

Inspection of West Herts College

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 April 2024

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

Information about this provider

The West Herts College Group consists of West Herts College and Barnfield College. The two colleges merged in 2019 with West Herts College remaining the legal entity. The Group has four campuses that are in Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Luton. At the time of the inspection, there were 5,869 learners aged 16 to 18 on study programmes. Three-quarters of these young people study at West Herts College. West Herts College has a very small A-level provision at their Hemel Hempstead campus. The college has launched T levels in education and childcare this academic year. At the time of the inspection, there were 365 apprentices, 1,490 adult learners and 146 learners with high needs.

Leaders have subcontracting arrangements in place with Hertfordshire County Council to offer Prince's Trust programmes and with Isales Academy Ltd to offer apprenticeships. Since the previous inspection, leaders have substantially reduced the amount of subcontracted provision.

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

Learners and apprentices value highly the supportive, friendly, welcoming and inclusive environment at the college. Learners feel included and valued as individuals by the staff at the college. Learners develop a thorough appreciation of equality and of celebrating differences through their time with the college. Learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) course appreciate finding out about different cultures and backgrounds. Access to health learners work positively together, supporting and encouraging each other. Apprentices studying plumbing and domestic heating know how to respect the cultures and religious backgrounds of their customers.

Learners have positive attitudes while at college. High proportions of learners take part in a wide range of additional activities at both colleges. This includes basketball, football, Pilates, cricket and fitness sessions at the gym. They attend workshops on healthy lifestyles, well-being and safety campaigns, events and projects. Most learners and apprentices attend their lessons and arrive on time. However, rates of attendance of younger learners in healthcare, business, construction and English and mathematics are too low. Where learner's attendance is too low, teachers take swift action. Leaders and managers provide learners with effective support to help them improve their rates of attendance.

Learners develop the skills they need for their future employment, such as teamwork and communication, considerably while at the college. Most learners gain valuable additional qualifications and specific skills to help them to succeed in their chosen careers. Learners on level 1 catering courses complete dementia training. They use this knowledge when running a dementia café for local people. Learners in level 3 sport gain additional qualifications in sports coaching, lifeguarding, first aid and safeguarding. A high proportion of learners on study programmes, and those learners with high needs, participate in relevant work experience. This helps to prepare learners for their next steps effectively.

Adult learners are highly motivated and have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They develop their confidence and resilience significantly because of what they learn. A high proportion of adult learners stay on their courses and complete them successfully. Most adult learners move on to the next stage of their education or work journey.

Learners with high needs make excellent progress. They produce work of a high standard. They receive excellent individualised support. These learners use the adaptive technologies, amendments to their learning materials and mobility devices that they need to be successful on their courses. Staff ensures that employers receive the training they need to support learners' specific needs when they are on external work experience. Learners respond very positively to the care and attention shown to their individual needs. Most learners on supported internships secure employment.

Apprentices quickly develop the professional behaviours needed to be successful in their roles. Plumbing and domestic heating technician apprentices develop good customer service habits. They understand the importance of being dependable and arriving on time to customer's premises. When these apprentices finish installing heating appliances at work, they know to provide information to customers about how to use the controls correctly.

Learners and apprentices understand the value of being a responsible citizen. Learners know the importance of democracy and having a voice in the upcoming general election. Learners understand how law underpins our society. Media learners at Barnfield College have produced video footage explaining why it is important for young people to vote. Adults on ESOL courses recognise the importance of being able to communicate effectively in English, demonstrating respect and tolerance.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college. Learners know how to report safeguarding concerns. They are aware of the differing risks in the local communities in which they study and work such as the risks of knife crime and gang violence. Apprentices understand the importance of health and safety at work legislation. Installation and maintenance electrician apprentices know about working safely at height. They know about the responsibility for health and safety for themselves and others such as safe isolation.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders are highly responsive to local and regional skills needs. Leaders are lead partners and contributors in a wide range of skills forums. They lead the green skills strategy for Hertfordshire and work collaboratively with other regional colleges. The college has a strong civic presence in its local towns. Leaders effectively encourage the use of college facilities by local businesses, charities and other groups for events and community projects. The college is seen as an anchor institution in its local communities.

Employers and stakeholders are continually involved in the review and design of courses. Leaders have developed an effective skill-maker scheme. This scheme encourages the involvement of employers in the design and teaching of college courses. Leaders swiftly responded to vehicle repair employers' feedback. They have introduced new modules that have enabled learners studying motor vehicle courses to develop skills in bonded panels and hybrid joining. Teachers worked with local employers to review their level 3 architecture and interior design courses. As a result, teachers introduced new 3D printing and user experience and interface technology. This technology allows the user to emotionally reflect on colour tones and colour psychology. Teachers have also introduced a peer review model to reflect common practice in the architecture industry for junior designers.

