

Inspection of West Herts College

Inspection dates: 7–14 December 2021

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

Information about this provider

West Herts College and Barnfield College merged to become the West Herts College Group on 1 February 2019. The West Herts College Group has four campuses, located in Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Luton. Learners access the college from a wide geographical area that includes West Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Luton and parts of North London.

At the time of inspection, approximately 6,000 young people were on study programmes which account for most of the funding, in addition to 450 apprentices, 2,700 adults and a small number of learners with high needs.

Leaders' subcontracting arrangements with Free to Learn Ltd and Isales Academy Ltd provide adult learning programmes and apprenticeships.

Leaders work with Luton Borough Council to help refugees integrate into their local communities. Leaders also work very closely with the Refugee Council to encourage adult learners from refugee families to access qualifications in language, literacy and communication. Further partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and the Centre for Youth and Community Development inform the curriculum.

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

Learners benefit from a positive and inclusive learning environment. Staff are welcoming and engage positively with learners in lessons and in the wider college environment. Learners know why British values are important and understand the need to be respectful and kind to others. They have a good understanding of equality, including disability and sexual orientation.

Young people benefit from high-quality resources that replicate the most up-to-date resources found in industry. Learners benefit from a vast array of specialist facilities, such as modern, well-equipped science laboratories and dance and TV studios. Learners frequently undertake meaningful work-related activities with employers, including master classes and live project briefs. Learners, for example, on level 3 aviation courses complete online modules with British Airways. These activities help learners to understand better the industries in which they want to work.

Learners who have high needs benefit from a highly effective curriculum. Learners have excellent individual support plans. The curriculum is carefully tailored to meet their individual needs and to broaden their outlook, as well as make them as independent as possible. Learners are prepared extremely well for adulthood. They develop independent living and social skills, and the skills that they need to find and remain in employment.

Apprentices swiftly gain the expert skills they need to succeed at work. Their employers value highly the work apprentices do for them. Apprentices often gain additional, relevant industry-related qualifications. Plumbing apprentices, for example, learn how to build scaffolding towers at college to increase their skills and confidence in working at height. Most apprentices develop skills that are more advanced than the requirements of the qualification they are studying.

Adult learners benefit from a highly motivating culture, which enables them to improve their future employment prospects and their day-to-day lives. Learners who have been previously disadvantaged have high aspirations about their future lives and opportunities. Learners referred by the Refugee Council quickly develop the skills necessary to adapt to life in the UK.

Learners and apprentices are safe at college, travelling to and from college and in workplaces. They learn in a college environment that has an exceptional culture of promoting inclusivity. Even the most vulnerable young people and adults successfully improve their life chances. Learners are well informed about healthy relationships and the effects sexual harassment may have on others' well-being.

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

Since the previous inspection, when West Herts College was found to be good, leaders have merged with Barnfield College in Luton. At the time of the merger, Barnfield College was graded as requires improvement; it had inadequate physical

resources for learners and significant debt. Within three years, and during the national pandemic, leaders have achieved outstanding financial health, have begun to replace the Luton estate with an ambitious state-of-the-art campus and have significantly improved the quality of education and training, which is now good.

Furthermore, leaders have improved the provision for learners who have high needs, improved adult learning programmes and transformed apprenticeships from good to outstanding. Leaders and staff have created a very supportive but aspirational culture across all campuses. Leaders ensure that learners who are vulnerable or disadvantaged access highly relevant courses that enable them to achieve their career goals. Staff work very closely with learners to ensure that they have the resources and support they need to succeed. Consequently, most learners consistently develop their skills and knowledge to a high standard.

Leaders work highly effectively with employer partners. Leaders have a sharp focus on raising the employment prospects of people within their local communities, and on serving the needs of the localities in which the college sites are based. Leaders use their partnerships to inform the curriculum and wider skills development for learners, particularly young learners on study programmes. Leaders' collaboration with, for example, Active Luton, enables young learners to gain essential work skills through on-the-job training. Learners often gain useful additional qualifications, such as coaching, lifeguarding and healthy-lifestyle training. Employers provide good-quality work experience for young people, which enhances their employment opportunities.

Leaders and managers have designed well-sequenced curriculums for most programmes. They ensure that learners develop skills cumulatively as they progress through more complex topics and concepts. Teachers cover contemporary and up-to-date content in, for example, travel and tourism. Learners explore sustainability on cruise ships and the trend for solo and specialist travel post-COVID-19. Apprentices work to commercial timings in a range of industries and develop very good customer service skills. Learners are aware of the specialist and emerging sectors within the industries they aspire to work in. As a result, learners swiftly gain the required skills and knowledge to succeed in their vocational route.

