

Inspection of West Nottinghamshire College

Inspection dates: 28 to 31 March 2023

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

West Nottinghamshire College (WNC) is a general further education college. Leaders offer education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships. Learners study at one of four college sites in Mansfield or Ashfield, or in the workplace. At the time of inspection, there were 2786 young people, 2626 adult enrolments, 1042 apprentices and 169 learners with high needs.

Young people study a range of full-time vocational courses or A levels. Almost all study at levels 1 to 3. Learners with high needs study pathway courses or join a vocational course.

Adults study from entry level to level 3. A large proportion study courses in English, mathematics, employability skills, or access to higher education (HE).

Most apprentices study standards-based apprenticeships at levels 2 to 5. The largest subject areas are construction, business and retail, and engineering.

The college also works with seven subcontractors. They mostly offer part-time courses to adult learners.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their studies at WNC. They find teachers and staff to be friendly and approachable, and rightly value their expertise, support, and encouragement.

Leaders and managers select well the specific curriculum content learners need for their future. For example, on access to HE, managers work closely with local universities to ensure the course content enables learners to successfully progress to their chosen university course. Young people undertake relevant work experience that helps them to understand workplace culture and etiquette.

Most learners and apprentices develop the skills and knowledge they need for their next steps. For example, railway track maintenance adult learners gain employment in the rail track industry. Engineering apprentices develop well the skills they need for their workplaces such as proficient use of trigonometry.

Young people are well prepared for the world of work through innovative, subject relevant 'learning companies.' Learners undertake a range of challenging projects and subsequently become more confident and skilled. Hospitality learners consult customers, run tasting events, and adjust products so they can market an exclusive range of gluten free cakes. Creative digital learners design beer bottle labels for a brewery in Cyprus through their non-profit making international company.

Learners benefit from a broad range of high-quality opportunities that help them make a positive contribution to the community. For example, in conjunction with the local police, motor vehicle learners refurbish bikes and distribute them through community foodbanks. Computer science learners clean and make safe digital devices for distribution to areas of digital poverty.

There is a caring, but ambitious culture at WNC where the vast majority of learners, including the most vulnerable, develop and flourish. Young people, across all courses, have the opportunity to visit the National Holocaust Centre where they learn about tolerance, diversity, oppression, and equality. Leaders invest significantly in off-site team building activities as part of targeted initiatives to build confidence and resilience.

Learners feel safe at college because of the calm and welcoming environment. They know who to speak to if they have concerns or need help. Learners are well-informed about risks to their personal safety such as staying safe online or taking taxis on their own at night. Learners study, in detail, relevant health and safety topics such as basic first aid, manual handling, and safeguarding risks in community settings.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders have a clear vision to be a force for raising aspirations in the communities they serve. Leaders understand their role very well in leading and driving skills development. They have a high number of well-established partnerships with key stakeholders and employers. Leaders are key players in the local district councils and Towns Boards. This joined-up approach supports the skills agenda and secures substantial new investment to the area. Leaders undertake purposeful work with stakeholders to regenerate the local area and make it an attractive place to learn, work, and live. The college is a key partner of Nottingham Trent University (NTU), and the university hub on the college campus successfully ensures higher education is an option within the community.

Leaders actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in curriculum design and teaching. The 'hotel takeover' with Warner hotels, enables hospitality, travel and beauty learners to undertake work in customer facing roles. Adults who study the level 2 rail course now learn more about rail industrial power tools. Links with companies such as ABB robotics and HAAS automation inform the teaching of the engineering courses. High needs learners undertake supported internships in the Mansfield District Council theatre.

Leaders ensure curriculum planning focuses closely on meeting skills needs. They adopt a detailed 7-step approach that includes use of labour market information, destination data and employment trends. Proactive collaboration between leaders and stakeholders informs understanding of emerging skills needs. For example, following the creation of the nursing academy in collaboration with NTU, there are 50 new trainee nurses. Effective links with the Department for Work and Pensions provides courses in welding and fabrication in response to local skills shortages. The sport curriculum includes additional qualifications on physical activity and mental health, and swim teaching, to meet forecast industry demand.

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

The ambitious leadership team has successfully secured the college's finances and developed an empowering culture based firmly on the needs of learners. Highly experienced governors have supported this transformation. Leaders and governors have a relentless drive to improve performance across the college.

