

Inspection of Bedford College

Inspection dates: 23–26 September 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
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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	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Bedford College Group is a large general further education college. In August 2017, it merged with Tresham College. The group has multiple sites across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. The largest sites are in Bedford, where it has a town centre college and a separate sixth-form centre. It also has a site in Kettering, Corby, Wellingborough and at Shuttleworth College, a land-based site in central Bedfordshire. The group has additional learning centres in community locations, including Bedford, Kettering and Corby, as well as in the National College for Motorsport based at Silverstone.

Leaders offer education programmes for young people in all subject sector areas. The largest are health and social care and art and design. At the time of the inspection, there were around 5,500 young learners on study programmes, around half at level 3. A similar number of learners were on full-time and part-time adult learning programmes. The 2,500 apprentices predominantly study engineering, motor vehicle, construction and business administration. Most are on standards-based programmes. 130 learners are in receipt of high-needs funding, and most of these are in specialist provision. At the time of the inspection, Bedford College did not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners enjoy their time at Bedford College. They benefit from the high-quality resources across the campuses, such as the modern, industry-specific tools and equipment at the motorsport and land-based sites. Learners develop the skills and knowledge required by employers, both through college-based provision and in the workplace. They apply their new knowledge and skills effectively to produce high-quality products and standards of work.

Learners feel safe at the college and learn in a calm and ordered environment. They develop confidence quickly, which enables them to express their views and share concerns. Learners, including those with high needs, develop their confidence and independence as a result of the activities they engage with on their programmes. Community learning centres provide adult learners with a calm and purposeful learning environment. Relationships among learners and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture.

Apprentices are valued by their employers and contribute very effectively to the businesses in which they work. Young learners and adults benefit from regular contact with employers and understand fully the industries in which they intend to work. As a result, they are prepared well for their next steps.

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

Adults and young learners develop excellent study skills. They embed new knowledge into their long-term memories effectively. Most learners with high needs move quickly towards independence. They progress into vocational courses and succeed at higher levels.

Most apprentices increase their confidence at work. They use their new learning in their job roles. For example, carpentry apprentices use appropriate carpentry joints when fitting a kitchen. This knowledge enables them to do more at work. They apply their skills to tasks such as hanging doors, and use accurate measurements.

Leaders' detailed research ensures a broad curriculum choice is available across college sites. The subjects and levels offered match the needs of the local and regional priorities. Managers maintain a clear rationale for the specific courses on offer, including for those learners with high needs.

Teachers plan programmes to develop the skills that learners need. They ensure that learners understand fully before moving on to more complex tasks and activities. For example, in the first year of A-level chemistry, learners use their school-based knowledge of atoms to develop their understanding of different atomic models. In sport, teachers develop learners' understanding of nutrition to introduce how to improve performance in elite sport.

Most teachers use information about the skills learners have, very effectively. This enables learners to quickly build on their understanding and skills. Teachers include learners' career aspirations and intended next steps to enhance learning. In adult mathematics and English classes, teachers do not use this information usefully.

Teachers and training coordinators use feedback from their assessment of learners' work. This enables them to review how effective teaching and learning are. For example, training coordinators of health and social care apprentices use assessment through observation to ensure that apprentices can apply their knowledge and skills confidently within new care situations.

Staff provide good-quality careers advice and guidance. Learners are clear about how to get from where they are to their intended future employment. Learners articulate accurately what they have learned and what they expect to learn in their programmes. For example, learners on level 2 in motorsport understand clearly the training required to be employed as a race technician.

Staff ensure an appropriate understanding of fundamental British values. For example, training coordinators cover a series of themes in discussion with apprentices, such as 'fake news'. As a result, apprentices recognise the impact on them, their employer and the wider world. Adult learners do not develop the same depth of understanding. Too many adults, particularly those on short courses, do not develop this knowledge through their programmes.

Staff plan personal and wider skills development excellently into learning programmes. For example, teachers engage learners in graphic design in lively discussions. Learners develop good skills in presenting reasoned arguments. They can discuss, for example, how religion impacts on social design. Learners become self-critical and reflective. They improve their confidence and are self-motivated to succeed.

Teachers of young learners do not use learning opportunities outside of planned lessons. For example, learning on work experience is not used to deepen understanding. Skills learned at college are often not practised in the work settings. Young learners do not link their skills and knowledge development usefully.

Leaders and managers do not effectively coordinate all specialist support. This includes speech and language development, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. The small number of learners who need this extra help do not develop their skills quickly. Key staff on vocational programmes often do not communicate support needs appropriately.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders effectively check staff suitability to work with learners before they are employed. Leaders ensure that staff are appropriately trained and understand their

responsibilities. Staff responsible for safeguarding maintain up-to-date knowledge. Through close links with a range of local organisations, they ensure that learners are safe.

The designated safeguarding officer reports to the senior team and governors frequently. As a result, they have a good understanding of the issues and know that they are effectively resolved. Young learners and apprentices are fully aware of safeguarding procedures. They know how to stay safe, including when working online. However, too many adult learners do not develop a good awareness of the potential dangers of radicalisation or of using the internet.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers need to ensure that those learners with complex high needs receive the additional support that will enable them to have the best chance for success. This includes the use of specialists in speech and language development. Leaders and managers need to ensure that vocational teachers and in-class support staff communicate effectively with each other the ongoing needs of learners.
- Leaders and managers need to ensure that adult learners, particularly those on part-time and distance learning programmes, understand how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation, and online. They must ensure that staff develop adult learners' understanding of how British values relate to them and their everyday lives.
- Leaders need to ensure that teachers use learning from all parts of the programme, including work experience, to enable learners to retain and develop their knowledge and skills more securely over time.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130597
Address	Cauldwell Street Bedford Bedfordshire MK42 9AH
Contact number	01234 291000
Website	www.bedfordcollegethergroup.co.uk
Principal/CEO	Ian Pryce
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, 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 observing 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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