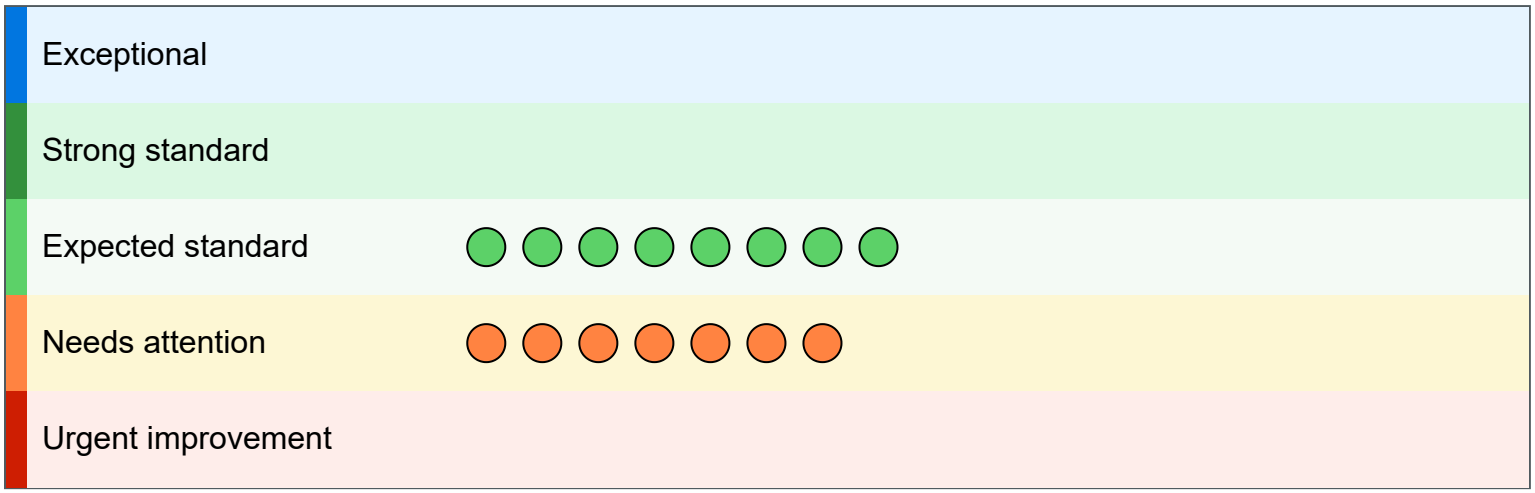
South and City College Birmingham

Address: 129 Floodgate Street, Digbeth, Birmingham, West Midlands, B5 5SU

Unique reference number (URN): 130461

Inspection report: 28 April 2026



Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

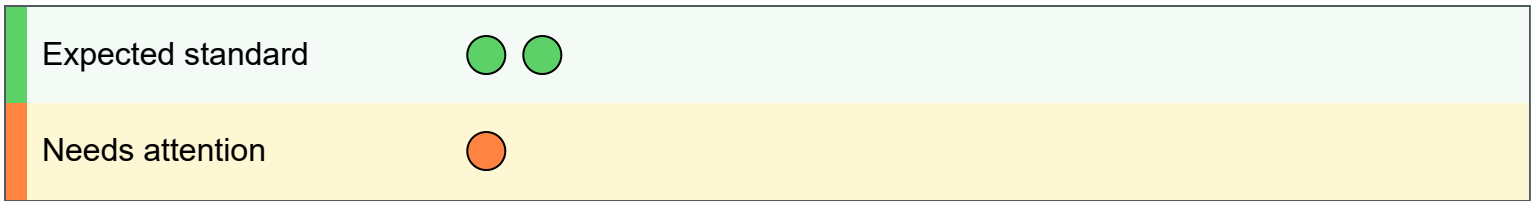
How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, leadership and governance, and contribution to

meeting skills needs



Expected standard

Contribution to meeting skills needs

Expected standard

Leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders to understand local and regional skills needs. This enables them to plan and adapt curriculums in areas such as green energy, construction and manufacturing to meet regional skills priorities. Leaders have invested in industry-standard equipment such as a hydrogen bus and retrofit houses so that learners and apprentices learn modern energy-efficient construction and how to manage retrofit challenges commonly found in older housing. Learners and apprentices develop the skills required to be successful in industry.

