

# Inspection of Buckinghamshire College Group

Inspection dates: 9–17 November 2021

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

## Information about this provider

Buckinghamshire College Group (BCG) was formed in October 2017 from the merger between Aylesbury College and Amersham and Wycombe College. BCG has campuses in Aylesbury, Amersham and High Wycombe.

The college has around 3,000 students aged 16 to 18, around 1,200 adult students and just under 500 apprentices. There are 250 students in receipt of high needs funding. Leaders offer courses in all subject areas, from entry level to level 4, with a range of full-time and part-time courses in most subjects. Leaders and managers work with eight subcontractors who teach students and apprentices across all provision types.

BCG received a monitoring visit from Ofsted in March 2019.

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

Students and apprentices benefit from a harmonious environment across the three college campuses. Students are highly respectful of each other's diverse views and backgrounds. They are keen to learn and most respond to the high behaviour expectations set by staff by attending all their lessons punctually.

Adult students develop new knowledge and skills that prepare them well to move on to further study or into employment. For example, students on access to higher education courses develop their analytic and evaluative skills quickly and feel confident about moving to university. A high proportion of adult students move on to employment or further learning, including higher education, on completion of their courses.

Apprentices gain useful practical skills that enable them to become more effective employees in the workplace. For example, carpentry apprentices fit skirting boards without supervision. Motor vehicle apprentices use mechanical measuring tools and diagnostic equipment to remove and repair engines safely.

Students with high needs do not experience consistently high-quality teaching. More than half of the students do not benefit from teaching that is sufficiently well planned to enable them to develop their knowledge and skills from their starting points. Consequently, these students are not making the progress of which they are capable.

Students benefit from a carefully considered tutorial programme. They learn about useful topics, such as mental health and healthy relationships, which develop students' personal and social skills well. Students know the signs of poor mental health and have a clear understanding of sexual consent and how to identify and tackle toxic relationships.

Students make good use of relevant work experience opportunities to develop their understanding of the industry they are interested in. For example, students in information technology complete useful placements with ethical hackers and web developers. As a result, they become more competent and confident in the skills and knowledge they need to work in that industry.

Most students and apprentices know what they need to do to prepare for their next steps in education or employment. Students benefit from a careers coaching programme where they explore potential progression routes, such as apprenticeships or higher education. Students with high needs who intend to leave at the end of the year do not benefit from regular visits to their proposed destinations. Therefore, they are not as well prepared for their next steps. A minority of apprentices do not receive careers information, advice and guidance during their training. These apprentices do not know the options available to them on completion of their apprenticeship.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear and carefully considered rationale for most of the courses they offer. They work closely with local and regional employers to ensure that their courses meet local and regional job market needs and increase employment opportunities for students. For example, they have introduced courses in special effects make-up, prosthetics and film production in response to shortages in the film industry. Leaders discuss and plan the social care curriculum with local employers, such as the Buckinghamshire Health Care Trust, so that students develop the relevant skills they need to gain employment in the sector.

Where leaders and managers cannot offer courses in certain subjects, they subcontract to carefully chosen partners. Leaders and managers generally manage subcontractors well, ensuring that they meet the college's quality standards. However, leaders and managers' monitoring of one subcontractor who teaches students with high needs is not thorough enough. This has resulted in the quality of some of the teaching that these students receive not being good enough to help them learn and make progress towards their goals.

Governance at the college is strong. Governors understand the challenges of the new college. They have a suitable range of backgrounds and experience that enables them to challenge and support leaders effectively. Leaders, managers and governors are ambitious for most students and apprentices to achieve well and move on to positive destinations. However, they do not have consistently high aspirations for students with high needs. They do not ensure that staff plan, teach and review their curriculum to meet the specific personal and social needs of these students. Leaders and managers acknowledge the issues in this area and have well considered plans in place to tackle them.

Leaders and managers have designed a range of useful training opportunities for staff to ensure that they continue to develop their vocational and teaching skills. This includes training specific to subject areas. For example, creative arts staff attend training to improve their ceramics skills to support students in this area better. Staff in information technology do not benefit from a clear plan for their professional development. Training available to information technology staff does not focus on areas that they feel they need, such as updating their vendor certification or improving their understanding of industry software packages.

