

Solihull College

General further education college

Inspection dates

8–11 November 2016

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good	Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Good teaching in most subjects develops learners' and apprentices' knowledge, skills and understanding well, enabling a high proportion to make good progress.
- Careers advice and guidance are effective. Learners are placed on the level of study that best suits their skills and interests, so that the vast majority complete their courses and move on successfully to further study, apprenticeships and employment.
- Learners and apprentices quickly develop a broad range of good personal, social and employability skills, as well as positive attitudes to learning, that prepare them well for their future careers.
- Staff provide thorough and effective additional learning support that helps ensure that those learners requiring extra support make good progress. Learners with high needs quickly develop the skills and confidence they need to become more independent.
- Learners and apprentices benefit from a harmonious and purposeful environment for learning, where they have access to high-quality learning resources and specialist accommodation that meets their needs well.
- Outcomes for learners have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. Achievement rates for most classroom-based learners are now high. The large majority of apprentices successfully complete their course within the planned timescale.
- Senior leaders, managers and governors have put in place numerous initiatives that have successfully improved the quality of provision.
- Leaders have ensured that the college's broad curriculum responds well, both to regional priorities set by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnership (LEP), and to the needs of employers and the local community.
- Governors make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the college. They use their skills well to provide good support and challenge to the leadership team.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Solihull College is a large general further education college situated to the south-east of Birmingham. Courses range from entry level to higher education. Approximately two thirds of learners come from Birmingham and one third from Solihull. The larger campus, where 80% of learners study, is situated close to Solihull town centre and serves areas of minor deprivation. The smaller campus is situated in north Solihull and serves areas of significant social and economic disadvantage.
- The proportion of Solihull residents qualified to level 3 and above is broadly similar to the England average but higher than for the West Midlands region overall. The proportion of pupils aged 16 in Solihull who achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is above the national average. In the north of the borough, this proportion is well below the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that planning for learning consistently and fully meets the needs of individual learners; and make sure that it provides learning of an appropriate pace and level of challenge for learners of all abilities.
- Ensure that all teachers provide precise and informative feedback to learners, which clearly explains how they can improve their work, accelerate their learning and reach their potential.
- Review and reinforce ways of improving attendance in all subject areas, particularly on GCSE and functional English and mathematics courses, so that learners improve their skills and gain qualifications in these essential subjects.
- Make better and more coordinated use of information about learners' progress and destinations when evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the relevance and suitability of courses, to assist with the continuing improvement of the provision.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have established a culture of continuous improvement. They have successfully tackled almost all the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have established a clear vision for the college, aimed at providing excellence in a curriculum especially based on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) that aligns well with local and national priorities.
- Managers have strengthened the arrangements for improving the quality of provision. These changes have led to improved teaching, learning and assessment and better outcomes for learners and apprentices. These arrangements include frequent curriculum 'health checks' and a programme of 'intensive care' for underperforming courses. They provide an effective framework for managers to challenge and support staff where quality or outcomes are poor and have led to rapid improvement.
- Senior and middle managers support their staff well to develop the expertise they need to provide a high-quality service to learners. Managers now take a more developmental approach to lesson observation and teachers are more open to the advice and support that arise from them. Managers use the strengths and areas for improvement identified through observations to plan effective individual and whole-college professional development. This has been a significant factor in improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers themselves benefit from professional development that has improved their capacity to accelerate improvements.
- Leaders and managers effectively manage the performance of individual staff to secure improvements in teaching and learning. In a small number of cases, individuals who were unwilling or unable to make the required improvements have left the organisation.
- Managers have reviewed the quality of learning programmes carefully and the resulting self-assessment report is accurate. All staff participate in a bottom-up process that includes reviews of individual courses and college departments, making use of a wide range of evidence to arrive at well-informed judgements about the quality of provision.
- Managers have developed productive arrangements with subcontractors who provide specialist apprenticeship courses, for example in construction. These arrangements ensure that subcontracted provision offers similar high standards to the courses provided directly by the college. Managers monitor closely the performance of subcontractors, suspending those who fail to meet the college's high expectations from recruiting more apprentices until improvements are fully evident.
- Learners' views of the college are highly positive, with most recommending the college to others. Managers make good use of the views of learners collected through a variety of means, such as a student voice group, learner surveys and focus groups, in order to improve their opportunities and experiences. For example, managers acting on learners' feedback made changes to the online computer booking arrangements in the 'open access areas' to meet the needs of learners more effectively.
- Leaders place significant importance on the development of learners' English and mathematical skills. They have, for example, provided extensive professional development that has helped teachers integrate these subjects into their lessons. However, this initiative has not yet led to the consistently high performance of learners across the full range of qualifications.