Leaders and managers involve employers and stakeholders effectively in designing and contributing to most curriculums. Learners and apprentices generally benefit from stakeholders' knowledge and expertise. In childcare, after discussions with schools, teachers include additional content on how to teach learners with support needs effectively. This means that learners are prepared well for their work placements. However, in a few curriculum areas the work with employers needs strengthening.

Learners and apprentices typically develop useful subject-specific knowledge and skills that they need for employment or further study. Learners studying beauty therapy learn modern skills such as Korean lash lifts. In English for speakers of other languages lessons, learners learn about the use of artificial intelligence in accountancy.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have established a supportive and inclusive culture. Staff are committed to meeting the diverse needs of the communities they serve, many of which are in areas of high levels of deprivation. Staff quickly identify learners' and apprentices' individual needs at the start of their courses. Teachers mostly use individual support plans successfully to help learners and apprentices overcome barriers to learning. For example, in games development, teachers create alternative feedback sheets for learners with autism to reduce cognitive and sensory overload.

Leaders ensure that those who are disadvantaged access the same opportunities as their peers. They provide financial support to help with travel costs to college and work placements.

Designated teachers work well with leaders and external agencies, such as virtual schools, local authorities and social workers. They review and update the personal education plans

of care-experienced learners and apprentices so that they receive the support that they need to achieve.

Staff receive appropriate training to enable them to support learners and apprentices effectively. Most staff use this training to put in place suitable adaptations that meet learners' and apprentices' needs. They systematically review and adapt the support they provide, so that learners become more independent.

Needs attention

Leadership and governance

Needs attention

Although leaders have swiftly increased the number of learners and apprentices who achieve their qualifications, their actions to improve some individual courses further have not had an impact. Leaders' actions to improve attendance rates have not had the desired outcomes. The numbers of adults and young people who attend their lessons remain too low.

Leaders understand the college's key strengths and areas for improvement. Governors have a broadly accurate understanding of the areas that leaders need to improve. Since the previous inspection, they receive more detailed information from leaders. However, the information provided for apprenticeships is not consistently accurate and does not routinely identify the impact of actions taken. This limits the effectiveness of governors' scrutiny and challenge.

Leaders ensure that staff mostly feel valued. They avoid creating unnecessary burdens so that staff workloads are manageable. Staff appreciate an annual 'wellbeing and breathe day' where leaders encourage staff to reflect and connect and refrain from sending emails.

Leaders work productively with stakeholders and select carefully the employers and external organisations that they work with. They ensure that the relationships that they forge provide opportunities aligned to the needs of learners and apprentices from the communities that they serve.

Leaders provide staff with well-planned professional development opportunities. They have invested in a substantial coaching infrastructure, advanced practitioners and a peer-coaching model. This enables leaders to offer targeted and tailored staff training to strengthen staff's teaching expertise and subject specialisms. Staff mostly find the training to be beneficial to enhance their practice.

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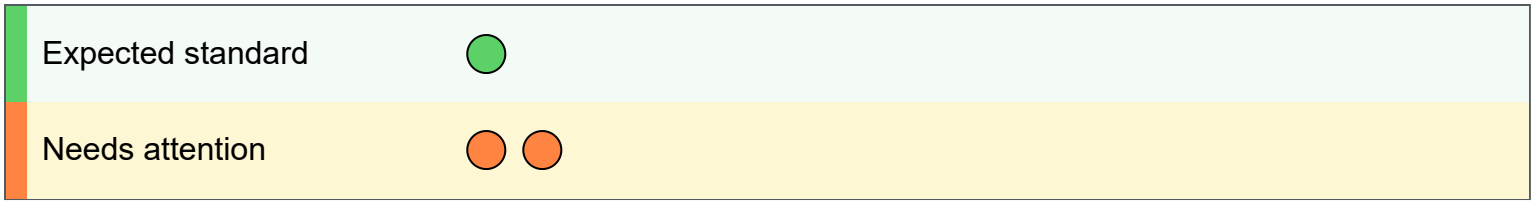
2. Education programmes for young people



Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have taken purposeful action to improve the quality of their curriculum and the standard of teaching. They have reviewed curriculums and enhanced the professional development for teachers. However, leaders do not have sufficient oversight of teaching in a very few areas, which results in inconsistencies.

