

Inspection of NCG

Inspection dates:

18 to 22 November 2024

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	Good

Information about this provider

NCG is a very large college group that formed in 2007 following the merger of Newcastle College and West Lancashire College. The group now comprises the following colleges: Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College, Carlisle College, West Lancashire College, Kidderminster College, Southwark College and Lewisham College. Each college is led by a principal and a team of locally appointed senior college leaders. Principals are accountable to the corporation board through the NCG executive board and the college stakeholder board.

The group provides academic, vocational, professional and technical courses from entry level to degree level and apprenticeships from level 2 to 6. At the time of inspection, there were 13,059 learners on education programmes for young people, including T-level courses in childcare, health, digital, science and construction. There were 10,208 adult learners on a wide range of courses, including Skills Bootcamps in welding and rigging and 1,475 apprentices. There were 770 learners with high needs.

At the time of the inspection, leaders worked with eight subcontractors.

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

Learners and apprentices are motivated and engage enthusiastically in all aspects of their learning. They readily make positive contributions in class discussions. They work well as individuals and in teams and are keen to learn from their teachers, peers and work colleagues. Learners and apprentices develop their independence and take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

Teachers and assessors provide good information to help learners and apprentices develop a clear understanding of British values. Learners and apprentices learn about democracy through college systems such as participating in activities where they vote and have a chance to feedback to leaders their opinions. ESOL teachers support adult learners who are new to the country to develop an understanding of the features of living in the UK and their local community.

Most learners and apprentices have high attendance at college and work. Attendance at all colleges has improved from the previous year. On the few occasions when learners are late to class, they notify their teachers in advance. They are apologetic and provide lecturers with an explanation for their lateness, as they would have to in the workplace. The strong focus staff place on attendance helps to prepare learners for the world of work.

Learners and apprentices make good progress in the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They quickly improve their knowledge and develop their practical skills, which they can then apply in a range of scenarios and contexts. This means learners and apprentices are prepared well for more challenging work and develop the skills required for their chosen next steps. For example, carpentry and joinery learners at Kidderminster College develop skills in using hand tools early in their programmes. They then demonstrate more refined skills when in workshops, such as using precise measurements and tools to achieve more complex techniques. Autocare apprentices without prior experience of the industry are quickly able to service cars and change oil and brake pads to the required standard.

Learners and apprentices enjoy being part of the diverse and inclusive college communities at each of the college sites. They value studying in college environments where there are high levels of mutual respect and where learners and staff are approachable and openly support and care for each other.

Leaders and managers provide a wide range of opportunities to enrich learners' and apprentices' experience at college. They organise individual and cross-college competitions across the group. For example, science learners on programme for young people at Carlisle College take part in an annual analyst competition where they identify ingredients in a range of baked products. Learners interested in music participate in a 'battle of the bands' event where they compete across the college group.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to keep themselves and others safe at their colleges, at work and during online training. They value the security

measures in place at each of the college sites, such as the requirement to wear lanyards, access arrangements, the high security presence and the visible displays about safety that signpost further support. Apprentices feel safe at work and when attending off-the-job training. Learners know who to contact if they have concerns about their own or the safety of others. They are confident that any inappropriate behaviour will be dealt with swiftly.

Learners, apprentices and learners with high needs display professional behaviours and conform to the expected conduct and standards of their specialist areas. Learners follow safety protocols and good housekeeping in practical workshops and laboratories. Apprentices wear safety equipment and work collaboratively with each other.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers engage effectively with a wide range of stakeholders to understand local, regional and national skills. They gather intelligence from civic stakeholders, prominent employers, small to medium-sized enterprises and community organisations to understand the needs of the local areas in which they work. These stakeholders include Central London Forward, the North East Combined Authority and employers such as Oliver Wyman, Eversheds and Ernst and Young. Leaders gather valuable intelligence from employers and higher education institutions to understand future skills priorities. Leaders in Newcastle are particularly effective in working with partners to engage with hard-to-reach young people.