- Managers have used their excellent relationships with local stakeholders, including employers, local authorities, the LEP and charity groups, to develop the curriculum to meet local and national priorities. These relationships have also helped college staff to increase the number and quality of work experience placements and have facilitated a number of high-quality, work-related learning opportunities. For example, engineers from a global leader in the aerospace industry work with a group of learners using 'live' work-related projects to solve complex engineering challenges.
- Managers monitor closely the performance of different groups of learners and take effective steps to help underperforming groups of learners to do better. As a result, few differences of real significance exist in achievement between particular groups.
- Staff at the college provide good-quality, impartial careers advice. The college employs three specialist careers advisers and an increasing number of learners benefit from individual consultations. Teachers and personal tutors also contribute to the good level of advice learners receive to help them choose future careers.
- Managers ensure that staff promote a wide range of equality and diversity themes through, for example, an appropriate focus on these themes in lesson observations and scheme-of-work reviews. Similarly, they ensure that staff promote British values well, and this helps learners to become good citizens. Managers have established a clear set of complementary college values and staff integrate these well into their courses.
- Managers have ensured that staff provide effective individual support for learners who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which helps prepare them for independence. Staff deploy assistive technologies well to help these learners overcome any difficulties with learning that they face. Most teachers plan learning that is individualised and inclusive of all learners and, as a result, learners who have additional needs are enabled to participate fully and make good progress working in classes alongside their peers who do not have additional needs. They develop the same good communication, employability and independent learning skills as their peers.
- Careful financial management has ensured that managers have been able to invest in high-quality resources to support the development of all programmes, especially those in STEM subjects. The college is well placed financially to sustain the quality of its provision.
- Although middle managers and teachers are clear about their own performance and improvement targets, they do not always have a clear understanding of how their own objectives contribute to the overall strategic objectives of the college.
- Managers have implemented a wide range of measures to improve learners' attendance. Although attendance has improved slightly, these initiatives have not yet been fully successful and it remains too low.
- Increasingly, managers gather a range of information to support judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, they do not yet make use of this data in a coherent way. For example, managers' assessment of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment still focuses too much on lesson observations and not enough on the progress learners make over time.
- Although managers make much effort to obtain information about learners' destinations, they do not routinely analyse this information to inform curriculum development or to judge the quality of careers guidance.

The governance of the provider

- Governors know the college well. They have participated in reviewing and supporting the work to tackle the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection and have a good knowledge of current challenges. Managers support them effectively in their work by providing helpful and accurate information about the college's performance.
- Governors play a full and active role in shaping the future direction of the college. They participate in an annual strategic planning day and frequently review strategic matters at board meetings. They review local labour market intelligence and use their varied experience well to evaluate the extent to which this matches the college's curriculum. They listen carefully to the views and opinions of learners.
- Governors provide good support and challenge for senior leaders. They have, for example, challenged managers about the impact of the college's international strategy on the work of the college. This resulted in the college withdrawing from this work. Since the previous inspection, they have adjusted the focus of their work so that more emphasis is placed on learners' progress and less on finance and resources. They are able to speak convincingly about their impact on recent college improvements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies, including those related to the 'Prevent' duty, are detailed and clear and implemented consistently across the college. College managers have fully met their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' requirements. For example, effective mechanisms are in place for monitoring learners' internet activity and vetting visiting speakers.
- Staff follow safer recruitment procedures closely. The required pre-employment checks are completed for all staff. Appropriate risk-management practices are put in place on the rare occasions when staff commence work before the completion of checks. The single central record is complete, accurate and up to date.
- New staff benefit from appropriate safeguarding training that is reinforced at frequent intervals through team meetings. They follow clear guidance on conduct, including online communications with learners.
- Well-understood arrangements exist for reporting safeguarding concerns, including those that arise from suspected radicalisation and extremism. Safeguarding officers investigate cases thoroughly, and the safeguarding lead refers cases to other organisations as appropriate. Relationships with other agencies are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are effective in helping learners to achieve and realise their ambitions. Mostly, learning activities engage learners' interest very well. Well-paced and well-structured activities maintain their attention and stimulate learning, resulting in learners who are developing a broad range of skills.
- Teachers make good use of challenging and targeted questioning to check understanding, encourage learners to reflect on their learning and mark each other's work. As a result, learners make good progress in lessons. Learners with high needs receive good-quality

teaching that helps them to achieve realistic and relevant targets, based on a thorough understanding of their individual difficulties with learning.