Teachers typically devise well-sequenced and logical curriculums. In level 2 childcare, learners are taught about the fundamentals of sensory loss. They then devise tactile activities, such as making slime, to help children with sensory loss on their work placements. In level 3 creative media, teachers use extended writing at the end of the first year to help learners develop the academic writing skills they need for further study. This culminates in large creative and inventive projects where learners apply their learning.

Teaching is mostly effective. Learning is generally structured well, with teachers helping learners to remember what they have learned. Learners apply what they have learned in new contexts. Learners studying bricklaying recall how to mix mortar and cut bricks precisely when they move from building walls to more complex structures, such as chimneys. However, teachers in a few areas do not consistently revisit learners' prior learning. This limits some learners' recall, which slows their progress.

Teachers typically ensure that they plan enough time in lessons to build learners' skills and understanding over time. In level 1 carpentry and joinery, learners practise each technique separately to develop their hand tool skills and measuring and calculation skills before they move on to more complicated joinery. In a very few instances, teachers provide insufficient challenge, overly support learners and use activities that lack clear purpose.

Teachers mostly use assessment effectively in lessons. They provide clear, constructive feedback to learners. This helps most learners to improve their work over time. However, in GCSE English, learners do not routinely correct errors in their work and continue to make the same mistakes.

Teachers generally ensure the curriculum is accessible by being responsive to learners' specific support needs. Learners receive study skills and wellbeing support to enable them to remain in learning and make progress.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

Although leaders have improved the overall qualification achievement rates over the last 3 years and achievement is now just below the national rate, too few learners make progress from their starting points in GCSE English and mathematics. Very few learners achieve grades 4 to 9 at GCSE or improve their grades.

Learners generally acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They produce work of an appropriate standard, and this mostly improves over time. Most learners on vocational courses develop appropriate English, mathematical and digital skills to help them to go on to further education or employment. In level 2 childcare, learners study phonics and language development. They use digital resources to create lessons so that they can teach these subjects as part of the early years curriculum.

Learners are generally ready for the next stage of education, employment or training. Those who remain on their courses and achieve mostly progress to positive destinations.

Participation and development

Needs attention

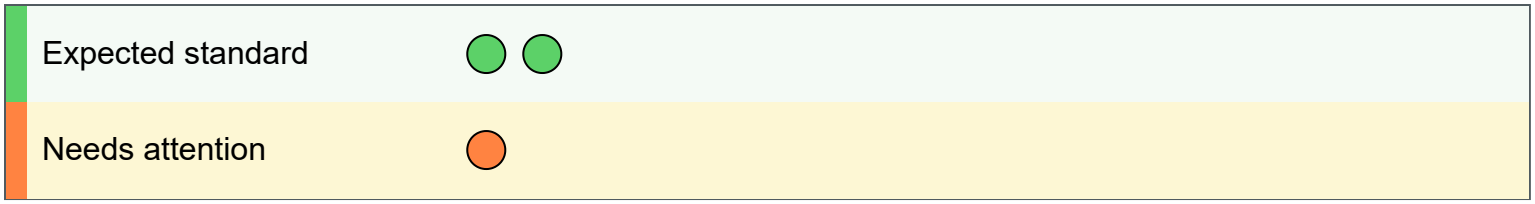
Too many learners do not arrive to their lessons on time or attend college routinely. Leaders have introduced a number of strategies to improve attendance, but it is too early to see the impact of these actions.

Learners are polite and well behaved. Leaders have fostered a welcoming and respectful environment across the college's campuses. Learners feel safe and enjoy coming to college. They know how to report concerns about bullying, harassment and violence.