Leaders use their strong knowledge of skills needs to shape the curriculum well. As a result, learners benefit from well-informed curriculum content. For example, learners on art courses interact with local business and freelance artists, to successfully develop their skills for self-employment. Business administrator

apprentices based with the Police or the NHS, focus closely on emotional intelligence within customer service topics.

Managers and teachers organise topics well within most courses for young people and adult learners. This enables learners to progressively build their knowledge and skills. In GCSE English, teachers firstly develop the fundamental aspects of the written language, and learners' ability to analyse texts, before they move on to focus on specific exam-focused texts. On the autism awareness distance learning course, adult learners develop a detailed understanding of the nature of mild, moderate, and severe forms of autism, then move on to learn how they might support children who have autism. The curriculum for learners with high needs is very well-sequenced with progression pathways that prepare them very well for adulthood. However, in a small number of cases, apprentices' on-and-off-the-job learning is not always well organised. Consequently, apprentices are not always able to practice and consolidate their new learning in the workplace.

Most teachers use their subject expertise skilfully to develop learners' understanding of key concepts. A levels teachers help learners to grasp differences in primary and secondary data through reference to the Office for National Statistics. In business, most teachers use a good range of materials, case studies and activities to help students grasp and understand key topics. However, the ongoing sector challenges of recruitment and retention of electrical teachers, as acknowledged by leaders, has caused disruption to learning.

Most teachers support learners very well to use subject and technical vocabulary. Art and design learners refer fluently to different artists and styles, such as Art Deco and Bauhaus. Access to HE learners use scientific vocabulary well and use terms such as phenotype and genotype correctly. In electrical, learners have to use correct terminology to order the exact materials they need from stores for their practical tasks. However, in a very small number of cases, teachers do not always pick up on errors with terminology when they mark learners' work.

Learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) benefit from a carefully planned curriculum with reasonable adjustments to support their learning. For example, computer science learners receive bespoke support that meets their needs such as changes to course end dates. In A levels, teachers and support staff collaborate well to adapt materials for learners with SEND or high needs.

Leaders work very effectively and diligently with the local authority to ensure a highly appropriate and robust educational offer for learners with high needs. This includes courses for learners with SEND, access to a wide range of college courses and well-designed supported internships. Comprehensive plans and activities help learners with high needs to transition very well to college life. Most teachers use informative teaching, learning and inclusion plans very effectively.

On most courses, teachers check learners' understanding well, and adapt their teaching appropriately. In foundation learning, teachers take time to check on learning frequently and correct any misunderstanding swiftly. In online lessons for

adult learners, teachers make excellent use of technology to check learners' understanding through use of chat boxes, online quiz tools and online noticeboards. However, in a small number of cases, checks of understanding are less effective. For example, on business courses, teachers do not routinely revisit topics over the duration of the course. As a result, students are less able to articulate key principles from earlier in their studies.

Teachers plan helpful practice activities. As a result, most learners become more fluent in their knowledge and skills over time. Young people readily practice and apply what they learn through departmental 'learning companies.' For example, in early years, learners build their leadership skills alongside their application of knowledge of early years through activities centred on story bags and puppetry.

Most teachers provide learners with clear and direct feedback on their work that helps them to improve. For example, sport learners receive feedback on their fitness training sessions with clients against professional standards. Specialist trainers set engineering apprentices appropriate practical tasks such as interpreting engineering drawing and machining techniques, and discuss progress on an individual basis. However, in a small number of cases, feedback is less effective. For example, business administrator apprentices, and adults on distance learning courses, do not always know how to improve their grades or work standards.

Most work that learners and apprentices complete is suitably demanding. Consequently most develop new knowledge and skills to a good level. In English GCSE, young people improve their writing from a rudimentary level and learn to use linguistic devices such as personification and similes effectively. Adult learners on rail courses demonstrate a detailed understanding of the risks of corrosion or debris under rail track plates. However, teachers on business and electrical courses do not always challenge learners to complete work beyond a basic level.

There is a clear and well understood expectation for good behaviour being the 'norm' at WNC. As a result, culture between learners and teachers is positive and respectful. Learners have good attitudes to learning and are studious and attentive. They focus on the tasks they are set, take careful notes, and work very well with their peers. Learners are confident, articulate, ambitious and rightly proud of the new knowledge and skills they gain.