Leaders take good account of local and regional priorities when planning the curriculum. At Kidderminster College, for example, they work with local digital companies within the 'cyber corridor' to develop courses in a range of digital contexts that meet the skills needs of local companies, with an emphasis on cybersecurity and cloud technology.

In most curriculum areas, stakeholders are involved in the design of the curriculum. Managers organise valuable advisory boards where employers of all sizes liaise directly with the curriculum staff on the current and future skills needs of their specific industries. Employers value these meetings and the opportunity to contribute towards curriculum development. Staff in art and design, for example, use employer feedback to suggest adaptations, which contributes to a richer and more valid curriculum for learners. However, employer involvement in a small number of curriculum areas is less well developed. This means that learners in these areas do not fully benefit from the experience and up-to-date knowledge of practitioners employed in their areas of interest.

Stakeholders are frequently involved in the implementation and delivery of the curriculum. Staff and stakeholders work collaboratively to identify any gaps in their curriculum to support their local and wider area needs. Together they act to plan

and implement a curriculum that reduces these gaps and to provide appropriate curriculum content and experiences for their learners and apprentices. However, in a few areas, stakeholders' input is limited to the development of learners' additional skills such as independent learning and oracy skills.

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

Leaders and managers provide a broad curriculum at all colleges in the group that enables learners and apprentices to gain the skills and knowledge they need to progress successfully to their next steps. Leaders at all the colleges provide curriculums that meet the needs of employers, learners and the local and regional areas they serve.

Most tutors plan and sequence the curriculum logically so learners and apprentices successfully develop their knowledge, understanding and skills over time. In practical subjects, they support learners well to develop and then apply their skills to workplace projects, classroom scenarios and case studies. For example, apprentices on the level 6 digital and technology solutions professional apprenticeship at Newcastle College study a curriculum closely mapped to apprenticeship fundamentals in their first year. As they progress to year 2, apprentices gain the knowledge and skills to apply design and development to the web and coding. They then know how data is stored and are confident in programming and networking.

Most learners across all colleges achieve their qualification. However, leaders have rightly identified that the proportion of learners who complete their course is too low at West Lancashire College and for learners on A-level programmes at Newcastle Sixth Form College. Leaders have put in place actions to strengthen the information, advice and guidance offered to learners on these courses, but it is too early to see the impact on the proportion of learners who complete their course. Achievement rates on apprenticeships have improved considerably since the previous inspection. Most learners progress to positive and sustained destinations on completion of their programmes such as further study or employment.

Tutors use effective teaching strategies which enable learners and apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills. They break down complex topics and skills effectively into smaller, more manageable parts so learners and apprentices understand how to approach challenging concepts sensibly. They use modelling and demonstration to introduce new concepts and useful and frequent opportunities for recap to enable learners to deepen their understanding. For example, tutors in level 3 engineering at Newcastle College demonstrate how to set out equations accurately. They clearly explain the steps to take when calculating forces on a beam, such as ensuring that loads are uniformly distributed.

Tutors mostly use assessment well to check what learners and apprentices know and can do and to identify and rectify any misconceptions. In lessons, tutors use targeted and thoughtful questioning, which helps to test and deepen learners' and apprentices' understanding. However, in a few instances, such as on adult learning

courses at West Lancashire College, painting and decorating apprenticeships at Lewisham College and the business administration apprenticeship at Kidderminster College, the feedback that learners and apprentices receive on their written work does not help them to improve their work or to learn from their mistakes.

Most learners receive appropriate support to help them to develop their English and mathematical skills. Tutors plan opportunities for learners to practise these skills in the context of their subjects. This includes the development of their report writing, presentation and oracy skills. For example, students studying T-level digital support at Lewisham College are taught how to review published literature relating to their subject. However, business administration and autocare apprentices at Kidderminster College do not receive effective support from tutors to develop their English and mathematical skills.