- A small minority of teachers in lessons for learners on study programmes and apprenticeships do not consistently challenge the more confident learners to achieve their full potential. On adult courses, a small minority of teachers do not sufficiently support or challenge learners at the right level to achieve their learning objectives.
- Teachers are well qualified and experienced. They are passionate about their subject knowledge and use their occupational knowledge and expertise well to develop the practical and technical skills that learners need for their chosen career. Learners benefit from high-quality learning resources and accommodation that extend their learning and enable them to adopt the most current working practices in their career area. Learners in the performing arts benefit from access to specialist rehearsal spaces. In hairdressing and beauty therapy salons, treatment rooms replicate those found in industry and commerce. In STEM areas, resources are good, for example in computing and information technology, motor vehicle studies and engineering, while in aeronautical engineering they are outstanding.
- Learners benefit from a good learning experience as a result of the success of improvement initiatives implemented since the previous inspection. Managers have helped teachers to improve their practice through the observation of teaching and learning. They have identified weaknesses and provided effective support. Access to innovative teaching resources and the sharing of good practice help them to meet learners' needs and expectations more effectively.
- Through information, advice and guidance and pre-course activities, staff are helping learners make the correct choices and ensure that they are on the right programme. Staff are highly effective in helping learners with high needs make the transition from school to college and develop the skills and confidence they need to become more independent.
- The large majority of learners understand their targets and what they need to do to improve. Teachers work effectively with learners on adult courses, and those who have high needs, to review their progress and development and set learning targets. However, a small minority of teachers on study programmes, for example in construction and engineering, do not routinely provide learners with sufficient information regarding their progress, assessment results and grades achieved to date. As a result, these learners do not have a precise understanding of what they are doing well or what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers assess learners' work well and provide detailed feedback that helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses to make improvements. Learners benefit from well-planned and effective opportunities to improve their English and mathematics in most lessons. However, the quality of teachers' written feedback on learners' work does not sufficiently challenge all learners to improve further.
- Teachers use their subject and occupational knowledge well to develop the practical and technical skills that learners need within their chosen industry or career. Teachers and support staff accurately identify learners who need extra or more specialist support and swiftly put it in place to ensure that learners achieve in line with their peers.
- Learners work well together, demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and their teachers and conduct themselves responsibly. Learners and apprentices benefit from the high expectations of teachers that reinforce high industry standards and career expectations.

- The development of employability skills is good. Most learners on study programmes benefit from a wide range of work-related activities and many engage in purposeful work experience that enables them to develop the personal and social skills they need for work. Learners speak positively about the impact work experience is having on developing their confidence and technical skills. Apprentices develop very good work-related skills and confidence, and they integrate well into their respective businesses and industries.
- Teachers integrate employability topics very effectively within the main programme of study across all subject areas. The tutorial programme for full-time learners is effective in promoting employability skills such as teamwork and effective communication.
- Learners benefit from investment in high-quality learning resources, including online resources, which are supporting effective learning and skills development. Teachers use technology very effectively to promote learners' independent study. Learners use particularly well the high-quality learning materials and links to further learning and research available on the college's virtual learning environment (VLE).
- In the large majority of lessons, teachers integrate work on the understanding of fundamental British values, and equality and diversity, well into their activities. As a result, learners demonstrate in their work a good understanding of relevant issues relating to social diversity, gender, age and ethnicity. Learners work well together and demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and their teachers when discussing subjects such as poverty, homelessness and homophobia. These activities effectively promote their wider understanding of life in modern Britain.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- The significant majority of learners on college-based, community and apprenticeship courses are well motivated and are proud of their work and of their achievements. They are polite, well mannered and respectful to their teachers and other learners. They demonstrate good levels of mutual support during teamworking and practical exercises.
- Teachers reinforce well to learners the importance of developing the skills and standards required by employers and those needed for progression. In practical sessions, learners produce work of a good quality which closely meets the needs of employers. For example, in a carpentry class, learners completed complex joinery exercises which enabled them to develop their hand skills and solve problems. Employers are especially positive about the standard of apprentices' work, and most apprentices go on to become valued employees.
- Across the college, learners have a good understanding of the need to demonstrate professional standards in all parts of their learning programme. For example, in health and social care, hairdressing and beauty therapy and public service courses, learners wear their uniforms with pride and present themselves well, reflecting the standards expected in the workplace.
- Staff promote and monitor health and safety well across the college. In practical classes, learners are routinely involved in conducting risk assessments, wear appropriate personal protective equipment and follow workshop safety guidelines. Learners feel safe, have a good understanding of personal safety, including digital and online safety, and know how to report any concerns that they may have.
- Most learners value their education and respond well to the positive learning environment and high expectations set by teachers. Learners who travel a considerable distance to attend the college receive support to help them with their travel where needed. All

