

Inspection of Windsor Forest Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 March 2024

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	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Windsor Forest Colleges Group is a large general further education college. The group is made up of four colleges, with sites in Langley, Windsor, Strode's in Egham and a specialist land-based college, Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA) with dedicated facilities for students with high needs in Maidenhead. At the time of the inspection, there were just over 4,000 students on education programmes for young people. There were 1,595 students on adult learning programmes and 443 students in receipt of high-needs funding. Of the 652 apprentices, 209 are aged 16-18. There were 72 part time 14-16-year-old students and six apprentices with one subcontractor.

The college offers courses from entry level to level 4, including a broad range of A levels as well as vocational programmes in subjects such as sport, protective services, travel and tourism and performing arts. Just over half of students study level 3 courses. The provision for adult students is taught during the daytime and evenings, including lessons in community centres. Courses include English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) from pre-entry to level 1. The college teaches adult programmes that prepare students for their next steps, such as access to higher education, and preparation for employment in the hair and beauty sector.

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

Students and apprentices have a very positive attitude towards college and their studies. They are motivated and enjoy coming to college. They talk positively about how teachers support and inspire them to achieve. Students, including those with high needs enjoy participating and making contributions in lessons and the wider activities of the college. For example, students on foundation programmes develop their understanding of how they can contribute to their communities and wider society. They raise awareness of and money for charities, including Save the Children.

Students benefit from an inclusive and welcoming environment in which they flourish. They are respectful of their peers and teachers, actively listen and focus on their activities in lessons. Students participate in celebrations of events throughout the year, including Black history month where students' written articles on influential role models are exhibited. Displays across the colleges promote awareness and discussions about topics such as International Women's Day, autism and democracy, including support on how to register to vote.

Students and apprentices appreciate the expertise of their teachers, who use their professional experience to support them to understand new concepts and develop new skills. For example, teachers use their knowledge very effectually to develop students' logical and critical thinking skills successfully. As a result, students studying A-level mathematics at Strode's increase their understanding of vector algebra and apply what they have learned to solve problems involving planes and polyhedra.

Students participate in a varied range of opportunities to develop their interests and talents beyond the curriculum. Leaders have put in place opportunities for students to participate in skills competitions and social action projects that support them to become active in their communities. Students appreciate opportunities to undertake additional qualifications. They enjoy the plethora of clubs available to them, and value visits to places that relate to their areas of study. External experts bring to life the specialisms students are learning about. For example, students working towards the level 3 diploma in performance can enrol on the dance leaders award, to further strengthen this aspect of their performing. Media students participate in trips to film studios and production companies which prepare them well for working in the film and television industry.

Students feel confident in their expert knowledge and are prepared well to enter employment or go on to further study, because staff ensure that they develop professional and technical vocabulary well. Students can use this accurately in lessons and assignments. For example, in access to higher education, adult students confidently articulate the structure of a neuron to describe how the axons carry impulses away from the brain.

Students with high needs benefit from effectively planned and tailored courses. Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum that prepares them well for their next steps, including progression into the community, employment or higher

levels of study. Students participate in a wide variety of trips where they practise using public transport and learn how to keep safe. As a result, students develop the confidence and independent living skills they need for adulthood.

The majority of apprentices' make good progress and they produce work to the standard required. Most apprentices learn skills and develop knowledge and behaviours beyond those set in the apprenticeship standard. Teachers and trainers ensure that skills learned away from the workplace are practised at work. Apprentices benefit from an effective broader curriculum which improves their professional development. For example, in collaboration with employers, plumbing apprentices learn about renewable energies. Apprentices in greenkeeping access additional accredited training and qualifications in chainsaw maintenance, cross cutting and tree felling. This additional content prepares apprentices well for their future careers.

Students and apprentices feel very safe in college. They know who to report concerns. Students on foundation courses understand the difference between safe and unsafe strangers using a prompt on the back of their identification card. Students speak with confidence about fundamental British values and can explain how they have developed their understanding of these values through their education programmes. Students are able to explain risks that they need to be aware of in the areas they live and work. For example, they understand criminal exploitation through county lines and sexual exploitation. Students can explain the dangers of knife crime. As a result, they are aware of how to keep themselves and their peers safe.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work very effectively with a wide range of stakeholders and employers to identify the skills priorities nationally, regionally and in the communities that the colleges serve. They work closely with Berkshire and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce to address the priorities of the local skills improvement plan for the region. As a result, leaders have developed a relevant curriculum to meet these needs.

Senior leaders work very collaboratively with other further education providers in the region to identify and respond to skills priorities. They plan provision carefully, to ensure that they avoid duplication so that regional skills needs are met. For example, the college is the agreed centre for training in heavy goods vehicle maintenance in the region.

Leaders use their extensive links with stakeholders and employers to provide a broad range of employability programmes, including Skills Bootcamps. Staff provide informative careers advice and guidance to students across the provision. This effectively prepares students and apprentices for their next steps.

Leaders and managers collaborate very well with employers and stakeholders to identify accurately and respond to their skills needs in the teaching of the curriculum. For example, in equine studies, students benefit from curriculum content and teaching support from an internationally renowned riding school and competition and training centre.

Leaders work effectively with local authorities, including Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough Borough Council, to support the needs of those people who are furthest from employment. They develop provision responsively to meet the needs of students with special educational needs, asylum seekers and refugees.

Leaders liaise closely with local schools to establish links to benefit the wider community of children and young people in the area. Leaders and managers implement programmes to support the transition of students from school to college, so that they are better prepared for further education.