Learners benefit from a well-planned tutorial programme. They learn about healthy relationships, keeping themselves mentally and physically healthy and the risks of knife crime. Learners have opportunities to join sports clubs and take part in a range of cultural events to celebrate the diverse college community. They are confident to challenge any misconceptions and stereotypes that they encounter.

Learners are mostly provided with sufficient careers advice and guidance. They are generally well informed about their next steps. Leaders have devised a variety of strategies to ensure students can access a broad range of work-related experiences. These include masterclasses, workshops, employer-set projects and work placements. However, leaders do not ensure that learners on level 1 and 2 courses have the opportunity to participate in work placements.

3. Adult learning programmes



Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Adult learners, a high proportion of whom are disadvantaged, achieve their qualifications and individual learning goals. They mostly develop considerable new knowledge and skills, including mathematical and digital skills. Learners who study English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are proud of the progress they make, particularly in writing emails and producing blogs.

Teachers generally provide constructive feedback to learners on their work. In ESOL, learners use this feedback to improve the accuracy of their written work and to use technical language confidently. Learners mostly produce work of an appropriate standard.

Learners typically make appropriate progress from their starting points. Those who achieve mostly progress to positive destinations. Learners on access to higher education courses develop research, evaluation and academic writing skills in readiness for their progression to university. Learners studying ESOL and functional skills English improve their English language skills.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders generally have an accurate understanding of the quality of their adult learning provision. They have improved their systems and processes to monitor more closely the progress that learners make. Leaders have increased the proportion of adult learners who achieve their qualifications.

Leaders plan adult learning curriculums that meet local and regional skills needs. They work with a range of stakeholders, including local employers and local authorities, to design courses that support learners to go on to further study or employment. Leaders have established a range of vocational pathways for learners who speak English as an additional language, including business administration, plumbing and childcare. They include the skills required by employers, such as communication on the telephone, so that learners progress successfully to their next steps.

Teachers plan and sequence what they teach effectively so that learners incrementally build their knowledge and skills. In access to higher education criminology, learners first learn the foundations of social justice. They apply this learning to explore theories of oppression.

Learners studying business management study theories of motivation before applying these to analyse their own motivation towards work and their future goals.

Teachers use a range of appropriate teaching strategies to help learners understand complex topics. In English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), teachers use group tasks, videos and pair work to improve learners' language skills. On the business ESOL pathway, teachers skilfully use activities for learners to practise using business terminology in complex sentences.

Teachers use appropriate assessment strategies to identify gaps in learning. They use well-designed interactive quizzes to revisit key content to build learners' fluency. Teachers routinely carry out learning checks to ensure that learners have a secure understanding of the topics they study.

Leaders generally ensure that the curriculum is accessible by providing alternative delivery models and accessible virtual learning environments for learners who have barriers to their learning. For example, in ESOL, leaders offer morning classes so that learners with childcare responsibilities can manage their studies around their childcare commitments. However, in a very few instances these adaptations are less effective.

Needs attention

Participation and development

Needs attention

Too many adult learners do not attend their courses often enough. Although managers often know the reasons for non-attendance, their actions to improve attendance have not had the required impact.

Leaders ensure that learners mostly benefit from an appropriate wider curriculum. Teachers discuss sensitively topics including how to stay safe online and how to keep physically and mentally healthy. Learners discuss how time pressures at work need to be balanced with personal wellbeing and identify strategies to support their mental health. Learners studying English for speakers of other languages debate business etiquette and consider cultural behaviours.

Learners receive comprehensive careers advice and guidance. They have useful reviews with their teachers to discuss their possible future steps and career choices. In addition, learners attend careers meetings with specialist advisers. Teachers help learners studying access to higher education courses to research their university and course options, complete their personal statements and prepare for interviews.

Learners feel safe and do not experience any bullying. They are confident that teachers would deal with any concerns about their welfare swiftly.