learners are offered a breakfast before their daily studies commence.

- Staff successfully ensure that learners with high needs, such as learning difficulties and/or disabilities, integrate well into the life of the college with those following higher-level courses in a mutually supportive environment. Learners and staff display very respectful, inclusive and tolerant attitudes in all lessons and public areas.
- Learners quickly develop a good awareness and understanding of safeguarding, equality and diversity, 'Prevent' and fundamental British values through regular tutorials, online learning and in-class learning activities. Learners talk confidently about these subjects, value the opinion of others and, where relevant, challenge inappropriate behaviour and attitudes. As a result, learners enjoy a positive and inclusive learning experience.
- Managers ensure that careful attention is given to providing impartial careers advice and guidance before learners join the college. Effective measures such as 'tasters' and 'carousel activities' during the first few weeks of the autumn term ensure that learners have sufficient information to decide which course and optional units to study. Learners receive timely career progression advice from their teachers, and benefit from visits to local businesses and talks from guest speakers from industry and higher education. These activities inspire learners when they plan their future careers and employment opportunities.
- Most learners benefit from an opportunity to participate in good-quality external work experience. Learners value this opportunity and the more confident learners arrange their own placement. Learners not yet ready to progress into external work experience have good opportunities to develop their work-related skills and confidence within vocational settings in the college, such as in animal management and health and social care.
- Many employers, particularly those employing apprentices, are fully involved in planning learning in the workplace and contribute well to assessments and the regular monitoring of learners' progress. The best employers provide comprehensive feedback. However, a small minority of learners do not benefit from the same high level of workplace learning and feedback.
- On most vocational courses, learners' attendance meets the college target. However, attendance is too low in some subjects, such as mathematics, and for some learner groups, such as adults. Most classes start on time and the large majority of learners are punctual. However, in some subjects, such as visual and performing arts and computing, teachers do not challenge lateness to the same extent as those in areas where attendance is better.
- For learners on study programmes, a well-designed logbook is used to record workplace learning and employers' feedback. However, teachers do not always fully celebrate the new learning and development gained by learners from their work experience. They do not always record these achievements in reviews of learners' progress targets and action plans.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The large majority of learners achieve well. Since the previous inspection, when the college was judged to require improvement, achievement rates on classroom-based provision have improved and are now above the performance of other similar providers. This is particularly the case for those aged 16 to 19 on study programmes, who make up

about three quarters of the college's classroom-based provision.

