

Inspection of Sandwell College

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 October 2022

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

Information about this provider

Sandwell College merged with Cadbury Sixth Form College in November 2018 and is the largest provider of education programmes for young people in the West Midlands. It comprises three campuses: Central Campus, which focuses on vocational courses in Sandwell; Central St. Michael's, the A-level centre for Sandwell; and Cadbury College, providing A-level and vocational courses in Kings Norton.

The college provides courses in a broad range of subjects from entry level through to level 3. More than three-quarters of learners are aged 16 to 19 and study classroom-based courses. Around a sixth of learners are adults who study classroom-based courses. The college also provides apprenticeships in several subjects, with the largest number of apprentices studying to be dental nurses, business administrators, healthcare support workers and teaching assistants. Apprenticeships account for around 1% of college funding.

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

The vast majority of learners and apprentices enjoy their experiences at Sandwell College. They are well motivated and want to do well in their studies. They are proud to be part of the college community. They recognise the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff around them, and this encourages them to work hard. They benefit from a calm and supportive environment, which enables them to focus and make progress in their learning.

Most learners are very satisfied with the education and training that they receive. Their teachers are knowledgeable and experienced and present information clearly. However, a relatively small number of apprentices do not receive the same quality of training as college learners. Staff often do not plan apprenticeship courses well enough and do not provide apprentices with enough tuition.

Learners develop their skills and knowledge well. Consequently, most move on to higher-level studies or into employment at the end of their courses. Those who take level 3 courses develop their study skills well in preparation for university. Apprentices improve their skills and knowledge and remain in employment at the end of their courses.

Most learners benefit from course content that reflects current industry practices. This is because leaders and managers have established many good links with employers whom they work with to decide what they should include in the curriculum. In addition, these links provide good opportunities for students to participate in work placements. However, staff do not always work closely enough with apprentices' employers to select topics that are most relevant to apprentices' jobs or to coordinate on- and off-the-job training.

Most learners develop their confidence during their studies. Group work and presentations help them to be more assured when working and communicating with others. Mock interviews enable them to be better prepared when applying for jobs or university places. College staff also provide a wide range of activities that learners participate in to learn more about themselves and the world around them.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at the college and when at work. They receive training in how to recognise risks to themselves and others. They know to whom they should report concerns to and have confidence that any matters they raise will be taken seriously, dealt with promptly and resolved satisfactorily.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work with a wide range of stakeholders to gain a good understanding of current and future skills needs and changes in employment patterns for the local area and the region. They make effective use of this information to plan the courses that they offer. College leaders work with partners to

respond to local strategic growth opportunities. For example, they are working in partnership with Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, Aston University, the University of Wolverhampton and Sandwell Council to develop the Midland Metropolitan Learning Campus that will create opportunities for local people to undertake healthcare training from entry level through to level 7. Leaders participate in several business networking groups that help them to build links with local employers of all sizes.

Most curriculum managers make effective use of advice provided by employer representative boards to plan the content and structure of courses. This helps to ensure that learners study the specific skills and knowledge needed in the local area.

Leaders and managers have developed an English curriculum that meets the needs of the local community well. It provides adult learners, the majority of whom are not native English speakers, with the speaking, reading and writing skills that they need to gain employment or study other subjects. Most of these learners move on to vocational courses or jobs.

Leaders do not do enough to monitor the progress of learners after they leave the college. As a result, it is difficult for them to know the extent of the impact their courses have on the local and regional economy. Although they receive informal feedback through networking groups, this is not systematic.

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

Most staff develop well-planned courses that have a clear purpose and appropriate content. In addition to teaching subject-specific topics, teachers help learners to develop a broader range of skills and knowledge that helps them to prepare for higher-level study or employment.

Most teachers present topics in an order that helps learners progressively build their skills and understanding. For example, A-level English literature students learn about power relationships in society and the family before studying the struggle for power between King Lear and his daughters.

Most teachers have high ambitions for their learners, including those with high needs, and provide them with a suitable level of challenge. Staff identify any additional needs that learners have and provide documentation that teachers use to plan extra help for them where necessary. However, a few teachers do not have high enough expectations of what learners can achieve and as a result, learners who could progress more rapidly do not have opportunities to do so. For example, teachers of English for speakers of other languages do not always make the best use of information about learners' starting points to ensure that activities are challenging enough.