Managers and teachers seek appropriate input from employers to inform the content and order of the curriculum ensuring that it is relevant to employer's needs. For example, teachers and students plan peer learning visits that enable those interested in careers in animal care to understand the physical demands of the job. Motor vehicle apprentices at Langley, work on specialist equipment such as electric baggage carrying vehicles, developing their knowledge and understanding of working with high voltage vehicles and the correct handling and disposal of electrical batteries.

Governors have a very well-developed understanding of the local and regional economy and skills needs in the area. Governors provide effective support and challenge to leaders to ensure that they are focused on meeting skills needs.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders have maintained the good quality of the provision. Leaders have high aspirations to provide high-quality courses that help students to further their employment ambitions and participate more fully in their local communities. Leaders have successfully managed the recent merger with Berkshire College of Agriculture extending the curriculum to include subjects such as equine, horticulture and animal care. Since the previous inspection, leaders actions to improve students access to high-quality and meaningful work placements has been highly effective. As a result, students benefit from gaining an insight into the world of work in their chosen vocational field.

Most managers and teachers have planned and sequenced courses logically so that students and apprentices gain fundamental knowledge and skills. They are then able to develop and combine these, to complete more complex tasks.

Teachers use assessment very effectively to check students' and apprentices' knowledge. They use this information well to identify gaps in their understanding. They also use the outcomes of assessment to inform topics they need to revise or cover again. Teachers skilfully use questioning techniques to promote discussion and debate and assess students' understanding. However, a few teachers do not ensure that all students have a secure understanding of concepts before they move onto the next topic.

In A levels, teachers use assessment well to monitor the progress of students and to advance their skills. For example, in English literature completed assignments are carefully marked identifying strengths and set improvement targets. Further assessments enable teachers and students to identify progress and to focus on specific areas for development.

Most teachers embed English and mathematics into their lessons so that students improve these important skills and develop a good understanding of their benefit in the workplace. For example, level 3 protective services students at BCA learn how to calculate averages for fitness testing. When planning a walking route, students can use the appropriate formula to calculate the expected time taken to walk a route, taking account of the gradients on the route.

Leaders and staff provide most students and apprentices with effective careers guidance to help inform their next steps. Most students and apprentices benefit from valuable advice and interactions with employers, universities, the voluntary sector and the armed forces. Most students and apprentices value the experience and expertise of their teachers, the careers team and specialist careers advisors who help them to make informed decisions about their futures. However, leaders have not yet ensured that students with high needs are supported well enough to make informed choices about their next steps. Plans are in place to strengthen this advice.

Staff care for students' and apprentices' well-being and promote positive mental health. They provide students with access to counselling services to support those who need specialist help. Through effectively planned tutorial topics and additional workshops, students are able to discuss mental health and strategies they can adopt to improve their wellbeing. Most students develop their understanding of healthy relationships. For example, they understand the importance of consent, which helps them to make better decisions. Most students develop their confidence and they become more resilient.

Teachers develop strong relationships with parents and carers from before students and apprentices start at the college. They communicate with them well, so that together they can support students and apprentices to remain on their programme and to achieve. Tutors attend frequent parents' evenings, including additional parents' evenings for those who are at risk of not completing their courses. These meetings focus on putting in place targeted support to help students and apprentices to succeed on their courses.

Leaders and managers have created a harmonious environment where staff have high expectations for behaviour and conduct. Students and apprentices behave well around the college and are respectful to each other and their teachers. Where there are behavioural issues, teachers quickly challenge these. Where students engage in intolerant behaviour towards their peers, staff take swift and appropriate action to deal with it. However, a small minority of female students feel uncomfortable about the behaviour of a few male students.

Teachers manage behaviour in classrooms and workshops very well. Most teachers command respect at the start of their lessons, they start lessons promptly and use introductory activities to engage students swiftly. Teachers ensure they develop students' skills in working more autonomously over time. As a result, students clearly understand the expectations that teachers have of them and become more independent in their learning.

Leaders effectively evaluate the quality of courses. Leaders planned activities provide scrutiny of the quality of teaching and assessment. Subsequent improvement plans are positively improving students' and apprentices' experiences and outcomes. For example, leaders rightly identify that several apprentices do not complete their apprenticeships within the planned time, and have plans to improve this.

Managers ensure that teachers benefit from effective training and development that enhances their subject knowledge. For example, mathematics teachers design lessons that promote the development of students' statistical understanding. Students complete increasingly complex topics such as measures of spread and histograms to complex probability and distributions.

Leaders do not ensure that teachers receive sufficient training about improving their use of techniques that help students to remember more what they are being taught. As a result, teachers are not continuously improving their teaching skills.

Governors have a wealth of experience in education, business and local government that they draw on to support and challenge leaders and managers to make further improvements to the quality of the provision. They have an exceptional understanding of the colleges strengths and areas for improvement. They contribute effectively to the direction of the college group and bring about improvements in practice. For example, leaders have established a 'mirror board' with membership from minority groups to scrutinise the work of leaders and to provide alternative perspectives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment practices. They complete an appropriate range of pre-employment checks on staff. However, their record keeping

requires some further development. They do not always retain copies of references or professional qualifications for their staff.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure all apprentices complete their training and achieve with the planned time.
- Make sure teachers are trained in techniques to help students remember more of what they are taught over time.
- Make sure students with high needs receive the advice they need to make more informed choices about their next steps.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130604
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Website	www.windsor-forest.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Gillian May
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	26 to 29 November 2019
Main subcontractors	Newbury College

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the group 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

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