- The large majority of learners aged 16 to 19 who complete level 1, 2 and 3 study programmes successfully achieve their main qualification. Achievement rates on vocational courses are particularly high in health, public services and care, engineering and manufacturing technologies and information and communications technology.
- Compared to their prior attainment, most learners aged 16 to 19 on advanced level courses achieve well. Learners undertaking extended diplomas in animal management, applied science, textiles, business, information technology and business and information technology (networking) make good progress and exceed expectations. Similarly, learners studying shorter, advanced-level credit awards achieve well, particularly in applied science, photography, engineering, health and social care and information technology. A small minority of the most able learners perform less well on advanced-level subsidiary diploma courses in health and social care, business, sports and public services. The few learners undertaking credit awards in sport and exercise science, photography and fine art do not make the progress expected of them. At other levels of study, learners mostly make at least the expected progress and develop good vocational skills.
- The proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who achieve GCSE English at grades A* to C is high, but GCSE performance in mathematics declined sharply in 2015/16 to around the very low national rate for these grades. At entry level, outcomes in English functional skills have improved over time to around the national rate, and in mathematics they are high. In contrast, the proportion of learners who successfully achieved their level 1 and 2 functional skills in both English and mathematics has declined and is now low.
- Teachers are particularly good at meeting the needs and improving the skills of learners who have complex or severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, as a result, they make good progress in developing greater independence.
- Achievement rates for adult learners, who comprise around a quarter of the total number of students attending classroom-based courses, declined in 2015/16. Performance for these learners was around the national rate at levels 1 and 3 but low at level 2 when compared with results in other similar providers. Current in-year data indicates that the large majority of adult learners now make at least the progress expected of them in acquiring good levels of skills, and in some cases exceed it.
- Adult learners develop good English and mathematical skills alongside their main studies, and functional skills achievement rates are high at all levels. However, few of the small number of adult learners studying English and mathematics at GCSE achieved A* to C grades.
- The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeship course, and do so within the planned timescale, has rapidly increased. Apprenticeship outcomes are high on both intermediate and advanced-level courses. Similarly, successful outcomes for apprentices delivered by subcontractors are very high. Younger apprentices are more successful compared to their older counterparts, but both groups perform well above average. However, success rates for the few learners undertaking higher-level apprenticeships are low.
- Differences in achievement between various groups of learners are relatively small. On study programmes and apprenticeships, no significant differences exist in the performance of different groups of learners or apprentices. Male and female learners across all provision types achieve at a broadly similar rate and learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed at least as well as their peers. Learners aged 16 to

19 who receive additional learning support, the small cohort of learners who were 'looked after' and those who were in receipt of free school meals all achieve well.

- Adult learners who state their heritage as White/Black Caribbean, Caribbean, Pakistani and African achieve less well when compared to other adult learners. Leaders have put in place a series of actions with additional resources to rectify this issue, but it is too early to judge its impact.
- Learners develop good vocational and employability skills which prepare them well for their future careers. Their progression to further study, employment or promotion at work is good. The very large majority of learners aged 16 to 19 and adult learners successfully move on to suitable employment, further study at the college or higher education. Virtually all apprentices secure employment upon graduation.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- At the time of the inspection, 3,267 learners were on study programmes, with the largest subjects being health and care, engineering, information and communications technology and arts, media and publishing. Study programmes equate to around three quarters of the college's classroom-based provision.
- Learners receive high-quality initial advice and guidance before starting their courses. Specialist subject staff ensure that they enrol on the right course to meet their career needs and aspirations. The large majority of learners make good progress from their initial starting points and successfully progress onto higher levels of learning, employment and apprenticeships, or secure a place at university.
- Staff initially assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills thoroughly, and put in place effective support arrangements for those learners who need extra help. A few teachers do not use information from initial assessments well enough when developing individual learning plans for learners.
- Teachers set high expectations for learners to meet professional and industry standards. As a result, learners develop good social, employability and independent learning skills and benefit from other internal and external experiences to support this development. For example, most learners benefit from effective work experience, take part in a number of cross-college enterprise events and participate in a range of volunteering activities. They become self-confident and develop a range of skills essential for employment, such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving. However, a small minority of learners have not yet secured planned work experience.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject. Their use of detailed and well-staged demonstrations, helpful explanations of important points and linkage of theory and practice inspire learners to learn and improve their knowledge and skills. Lessons are generally well structured and the pace of learning is brisk, resulting in the large majority of learners making good progress.
- Teachers provide highly focused and productive verbal feedback in lessons. Written feedback from teachers refers to assessment criteria and mostly explains clearly to learners the theory and practical understanding they must apply to improve their work. Most learners' work is marked appropriately, with errors in grammar and spelling identified in a helpful and constructive way. However, a small minority of teachers do not

provide in their written feedback sufficient developmental guidance on what learners need to do further.