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4. Apprenticeships

Needs attention

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

Although leaders have increased the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeship, achievement remains too low. A significant number of young apprentices do not achieve their apprenticeship. Too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship in the planned timeframe. Although leaders' actions have reduced the proportion of apprentices who do not complete, too many are still beyond their planned end date. Apprentices who do achieve remain in employment or gain promotion.

Apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours that they apply well in their job roles, although few achieve merit or distinction grades. Most apprentices are unclear about the grades they could achieve in their final assessments.

Apprentices do not routinely produce work of a high enough standard. Teachers do not provide constructive feedback to help apprentices improve their work. This means that apprentices' written work does not improve over time.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention

Leaders have insufficient oversight of the quality of apprenticeship teaching and training to drive swift improvement. They produce reports that lack detailed information and targeted actions. Although leaders can demonstrate improvements in a few apprenticeships, the quality of teaching and training is not consistently high.

Teachers plan the curriculum to help apprentices to build their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. Level 3 motor vehicle apprentices learn how to maintain equipment and familiarise themselves with the range of tools required to fix vehicles. They apply this information when studying vehicle systems and learn how to fix components such as braking systems.

Teachers mostly use a range of useful strategies to teach apprentices. They use questioning and demonstration well in practical workshops to develop apprentices' knowledge and skills. In electrical lessons, teachers demonstrate how to measure electrical current accurately. Apprentices use this information and move on to explore continuity testing, earthing and neutral arrangements. They apply this knowledge to real-world connections to develop a deeper understanding. However, in a few instances, because teachers repeat topics for apprentices who were absent in previous sessions, apprentices who attend consistently do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Teachers are experts in their field. They use their expertise to link classroom teaching to the workplace. Building services engineering senior technician apprentices share their workplace experiences of working with different stakeholders on a project and how different perspectives can create tensions. Apprentices explore how they can manage these tensions and reach a resolution through clear communication and information sharing.

Apprentices report feeling well supported and benefit from useful resources. They use online platforms to revisit and consolidate outside of the classroom what they have learned. However, too many apprentices are not aware of the grades they could achieve or the grade at which they are currently performing.

Participation and development **Needs attention**

Apprentices do not benefit from well-planned careers advice and guidance. They have a limited awareness of the broader opportunities available to them in their sector and how the skills they are developing would support them to apply for roles in the future.

Apprentices demonstrate positive and respectful behaviours in classrooms and workshops. They learn in safe, supportive and welcoming environments. Apprentices largely attend their off-the-job training.

Apprentices feel safe in college and in the workplace. They do not experience bullying or harassment and are confident that staff would deal with this swiftly if reported.

Apprentices have access to a range of online resources relating to wider learning, study skills, workplace skills and personal development topics. They study units on topics such as mental health awareness, equality and diversity and healthy relationships. However, too few of the apprentices spoken to during the inspection use these resources.

Apprentices build their confidence as a result of the training that they receive. They learn to communicate appropriately with others at work and speak confidently with their customers. Apprentices understand the importance of treating colleagues and their peers with respect.

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5. Provision for learners with high needs

Expected standard

Expected standard

Achievement **Expected standard**

Most learners achieve their qualifications. Those who study English and mathematics typically make progress from their starting points and achieve at least as well as their peers. Most learners go on to positive destinations.

Teachers set learners ambitious personalised targets that enable them to build their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. Learners effectively develop independence, confidence and resilience and improve their English and mathematical skills. This prepares them well for their next steps.

Learners' work is generally at the required standard for the level that they study. Staff provide useful feedback to learners on how to improve their written work. They break down tasks to identify key words in mathematics so that learners understand the operation required to complete the task. Learners use this feedback to improve their work.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders understand the quality of their curriculums for learners with high needs. Since the previous inspection, leaders' actions have brought about swift improvements to the quality of training that learners receive. Leaders design curriculums that prepare learners successfully to go on to further courses, employment or volunteering roles.

Teachers identify accurate starting points for learners and use these to sequence the curriculum carefully so that learners develop their knowledge and skills logically and build on prior learning. In customer service, learners learn what effective customer service looks like, how to create a positive first impression and how to communicate well. They swiftly move on to more complex issues, such as identifying why people may not communicate effectively and developing an understanding of different needs and cultures.