Leaders work effectively with employers and stakeholders to create and design bespoke courses that closely meet their customers' needs. Leaders have designed

catering courses for refugees. These courses have improved the employability of these adult learners. College leaders have worked effectively with local housing associations to develop courses to meet the needs for extensive retrofit work and modern methods of construction. As a result, leaders have developed specialist construction facilities in Hemel Hempstead.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders have effectively reviewed how they work with stakeholders. They have developed the way they work with employers. Leaders have moved from an opportunistic approach to one that is more strategic and targeted to meet skills shortages. Leaders work with employers who use their industry knowledge to inform the design of courses. Leaders have continued with their significant investment in the development of the Barnfield campus. The high-quality teaching resources and buildings have had a demonstrable positive impact on improving learners' education.

Leaders have developed a culture of teamwork throughout the college. Leaders have high expectations of their staff. Leaders and managers work effectively with their subcontractors to ensure that the quality of this provision remains effective. Leaders and managers are extremely skilled in managing and improving courses where the quality of education is not yet of high quality. They respond quickly and effectively to any concerns raised by staff and learners.

While most younger learners achieved their qualifications, leaders and managers identified that too few learners were passing external examinations. Leaders reviewed the quality of teaching, sequencing of the different topics and knowledge and staff experience in preparing learners for examinations. Learners now receive extra help such as study skills support groups and virtual exam rooms for learners to explore ways to prepare for examinations. Consequently, actions put in place have swiftly had a positive impact. Leaders can demonstrate in-year improvements in these areas.

Teachers are highly qualified and experienced in the subjects they teach. Teachers frequently take part in industry updates and high proportions continue to work in their industries. As a result, teachers can make learning relevant and interesting and can use a broad range of realistic examples. In sport level 3, teachers give expert demonstrations on taping and strapping a sprained ankle. Teachers demonstrate how their approach would differ if there was an Achilles tendon injury.

Teachers assess learners' and apprentices' skills and knowledge effectively at the start of their course. Teachers use this information to ensure that learners do not repeat knowledge and skills that they already know. In GCSE mathematics, teachers plan their teaching carefully to teach the areas that learners are not yet confident in such as fractions and ratios.

Most teachers use varied teaching activities that interest and stimulate learners and apprentices. Teachers use varied resources such as videos and demonstrations so that learners acquire new concepts and skills confidently. As a result, apprentices can replicate these skills accurately in their workplaces. Learners in level 3 TV and film courses work on projects with employers, such as a park project with the local council. As a result, learners experience what it is like to work in the creative sector.

Teachers give learners and apprentices effective and useful feedback on their work that helps them improve their future work. In level 1 carpentry and joinery, learners respond to feedback by adjusting timings or their selection of the correct tools. This minimises damage to timber products and avoids breakages. Consequently, most learners and apprentices produce work of a good standard. Most learners improve their written and practical work over time.

Learners and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills. Adult learners on ESOL courses significantly improve their speaking skills. Learners do not need interpreters when speaking with their GP when they are feeling ill or with Home Office officials when discussing their refugee status. Learners can apply for work and attend interviews answering questions confidently using spoken English accurately. Level 3 TV and film learners know how the atmosphere in films is created using different lighting techniques. Learners use relevant technical language such as technical and symbolic codes. Installation and maintenance electrician apprentices can run twin and earth cables to a range of sockets and test circuits for continuity. As a result, they become useful members of their work team.

Most teachers develop learners' and apprentices' English and mathematics in their teaching. Learners and apprentices develop a sound understanding of the importance of English and mathematics in their vocational context and for their future careers. Level 3 architecture and interior design learners use measurement, scale and proportion accurately when making models and using design software. In level 2 hair professional apprenticeship, apprentices learn the difference between open and closed questions when carrying out client consultations. Apprentices apply ratios appropriately when measuring out liquids for treatments and calculate angles accurately when cutting hair.

Too few younger learners achieve a grade 4 or higher in their GCSE mathematics examinations. Learners do not routinely practise applying their mathematics skills outside of their lessons. As a result, a few learners do not develop their confidence in their mathematical skills.

Most apprentices and adult learners achieve their qualifications. However, too few apprentices studying the installation and maintenance electrician standard remain on their programme and complete their training. These apprentices have moved roles to other industrial sectors or changed employers to those who could no longer support the apprenticeship. Of those installation and maintenance electrician apprentices who remain on their courses, few achieve merit or distinctions in their final assessments. More installation and maintenance electrician apprentices are now

staying and completing their apprenticeship due to the improvement actions taken by leaders and managers.

Leaders have in place a vast array of high-quality career events and resources to support learners and apprentices in extending their aspirations and knowledge of careers in their chosen sectors. As a result, learners and apprentices have a good understanding of their intended career and of the steps they need to take to achieve their goals. A high proportion of learners and apprentices move on to the next level course, higher education or into employment.

Governors and senior leaders have a good oversight of the quality of education. Governors have a breadth of skills and experience from education and business to be able to challenge and support leaders. Governors hold leaders to account very effectively. This helps improve the quality of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the proportion of installation and maintenance electrician apprentices who complete their apprenticeship and achieve merit and distinction grades in their final assessments.
- Continue to improve how teachers prepare learners for external examinations on vocational and GCSE mathematics courses.

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 or equivalent	Gill Worgan
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	7 to 14 December 2021
Main subcontractors	Hertfordshire County Council Isales Academy Ltd

Information about this inspection

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

Inspection team

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