- The large majority of teachers set appropriate individualised targets and provide good support for learners, helping them to make good progress as they work independently towards their goals. For example, learners in construction, sports science and horticulture are provided with good support by teachers. As a result, they remain on-task and fully participate in all learning activities. However, a small minority of teachers do not consistently set work that is sufficiently demanding for all and a small number of assignments lack sufficient critical and conceptual challenge. As a result, the most able learners do not develop a deeper understanding quickly enough or make the progress they are capable of.
- The use of technology to support learning and assessment is good. The majority of teachers use the college's internet-based VLE well as a teaching resource. Resources on the VLE promote further learning well. Learners in most vocational areas use it routinely to consolidate their learning in class, catch up on any missed work, revise for assessments and submit assignments. In vocational areas, specialist resources and accommodation in animal care, construction and media often match standards found in industry, allowing learners to practise and hone their occupational skills well. The large majority of learners make good progress in their studies and their standard of work is high.
- Learners feel safe and are able to demonstrate safe working practices in a wide range of settings, including while out on placement. They are confident in expressing their views and opinions, showing a good awareness of their own and others' rights and responsibilities. As a result, learners' attitude and behaviour towards learning are good. They quickly develop a professional 'mindset', meeting industry expectations. For example, in provision for leisure and tourism, public services and cabin crew, learners dress in appropriate workwear, replicating the standards expected in the workplace.
- Teachers help learners to develop their use of English in lessons by reading out loud, helping learners to practise writing well-structured sentences and encouraging them to recognise and self-correct mistakes in their written work. For example, in travel and tourism, learners frequently update a list of new, sector-related vocabulary, while learners in art, media and design, engineering, construction and information technology confidently use technical language acquired from practical workshops and exercises to develop their ideas further. However, teachers do not consistently develop learners' skills in mathematics to the same extent. Where this is the case in discrete lessons in mathematics, teachers pay insufficient attention to learners' existing numeracy skills and, as a result, learners do not make rapid enough progress.
- Attendance and punctuality are in line with college targets for many lessons, although attendance is too low in a minority of areas, including GCSE English, health and social care, sport science and veterinary nursing.

Adult learning programmes

Good

- Adult programmes account for around a quarter of the college's classroom-based provision. Some 548 adults are on part-time courses, mostly at level 2, including pre-access to higher education, vocational qualifications, functional skills and GCSE English and mathematics qualifications. A further 565 adult learners study on full-time courses,

predominantly at level 3, including access to higher education and vocational qualifications.

- Learners benefit from access to a wide range of courses that meet local priorities and enable them to develop essential skills and knowledge, gain basic qualifications, progress to higher-level qualifications and gain employment. For example, the Fircroft Horticulture Project is highly effective in the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, giving them the opportunity to gain new skills and develop self-confidence and independence.
- Teachers have appropriately high expectations of learners. They plan learning well, taking into account learners' starting points and individual needs. Teachers use well-designed high-quality paper-based and electronic resources to support learning well, and use their knowledge and experience to promote professional practice. Specialist resources, for example in carpentry, beauty therapy and graphic design, are of industry standard, enabling learners to develop a good standard of vocational skills and to produce high-quality work.
- Lessons are interesting and challenging and capture learners' attention. Learners are eager to learn and contribute to lesson activities with enthusiasm. They take pride in their work, cooperate well with their peers and are respectful. Teachers skilfully use learners' experiences as a starting point for discussions and, as a result, most learners make good progress. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not focus sufficiently on the less able or quieter learners, or provide sufficiently challenging tasks to promote rapid progress.
- Teachers assess learning very well through a range of methods, including questioning, online quizzes and homework tasks. Learners know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve because of the detailed and supportive feedback that teachers provide on learners' classroom and written work.
- Well-organised support for learners from tutors and learning support assistants is effective in developing learners' progress and independence.
- Good information, advice and guidance and thorough initial assessment ensure that learners are placed on the right courses at the right level. For instance, access to higher education learners are required to complete a preparation for learning module before the course starts. This prepares them well for the demands of academic studies. Where learners do not meet course requirements, alternatives are offered so that they have a good chance of success on a course that best meets their needs and starting points.
- Managers organise and structure the course offers well to enable learners to progress. Pre-access and access courses allow learners to improve their chances of entering higher education or enhance their career prospects. A high proportion of learners progress internally from level 1 to 2, and from level 3 to higher education and employment.
- Managers increasingly focus on developing and improving learners' English and mathematical skills. They provide classes at a variety of levels, including GCSE, at many accessible local venues, as well as the two main college sites.
- Much of the adult provision in functional skills and vocational qualifications leads to good outcomes for learners, which improve their prospects. However, outcomes for learners taking GCSEs in English and mathematics are weaker. College managers have implemented a strategy for improving provision. In the current year, English and mathematics sessions are mostly effective in developing learners' skills.
- Teachers and tutors use individual learning plans well in lessons and tutorials to record progress. Learners, together with their tutors, agree short-term learning targets to support their progress. In most cases, these targets are effective in supporting long-term

goals. However, in a significant minority of cases, targets are not detailed or specific enough to ensure that learners make rapid progress.