Teachers are well qualified to teach learners with high needs. They complete specialist training and attend conferences to extend and update their specialist skills and knowledge. They use this training to help them to identify barriers to learning and provide effective support.

Leaders ensure that their curriculums are accessible for all learners. They carefully consider learners' individual needs, implement helpful strategies and provide appropriate assistive technologies. Learners access specialist keyboards, radio aids and noise reducing headphones, so that they can actively participate in their lessons.

Teachers use helpful teaching techniques that deepen learners' understanding and enable them to work towards the outcomes in their education, health and care plans. They break down tasks skilfully, and use video and roleplays, so that learners progressively develop the knowledge and skills they require. Learners successfully identify workplace hazards and mostly learn how to identify risks and recognise actions to take to avoid incidents.

Teachers use a range of assessment methods effectively to check learners' understanding. They use online quizzes to identify gaps in learners' knowledge. They use questioning skilfully and provide time for learners who need more processing time to consider questions before they respond. Teachers observe practical work to effectively assess learners' understanding thoroughly before moving on to the next topic.

Participation and development **Expected standard**

Learners are motivated to attend college and feel safe. Actions taken by leaders to improve attendance have been mostly successful, with learners attending their taught sessions more often. Staff reinforce positive behaviour through modelling and support strategies. Learners typically behave well and are respectful and polite in lessons and around the college campuses.

Staff provide learners with a range of valuable opportunities to participate in community activities and take part in visits that extend their interests. Learners participate in community events, such as litter picking, contribute to a clothes bank and access college activities, such as the debating society and the student council. In a few cases, learners in vocational curriculum areas enter national industry competitions where they win awards.

Learners benefit from suitable careers information, advice and guidance to help them to make informed choices about their next steps. Teachers invite employers into the college to discuss the opportunities available to learners on completion of their qualifications. Staff provide learners with a range of useful opportunities to help them gain an understanding of work. Learners attend work experience or take part in work-related activity, where they develop valuable skills such as time and workload management.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Learners and apprentices across all campuses value the welcoming environment. They describe a positive and respectful culture where they have not witnessed any bullying or discriminatory behaviour. They appreciate that the security personnel talk to them and build relationships with them, which helps them to feel safe. However, a very few learners indicate that the behaviour of their peers is not appropriate. These learners do not feel that poor behaviour is always dealt with effectively enough.

Learners and apprentices benefit from the support that leaders and staff provide. They benefit from staff understanding the local areas very well and the communities in which they live, most of which are in areas of significant disadvantage. Learners and apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds who attend college are well supported to achieve their personalised goals and qualifications.

Too many young people and adults do not attend their lessons. As a result, they do not make the expected progress or achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Young learners talk passionately about feeling part of a community. They value the friendships that they make and the support that their teachers provide. Learners feel listened to and feel their views are taken into consideration. They appreciate having a games room where they can socialise with their peers and play pool and table tennis. They enjoy taking part in activities with learners from different campuses and say that they would appreciate more of these types of opportunities.

Learners with high needs benefit from a supportive and caring environment where they thrive. They feel at ease in lessons and participate in activities well. Learners answer questions and contribute to activities eagerly, and use their own initiative. They are respectful of each other and celebrate each other's successes. Learners apply the skills they learn at college in their work placements. They travel independently, communicate well and enjoy being part of a team. Most learners with high needs achieve their qualifications and make progress towards their individual targets.

Adult learners mostly enjoy their studies and are keen to learn. Those who attend gain valuable new knowledge, skills and behaviours, and confidence in their work and study. Learners value their teachers' expertise and their constant willingness and individual support to help them achieve their very best. They diligently take notes and produce work of the expected standard for their stage and level of course. Adult learners develop their skills for independent living, particularly in courses for English for speakers of other languages and functional skills. They broaden their knowledge of democracy, local elections and current affairs that impact on their local area.