Leaders, teachers, and staff use a wide range of effective initiatives and approaches to monitor and further improve levels of attendance. As a result, most learners attend well. However, attendance is less positive in a few areas including construction and English GCSE.

Leaders ensure an extensive enrichment programme that develops learners understanding of important aspects such as citizenship, equality of opportunity, and healthy relationships. Participation with these activities is high across the college. Teachers and support staff also skilfully integrate personal development topics into lessons.

Learners, including those with high needs, experience a well-planned careers programme of impartial advice and guidance. Learners benefit from a digital 'careers toolkit', that provides them with a comprehensive range of resources such as, career quizzes, labour market information, setting up your own business, apprenticeships, and HE. Employers attend college careers events such as careers evenings. As a result, learners are knowledgeable and confident about their next steps options.

Most learners and apprentices successfully pass their courses. Around half of young people achieve high grades on vocational courses and around a third achieve high grades on A level courses. Just under half of apprentices achieve high grades. Adult learners achieve their qualifications in line with expectations across most course types, although this is a little lower in basic English and mathematics.

Most learners and apprentices develop the knowledge and skills they require for their planned next steps. Almost all apprentices move into sustained employment. A large majority of adult learners secure jobs in the relevant sector and many access to HE adult learners progress onto university courses. A very high number of learners with high needs secure meaningful positive destinations.

Leaders focus closely on the quality of education, and they are ambitious for learners' outcomes. A 'teach to the top' strategy has led to an array of course-specific training to help teachers support learners to achieve strongly. At the time of the inspection it was too early to see the full impact of this approach.

Quality assurance and improvement is carefully planned. Leaders and managers have high expectations for standards of teaching. They undertake frequent checks on quality via deep dive activities that lead to comprehensive action plans. As a result, quality of education is at least good across most provision.

Governors have a detailed knowledge of the college's strengths and weaknesses, and about the quality of teaching and learning. They frequently and rigorously challenge leaders' decision making to support continued improvement.

Leaders involve staff well in projects that lead to improvements for learners. For example, a project focused on attendance has led to a strong 'seek to find out' culture whereby staff use different interventions for different reasons of non-attendance. As a result, attendance levels continue to rise steadily and incrementally.

Leaders are considerate and thoughtful in relation to staff well-being. For example, there are well-being and carer champions, and disability and menopause networks. Leaders are visible around the college and with staff teams. There is a relaxed and positive culture in which staff and learners are comfortable to speak to senior leaders. As a result, there are high levels of staff satisfaction.

Leaders have effective oversight of sub-contracted provision. They undertake deep dives, produce quality action plans, and review them as part of performance monitoring. They undertake joint curriculum planning and offer tailored CPD to

subcontractors' staff. Subcontractor managers value the positive impact of these processes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure comprehensive arrangements are in place. Policies are appropriate and safer recruitment is thorough.

Safeguarding leads are very experienced. They ensure appropriate and useful training for all staff and learners including on topical issues such as sexual harassment and misogyny.

Safeguarding leads swiftly assess and carefully record any concerns. They work closely with external partners including the early help unit and domestic violence support charities.

Leaders monitor well trends in referrals to inform subsequent training and learners' personal development curriculum. Leaders have a good knowledge of local risks such as right-wing activists at local music festivals. This helps keep learners safe.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure plans for apprentices' on-and-off-the-job learning are used consistently to inform practice and consolidation activity.
- Leaders should continue their work to stabilise the electrical curriculum and provide tailored support for the teaching team.
- Leaders should ensure all teachers set learners demanding work that helps them achieve high work standards over time.
- Leaders should ensure all teachers use assessment effectively, so learners retain their learning over time, and know what they need to do to improve their work and skills further.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130777
Address	Derby Road Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG18 5BH
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Website	www.wnc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Andrew Cropley
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	7 to 10 February 2017
Main subcontractors	Chameleon School of Construction Ltd The White Rose School of Beauty & Complementary Therapies Ltd Nottingham Trent University Qualitrain Ltd Trackwork Ltd The Inspire & Achieve Foundation Academy Transformation Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal curriculum and quality, 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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