- Adult learners develop the good social, personal and employability skills that they need to become increasingly independent. Learners studying on functional skills and English for speakers of other languages courses quickly develop their confidence and self-esteem as they improve their speaking, listening and written English skills. Learners on pre-access and access courses, many of whom are returning to education after a long break, develop a good level of study skills. On vocational and community courses, learners develop the practical skills that are relevant to their future careers and aspirations.
- Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding. They follow safe practice in studios, workshops and salons, have a good grasp of issues around bullying, harassment, radicalisation and extremism and know how to report concerns. Learners engage in thoughtful and mature discussions around the right to vote, the rule of law, gender equality and respect for others.
- Managers are improving learners' attendance. Where appropriate, they support learners by providing them with access to online resources and targeted support. However, too much variation exists in the levels of attendance between individual sessions and courses.

Apprenticeships

Good

- The college provides apprenticeships for a wide range of business sectors, including retail, business administration, health and social care, engineering and manufacturing, construction, leisure, travel and tourism, information and communications technology, horticulture, animal care and education and training. Currently, 1,113 apprentices are in training, of whom 92 are trained by subcontractors in partnership with the college.
- Most apprentices make good or better progress and are on target to complete their qualifications on time. Apprentices develop very good work-related personal and social skills. They all develop self-confidence and self-reliance and integrate well into their respective businesses and industries very quickly. Apprentices make valued contributions to the employers' businesses. For example, information and communications technology apprentices undertake complex software upgrading projects for large engineering companies. Employers move apprentices onto more complex work as soon as they are ready and speak highly of the contribution apprentices make to their businesses.
- Teachers and assessors provide good verbal and written feedback to apprentices, with clear guidance on how they can improve. Teachers and assessors use skilful questioning techniques to ensure that their understanding is clear before moving onto the next step or topic. As a result, apprentices are routinely challenged to extend their knowledge and skills further. However, in a few cases, teachers are not providing sufficiently demanding work for the most able apprentices. As a result, they do not make the full progress they are capable of.
- Teachers, assessors and workplace supervisors are enthusiastic, experienced practitioners with good occupational knowledge that they use well when teaching and coaching apprentices. For example, teachers and assessors make sure apprentices in veterinary nursing and health and social care use the correct scientific terminology for anatomy; this enables them to have accurate and purposeful discussions with other veterinary or health care professionals.
- Teachers and assessors use an effective range of learning and assessment activities,

including discussions, video clips, workplace scenarios and presentations, to capture apprentices' interest and increase motivation. Assessors direct apprentices towards interactive learning materials on the college intranet that extend knowledge and check understanding.

- Teachers and assessors plan learning and assessment activities well to meet the differing needs of apprentices, based on their previous experience and knowledge. Assessors work closely with employers and supervisors when planning visits to set up assessment opportunities and devising coaching plans for the workplace. For example, teachers provide twilight training sessions in English and mathematics functional skills to accommodate the shift patterns of warehousing apprentices. In retail, hairdressing and barbering, assessment visits to see apprentices in the workplace are brought forward to November to avoid clashing with the busy Christmas trading period.
- Workplace supervisors take a full role in appraising apprentices' performance and setting and measuring targets for skills development. However, in horticulture, targets for seasonal training and related assessment tasks are frequently missed, thus slowing the progress of this group of apprentices.
- The majority of apprentices are developing their mathematics skills well. They are able to apply these skills well in the workplace, and frequently practise them on a daily basis in calculating profit and loss, administering medicines, analysing information and interpreting plans and data.
- Apprentices are confident and articulate. Teachers and assessors develop apprentices' speaking and listening skills well, particularly in service sectors that demand high levels of customer care. The standard of learners' written work is good in business administration. However, this is not consistent across all sectors. Apprentices do not have enough opportunity to practise their technical writing skills in the workplace beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship.
- Apprentices gain a wide range of very good workplace skills that employers value. For example, apprentices develop excellent customer service skills, particularly when working in teams. Consequently, almost all remain in employment on completing their training. Progression opportunities beyond the apprenticeships are good, with high numbers benefiting from pay rises, additional responsibility or promotion. A significant and growing number of advanced apprentices progress to higher education, particularly in engineering and health and social care.
- Assessors use their highly effective partnerships with employers to ensure that they meet the training needs of apprentices. They work closely with employers to provide very beneficial personal and pastoral support to apprentices.