Apprentices develop the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful at work. They are motived to develop skills beyond their own specialisms, which they practise and then apply successfully in the workplace. For example, installation maintenance and electrical apprentices who work in commercial settings develop domestic installation skills. This supports their future career opportunities.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff have high expectations for learners' attendance. They should work closely with managers and staff to improve attendance for young people and adults.
- Leaders should continue to take action to improve the proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship on time and achieve merit and distinction grades.
- Leaders should improve the careers education, advice and guidance for apprentices so that they are aware of the wider opportunities available to them on completion of their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that young people make sufficient progress in GCSE English and mathematics.
- Leaders should improve the quality of information that they provide to governors so that governors can provide effective scrutiny and challenge.
- Leaders should further strengthen their approach to supporting learners with barriers to learning so that these learners receive this support consistently.
- Leaders should continue to strengthen links with employers so that employers provide valuable input into all curriculums and these remain up to date in relation to industry needs.
- Leaders should continue to strengthen professional development for teachers so that learners experience high-quality teaching in all curriculum areas.

About this inspection

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with learners, parents/carers, leaders, governors, staff, employers and other stakeholders during the inspection.

South and City College Birmingham is a large general further education college with 8 campuses across Birmingham. The college recruits learners from some of the most deprived areas of Birmingham. The main college sites are the Longbridge campus, Digbeth campus, Hall Green campus, Handsworth campus and Bordesley Green campus. These sites offer a range of technical, academic and vocational courses. The Golden Hillock Women's Centre is for women only. At this campus, leaders offer subjects such as childcare and health and social care. The Longbridge construction site is based at the Longbridge campus. Leaders at this site focus on practical construction courses. Leaders at the Fusion Centre mainly offer courses in fashion, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and digital skills.

At the time of the inspection, there were 3,850 learners aged 16 to 18 enrolled at the college. For these learners, leaders offer A-level, vocational, T-level and foundation learning pathways. The large majority of young people are enrolled on courses at level 2. Leaders offer entry level and level 1 foundation learning courses across 3 campuses. These include pathways to employment, vocational courses, independence and supported internships. At the time of the inspection, 135 learners had high needs. Many of the courses for school leavers are also taught to adult learners. Other courses taught to adults include access to higher education, ESOL and a range of vocational courses. During the inspection, there were 4,809 adult learners enrolled at the college. There were 349 apprentices. Leaders offer apprenticeships from level 2 to level 6. Most apprentices study at level 3, predominantly in the construction and engineering sectors.

Principal and Chief Executive: Mike Hopkins

Lead inspector:
Alison Humphreys, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Zoe Ibbotson, His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Whelan, His Majesty's Inspector
Alan Winchcombe, Ofsted Inspector
Mark Crilly, Ofsted Inspector
Liz Greenhalgh, Ofsted Inspector
Helen Nellist, Ofsted Inspector
Karen Roberts, Ofsted Inspector
Andy Gadsdon, Ofsted Inspector
Simon Farrar, Ofsted Inspector
Penny Fawcus, His Majesty's Inspector
Steven Ingle, Ofsted Inspector
Kay Hedges, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

This data is from 28 April 2026

Number of learners

Total learners

9143

Education programmes for young people

3850

Adult learning programmes

4809

Apprenticeships

349

Provision for learners with high needs

135

Percentage of learning aims successfully achieved

Education programmes for young people

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	80	84	Close to average
2024/25	80	84	Close to average
2023/24	77	83	Close to average
2023/24	77	83	Close to average
2022/23	64	81	Below
2022/23	64	81	Below

Adult learning programmes

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	90	87	Close to average
2024/25	90	87	Close to average
2023/24	83	87	Close to average
2023/24	83	87	Close to average
2022/23	79	87	Close to average
2022/23	79	87	Close to average

Apprenticeships overall achievement rate

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	60	65	Close to average
2023/24	55	60	Close to average
2022/23	53	55	Close to average

Apprenticeships pass rate

Year	This provider	National average
2024/25	87	98
2023/24	92	98
2022/23	98	97

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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Piccadilly Gate
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