Most learners with high needs in specialist provision receive good support to develop new knowledge and skills in preparation for adulthood. Staff use education, health and care plans (EHC plan) and inclusion plans well to settle learners quickly and enable them to make rapid progress from their starting points. For example, learners with high needs at West Lancashire College are supported to develop employability skills such as time management and how to use these in the workplace. Most learners on supported internships gain employment, often at their placement employer. However, learners with high needs on vocational courses are not supported consistently well due to staff not taking full account of EHC plan outcomes. Senior leaders are fully aware of the strengths and areas for development for this provision across the college group and have in place a revised policy which provides clarity of expectation. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of this.

In most cases, staff provide helpful careers information, advice and guidance that learners and apprentices use when considering their next steps. For example, electrical installation apprentices and trainers discuss a career plan, which is reviewed every six months. Cabin crew learners at Southwark College benefit from industry-led masterclasses from international airline companies to understand the prospective job roles. Staff support learners well who plan to go to university with completion of their applications and visits to prospective universities.

Most learners benefit from valuable experience of the workplace and the world of work. Where learners complete work placements, including T-level industry placements, they are meaningful and high quality and related to their subject or industry. Learners in specialist high-needs provision carry out work experience placements such as in the college coffee shops and customer-facing community centres. However, in a few vocational programmes, including engineering at Newcastle College and carpentry and joinery at Kidderminster College, too many learners do not benefit from participating in work placements. Leaders are aware of this and provide for engagement in broader work-related activities such as projects, competitions and social action projects to give learners exposure to experience of the workplace. They are actively sourcing further placement opportunities to ensure that all learners on vocational programmes have access to purposeful placements.

Teachers support learners and apprentices to complete work of at least the expected standard, and, in a few instances, learners' written and practical work is of very high quality. For example, A-level law learners at Newcastle Sixth Form College develop the skills to analyse, evaluate and use legal terminology with accuracy. On Skills Bootcamps, learners quickly understand common defects in welding and know how to use the 'nick test' to look out for these.

Leaders and managers have a good overview of the quality of the provision at all college sites and subcontracted provision. Leaders at each college have a range of appropriate quality improvement processes in place, which they use well to monitor and improve the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive.

Leaders have a thorough understanding of the progress learners and apprentices make. They carefully track performance of different groups of learners at group, college and course levels. They swiftly identify any areas that are not performing at the required standard. They challenge leaders and managers and put appropriate actions in place to address weaknesses.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have taken substantial steps to improve apprenticeship provision across the group. Apprenticeships are now of good quality and are aligned closely to local and regional priorities.

Leaders and managers have carefully selected subcontractors based on their intention to serve their local, regional and national communities. They work with sports partners to engage disadvantaged young people, specialist agencies who support homeless people and those with addictions, and a safari park to provide specialist animal care courses. This provision enables learners who would otherwise not engage in learning to participate and benefit from further education.

Governors have high levels of experience in sectors such as further education, business growth and finance. They use their breadth of experience to challenge senior leaders effectively and hold them to account for the quality of the education they offer. For example, to improve the declining apprenticeship provision in 2023, they scrutinised leaders' actions through the audit and risk committee. This contributed to an overall improvement in apprentices' achievements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Provide learners on vocational programmes with high-quality and relevant work experience on those courses where this is not yet in place.
- Identify and implement actions to increase the proportion of learners who complete their courses at West Lancashire and on A-level courses at Newcastle Sixth Form College.

- Ensure that staff take full account of EHC plan outcomes to identify the best way to support learners with high needs on vocational courses.
- Provide effective support for apprentices on all programmes to develop their use and knowledge of English and mathematics.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130552
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Contact number	0191 200 4000
Website	www.ncgrp.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Liz Bromley
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	17 to 21 January 2022
Main subcontractors	Newcastle United Foundation West Midland Safari Park Limited KHFC Ed Ltd Ken Bate Associates Limited Millwall Community Trust Newcastle Rugby Foundation Eagles Community Foundation Right2work CIC

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the executive director of quality, 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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