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

- A total of 48 learners currently receive high-needs funding from two local authorities. Over a third of these learners are enrolled on discrete learning development courses, including employability and personal development, and the remainder are taking a wide range of vocational courses.
- Managers use the funding for learners with high needs appropriately and arrangements to help learners make the transition from their previous provision are effective. External agencies, healthcare professionals and parents and carers contribute to the design of personalised programmes for learners who have a range of special educational needs,

including autism spectrum disorder, Down's syndrome and cerebral palsy.

- Learners with high needs benefit from well-coordinated support. The use of specialist support staff and a range of assistive technologies and adapted resources enable these learners to increase their independence and overcome problems which might inhibit learning. For example, visually impaired learners use non-visual desktop access software to enable them to work more independently on personal computers. Makaton language software is used to enhance communication and develop spoken language skills. Staff are able to reduce support as learners become more independent over time.
- Learners with high needs are provided with regular opportunities to develop their independence and improve their communication skills. They work both independently and collaboratively on a range of challenging and purposeful activities. This work develops and enhances the skills they require for independence and to participate successfully in wider activities within the college. For example, a learner with high needs in media studies delivered an electronic presentation to the class about the video that he had produced using specialist editing software. Learners who have autism spectrum disorder have formed a social development group to help improve their communication skills.
- High-needs courses are well planned and meet learners' individual learning and support needs well. The large majority of teachers use assessment information effectively to plan learning that develops individual learners' knowledge and skills for employment and for independent living, including English and mathematical skills. For example, more able learners are able to explain the importance of displaying positive body language during job interviews. Learners in a life and living skills lesson confidently followed written and verbal instructions on how to prepare and cook their lunches using a range of kitchen appliances.
- In a small minority of cases where learners with high needs are enrolled in non-specialist provision such as study programmes, teachers do not always use the information from individual support plans effectively to ensure that learning meets the requirements of all learners with high needs.
- Risk assessments for learners with high needs are detailed and appropriate. Learners feel safe and follow workshop safety guidelines by wearing the correct personal protective equipment. They follow the safety instructions, such as adhering to biosecurity measures to minimise possible infection when working with small animals in the college's animal care unit.
- In discrete provision, learners with high needs negotiate clear and purposeful targets which are meaningful to them as individuals. They understand what they have to do to improve. For example, many learners in discrete provision achieve personal targets around developing their communication skills. However, targets for learners with high needs on study programmes do not always provide them with sufficient information on what they need to do to improve. As a result, a few do not make the progress expected of them.
- Teachers' assessment of learning is mostly effective. Teachers use relevant strategies to check individual understanding and gauge progress against learning objectives. They use directed questioning well to assess individual understanding. The large majority of learners with high needs are provided with verbal and written feedback on what they need to do to improve their work. A small minority of teachers do not always use appropriate methods to ensure that learners with high needs fully understand key aspects of learning.

- Attendance for learners with high needs is high and they demonstrate a positive attitude to learning. They arrive on time for lessons, are well prepared and demonstrate very good behaviour and conduct. All learners with high needs have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures and know who they should contact if they have any concerns.
- The very large majority of learners with high needs make good progress, and many move on to a higher level of study after their courses. Most learners undertake relevant work experience in real work environments and in college. For example, a learner in health and care gained a placement at a local nursery and a learner in photography undertook a placement at a local art gallery. However, the proportion of learners who progress to employment is too low. Managers are currently working with the local authority and a number of partners and local employers to develop a range of supported internships.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130481
Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	5,258
Principal/CEO	John Callaghan
Telephone number	0121 678 7000
Website	www.solihull.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	486	217	886	328	1,895	538	–	27
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	246	360	246	242	2	17		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	48							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The England Golf Union ■ Creative Alliance ■ The Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals ■ The Colebridge Trust Limited ■ Auctus Management Group Limited ■ McDermott Building & Civil Engineering Limited 							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, teaching, learning and assessment, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Victor Reid, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Russ Henry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tracey Mace-Akroyd	Her Majesty's Inspector
Neil Clark	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Cadman-Marks	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Thompson	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Tucker	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
David Sykes	Ofsted Inspector
Clive Blanchette	Ofsted Inspector
Sylvia Farrier	Ofsted Inspector
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