Well-qualified staff use their vocational experience to plan and teach most lessons effectively. Most staff plan teaching in a logical order so that students and apprentices develop the basic skills and knowledge they need before progressing to more complex topics and techniques. For example, creative arts teachers teach image manipulation before moving on to more specialist techniques, such as the use of the darkroom.

Teachers in most subjects help students to secure the knowledge, skills and key concepts they need for their future learning. They frequently revisit topics and use questioning effectively so that students and apprentices practise and consolidate their learning. For example, in access to higher education, teachers set useful activities at the start of lessons that allow students to build on previous learning. As a result, students and apprentices become increasingly confident and competent in their chosen subjects of study.

Teachers in too many courses, including some for students with high needs, do not use assessment effectively, to check what students have learned and identify gaps in students' knowledge. They do not provide students with useful feedback or targets to help them identify how to improve their work. As a result, these students are not making as rapid progress to the next stage of their learning as they are capable of. Adult students benefit from developmental oral and written feedback, and, as a result, they improve their skills over time and are on target to achieve their qualifications.

In vocational subjects, students and apprentices develop their technical understanding and practical skills quickly. They are able to use specialist terminology accurately and confidently. For example, art and design students are able to explain the use of colour theory in key works of art using terms such as complementary and contrasting colours correctly. Adult students are able to put into practice their theoretical knowledge of electrical components to build circuit boards of increasing complexity.

Teachers support apprentices and students in vocational subjects to develop the numeracy and literacy skills they need for their roles and future careers. In carpentry, apprentices are able to apply Pythagoras' theorem to mark and cut 90-degree angles in joints and door frames accurately. Adult students studying English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) improve their conversational English, which they use to interact better with clients at work. Teachers of students who need to take examinations in mathematics as part of their programmes do not support these students well enough. As a result, too few students feel prepared for their examinations.

Most students take part in a wide range of valuable activities which help them develop skills that complement their studies well and increase their industry knowledge. These prepare students well for employment or further study in their field of choice. For example, plumbing students visit groundwork installations. Art and design students use recycled materials to produce work on a range of environmental topics, such as the protection of turtles. This also develops their awareness of climate change.

Students' attendance is not consistently high. Students on study programmes attend their vocational lessons well. They do not attend the other elements of their study programme as frequently. Attendance is low for adults on ESOL courses and in some apprenticeship lessons. As a result, many students and apprentices miss

opportunities to learn. A few apprentices arrive late for lessons, thus not displaying the professional behaviours required in their industry.

Students and apprentices generally understand and demonstrate fundamental British values at college and in their daily lives. Students at all three campuses observed the Armistice Day two-minute silence with respect. While all students and apprentices undertake training in understanding extremism and radicalisation during their induction, many find it difficult to recall this learning later on in their studies.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers make sure that the college is a safe and welcoming environment for students and apprentices. Students value the different ways available to them to report incidents, which include reporting anonymously online.

In practical subjects, teachers reinforce the importance of health and safety. Students and apprentices accurately evaluate the risks of the activities they carry out and the tools they use. They know how to work safely.

Most students are confident to report their concerns to staff and many do, knowing that staff will deal with these sensitively and appropriately. However, this is not consistent across all campuses and a small minority of students feel that staff have not taken their concerns seriously or taken quick enough action to resolve them.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders and managers should increase students' and apprentices' attendance rates by identifying why they do not attend their lessons frequently. They should tackle the barriers that cause some students and apprentices to miss lessons so that students and apprentices benefit from their lessons and make progress in their studies.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that staff have high aspirations for students with high needs. They should ensure that teachers collect detailed information about students' starting points and use it to plan, teach and review a challenging curriculum. The curriculum for students with high needs should meet their personal and social needs so that they make the progress of which they are capable and are prepared for their intended destinations.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that teachers use assessment effectively to check students' learning and plan the next stage of teaching. They should provide students and apprentices with useful feedback that allows them to know what they do well and what they need to do to improve their work or skills.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all staff are trained to take concerns raised by students or apprentices seriously and take swift action to resolve them.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal</b>	Karen Mitchell
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Free to Learn Ltd New Meaning Centre Bucks Limited British Academy of Jewellery Limited The Wildlife Hospital Trust Digital Native (UK) Limited Adviza partnership The Entrepreneurial Education Group Limited Insider Access

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal learning and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit 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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