully work with a range of key stakeholders across the region. They have a clear understanding of the local and regional skills needs and how their curriculums can work to serve these needs. For example, leaders have invested and increased their digital, health and social care, and business curriculums to ensure there is the breadth of courses to support progression from entry level through to higher education.

Leaders have effective working relationships with other local education providers. They work collaboratively with other local colleges and universities to ensure their curriculums are planned well to complement each other's. There is a focus on specialist areas and resources, to ensure the region has the skills education it needs for learners. For example, college leaders work with the University of Worcester to facilitate delivery of higher education programmes locally, equipping graduates to work in early years, special education, and further education.

Leaders have taken steps to involve employers more heavily in the design and delivery of their curriculums. Each curriculum area has an employer board which meets regularly to discuss the skills that require development for their sector. Some of these boards are well established, such as in health, catering and in digital

technologies. In other curriculum areas, these employer boards are still in their infancy, and so the benefits of these working partnerships are yet to take effect.

Leaders, managers, and staff listen to feedback from their stakeholders. They use this feedback to ensure their curriculums are planned and taught effectively, so that learners learn the skills they need for their next steps. For example, in digital technology courses, staff have incorporated a focus on spreadsheet software and project management into the curriculum, following feedback from employers.

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

Leaders and managers know their provision well. They ensure that clear targets for improvement have been set in the few areas identified as requiring improvement, and they monitor these regularly. Leaders rightly recognise that apprenticeship provision requires improvement. They have recruited new leadership and management into this department. They have sought external expertise to help them to improve apprentices' retention and raise achievement. However, the impact of these initiatives is not yet evident.

Governors have a wide range of relevant expertise and skills. They use this effectively to support and challenge senior leaders and managers. They hold leaders and managers to account for improving all aspects of the college experience for learners and apprentices. They have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses and are clear about the actions and interventions needed to assure quality and raise standards.

In most cases, the curriculums which learners follow are well thought out and logically ordered. This ensures that learners develop their skills and knowledge over the duration of their studies. For example, in level 2 counselling skills, adult learners learn basic counselling skills such as active listening and paraphrasing, before moving on to more complex counselling theories. As a result, learners can practise and apply counselling skills to the theories they learn.

The curriculum is less well planned and sequenced for apprentices. In level 2 healthcare science assistant the flow of learning is not always well thought out. Teachers do not ensure apprentices understand the basic concepts of anatomy before moving on to more complex learning on investigating, treating, and managing diseases and disorders. As a result, apprentices do not always learn new knowledge and skills in a logical order to help them to know more and remember more over time and apply these skills at work.

Teachers across all sites are qualified and experienced in their subjects. They are supported to develop both their teaching and vocational skills through continual professional development opportunities. As a result, most learners benefit from high-quality teaching. For example, at Whittingham Road site, A-level psychology

teachers receive training on retrieval practice. They adapt their teaching to include more retrieval activities to understand what learners have retained and to identify and address any misconceptions before moving on to new topics. Learners can recall and secure their learning on internal validity and then apply this to a practical research activity, understanding how validity needs to be considered when undertaking research.

Most teachers are skilled in using questions and prompts in lessons to check learners' knowledge and understanding. They use these well to support learners in developing a deeper understanding of the topics taught. For example, in adult learning programmes, teachers ensure learners expand on their answers and provide examples of applying learning in context of their career goals. As a result, most learners benefit from discussions and debates which improve their understanding of key concepts.

In apprenticeships, level 3 business administration teachers do not routinely use effective teaching strategies. Teaching of the curriculum focuses too heavily on independent research and self-study. There is little planning for teaching beyond the review of completed assignments and feedback. As a result, teachers cannot swiftly identify any misconceptions or use assessment to inform their teaching to ensure apprentices learn more and remember more.

Learners benefit from a range of high-quality teaching resources. Teachers use these resources effectively in their teaching. For example, at Whittingham Road site, level 2 information technology (IT) learners use cloud technology and industry-standard resources for cyber security. This enables learners to work with the latest equipment in the IT sector.

Learners with additional learning support needs, including those with high needs, receive the support they need to make similar progress to their peers. Teachers work well with learning support staff. They work closely to ensure that support assistants understand the curriculum and what each of the learners they are supporting are studying. In education programmes for young people, teachers work with progress coaches to identify learners who are falling behind and plan additional support to help them get back on track with their studies.

Most learners receive useful feedback to help them to improve over time. For example, in T level education and childcare, teachers give feedback to learners on their workplace performance and on their written work. As a result, learners improve their classroom practice and know how to improve their written work to achieve higher grades. However, the feedback that apprentices and a minority of learners on education programmes for young people receive is less developmental. Feedback does not support apprentices and learners to make improvements to ensure they can achieve the highest standard and access the highest grades available.

In most instances, teachers in education programmes for young people support learners to develop their mathematics, English and digital skills. Technical language is introduced early in the curriculums and is reinforced during lessons. For example,

in level 1 animal care, learners can explain technical words such as 'prehensile tail' when learning about how certain animals have evolved to grasp or hold objects using their tail. Consequently, learners develop their confidence when using technical vocabulary. However, too few learners who study additional English and Mathematics qualifications as part of their studies make rapid and sustained progress to achieve their qualifications.

Most learners receive useful careers education, information, advice, and guidance to support them in planning their next steps. However, staff do not sufficiently ensure that apprentices systematically benefit from high-quality careers guidance. As a result, apprentices are unclear of the potential career options and future opportunities available to them.

Leaders set clear expectations for all learners to complete work experience or work-related activity. Staff promote personal development activities to learners through various methods such as a careers hub, bulletin, and tutorials. However, leaders recognise that they need to increase the participation in these activities so that more learners benefit from them.

Most learners achieve their qualifications. They develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours through their study of the intended curriculum. Leaders rightly recognise that further work is needed across subjects to increase the number of learners and apprentices who achieve high grades.

Too many apprentices leave early and so do not achieve their qualification.

A high proportion of learners move on into positive destinations, including higher education, employment, and apprenticeships.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase retention and achievement rates for apprentices.
- Ensure apprenticeship teachers plan and use effective teaching strategies.
- Increase the number of learners and apprentices who achieve high grades.
- Improve the sequencing of the curriculums for apprenticeships.
- Ensure apprentices receive high-quality careers education, advice and guidance.
- Increase attendance and achievement rates for learners who study mathematics and English qualifications as part of their studies.
- Increase learners' participation in work experience and work-related activities.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130476
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Contact number	01216 027777
Website	https://www.halesowen.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jacquie Carman
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	18–21 September 2017
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal quality and standards, 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.

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