In most subjects, teachers check learners' understanding in classes very effectively. Teachers identify and quickly resolve any misconceptions that learners and apprentices may have. Teachers provide learners with useful feedback on their work so that they know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. As a result, the standard of learners' work is often better than their level of study. Learners' work in, for example, performing arts, is exceptional for their age and level. Most learners finish their programmes knowing more and being able to do significantly more than they could at the start.

Leaders have developed an exceptionally well planned and integrated personal development programme for learners. The cohesive curriculum ensures that learners receive very useful information and support related to a wide range of themes. These include understanding local risks, healthy relationships and living, preparation

for work, mental health, inclusion and diversity. Staff ensure that learners' knowledge is reinforced through the tutorial curriculum and themed events throughout the college year. As a result, learners are very well informed and knowledgeable about these topics.

Managers ensure that learners and apprentices receive highly effective personalised learning support. Learning support advisers are very experienced in supporting learners and apprentices with a wide range of learning needs, for example autism and dyslexia. They strongly encourage learners to attempt classwork themselves to develop their knowledge and independence. As a result, learners and apprentices who are supported learn how to study effectively, and achieve at least as well as their peers.

Learners' access to assistive technology during their studies is exceptionally good. They use a range of tools, such as magnifiers and simplified text, competently, which helps them learn and achieve. Learners are keen to make sure that peers who have additional needs feel included. For example, they learn simple sign language so that they can interact with hearing-impaired learners in their classes. Consequently, learners who use assistive technology to help them learn achieve their challenging learning goals.

A very high proportion of learners and apprentices move on to higher apprenticeships, further learning, employment and/or gain promotion, after completing their courses. This includes those with education, health and care plans, those who are looked after and adult learners on employability programmes. Learners have a good depth and range of knowledge about their potential future steps. Staff continually connect aspects of learning to the intended destinations of learners. This helps them to link principles, such as communication methods, to their future career goals very effectively.

Leaders and managers monitor the performance of their small, subcontracted provision exceptionally well. This ensures that subcontractors meet the high expectations set for college staff. Leaders ensure that subcontractor staff attend professional development events across the college and become good teachers and practitioners. As a result, learners who study with subcontractors experience very good quality provision.

Learners' behaviour is mostly courteous and polite, and they demonstrate a high level of respect and support for one another in lessons. Adult learners have, for example, agreed to always wear face coverings in their class as some learners identify as being vulnerable. Teachers set high expectations for learners' behaviour and participation in lessons. Learners benefit from a calm and respectful learning environment. As a result, most learners demonstrate the professional behaviours required to achieve their career goals.

Teachers, in a small minority of classes, do not tackle learners' low-level disruption effectively. Not all staff in, for example, public services or childcare, ensure that learners are attentive and ready to learn in their classes. Learners in these lessons

do not listen respectfully to each other during discussions. Not all learners are always courteous to visitors or other learners. As a result, a small minority of learners do not demonstrate the same high levels of professional behaviour as their peers.

The quality of provision in childcare, travel and tourism, public services and GCSE mathematics is not yet consistently good across the college. Leaders have not ensured that managers and teachers of the same curriculum across different sites work together effectively to plan the curriculum and share good practice. Too few learners in these subject areas can recall previous learning well enough. As a result, they often do not apply new learning to similar or related aspects of their studies fluently.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a positive culture of safeguarding for both staff and learners across all four campuses. The safeguarding team members have developed close links with relevant agencies to help them identify and respond appropriately to specific local dangers. Issues such as youth violence in Luton are well understood. Leaders and staff support individual learners extremely well to help them access college safely. This includes providing taxis to and from home and working closely with parents and carers.

Leaders ensure that arrangements for safeguarding learners at subcontracted provision are robust and meet the high expectations of the college's own policies and procedures. Leaders work very effectively with subcontracted staff to deal with any safeguarding disclosures.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that they help staff to improve the professional behaviours of the minority of learners who do not reflect the high standards demonstrated by most learners across the college.
- Leaders must ensure that managers and teachers of the minority of subjects where learning is not yet consistently good work together effectively to plan the curriculum and share good practice. This will ensure that learners are able to apply new learning to their studies fluently.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130720
Address	Watford Campus Hempstead Road Watford Hertfordshire WD17 3EZ
Contact number	01923812345
Website	www.westherts.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Gill Worgan
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Free to Learn Ltd Isales Academy Ltd Hertfordshire County Council

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal (Barnfield), 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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