Teachers have good, up-to-date subject knowledge that they use to plan interesting lessons and coaching sessions. They provide clear explanations and use good

examples to illustrate key learning points. They relate themes to previous learning, and this helps learners to understand the current topic and build their comprehension of the subject.

Most teachers make frequent and effective use of a range of assessment methods to check that learners understand topics. Throughout courses, they use quizzes, written exercises, practical tasks and self-reflection to help learners to remember what they have studied. Most teachers mark work promptly and provide clear and specific feedback that helps learners to recognise their mistakes and to see how they can improve their work. However, a small number of teachers do not use assessment well enough, mark work too slowly or provide imprecise feedback that does little to help learners to improve. For example, level 2 automotive learners complete a task once before moving on to new material and do not have frequent opportunities to revisit what they have previously studied.

Staff do not plan apprenticeship programmes well enough. Too often, they do not clearly define what apprentices should learn or the standard of performance they should attain. They often do not provide enough well-planned, clear and explicit teaching. As a result, some apprentices do not make the progress that they might.

A high proportion of learners and apprentices achieve their qualifications. Most learners and apprentices produce work of at least the expected standard and many produce work that exceeds expectations. Learners improve the standard of their work throughout their time at college and later work often shows substantial gains in their subject knowledge and the ability to express it clearly.

Staff prepare learners and apprentices well for their next steps. The vast majority of learners go on to study at a higher level, including at university, and almost all apprentices remain in employment at the end of their apprenticeship.

Leaders invest heavily in supporting learners to attend. They have appointed programme achievement managers, student support officers, mentors and attendance officers whose purpose is to help learners with their welfare and attendance. Staff carry out announced and unannounced home visits to discuss with learners and their parents how they can help with attendance. Learners understand the importance of attendance, which is good overall.

Staff set clear expectations for behaviour. They prioritise early intervention and support when learners' conduct falls below the expected standard, and they invoke suitable disciplinary processes when necessary. Overall, the conduct of learners and apprentices is exemplary.

A large number of learners engage in additional activities within college. They work as student ambassadors, mental health champions and student representatives. Many participate in activities with the local community. For example, sports students work with the local football club to support community outreach activities.

There is a positive and respectful culture across the college in which diversity is

celebrated in a series of scheduled events and activities, as well as through the tutorial programme. As a result, learners feel supported and included.

Leaders and managers develop activities, support and training materials on topics such as respect, communication and online safety, and teachers successfully integrate these into their lessons and tutorials.

Managers provide a good range of services that helps learners with their mental and physical health. These include internal college services, such as mental health first aid, as well as links with external agencies such as one that provides round-the-clock access to professional support. A substantial number of learners make use of these services and managers monitor take up closely. Where concerns arise, such as a recent increase in self-harming behaviour, managers provide tutorial materials and training for staff to help tackle the problem.

The tutorial curriculum introduces learners and apprentices to a range of topics that are relevant to their daily lives. Managers arrange staff training and guest speakers who offer deeper insight into these themes. Topics include knife crime, sexual harassment, eating disorders, drug abuse, county lines, sexual health and a range of themes related to equality and diversity. Events are well attended, and learners can explain what these topics mean to them.

Staff support a significant and growing number of student clubs and societies which help encourage learners to expand their interests. Managers provide financial support for these clubs, which include sports, board games, debating, gender-specific groups and medical societies. Students lead these groups, and attendance is high.

Learners benefit from high-quality careers guidance which helps them to make well-informed decisions on their next steps. Many learners take part in useful activities, including trade shows, competitions, taster days, university open days, industry days and professional or inspirational speakers. They receive ongoing help and advice which culminates in assistance with university applications, job interviews and signposting to further support.

Leaders and managers have high ambitions and expectations for all of their learners and apprentices. They rightly focus on those who have previously had difficulty engaging in education. Leaders ensure their ambition is communicated well to staff and learners. These learners and apprentices develop a renewed engagement with their learning. Nearly all learners and apprentices are positive about their futures.

Leaders and managers have successfully overseen the merger with Cadbury Sixth Form College. They have invested in infrastructure and technology and expanded the range of courses available. Staff's morale is high as a result.

Leaders and managers make suitable arrangements for quality assurance. They are aware of where they need to make improvements. They understand the weaknesses in apprenticeships, although they have yet to secure the necessary improvements.

Leaders and managers carefully plan professional development for staff. As a result, teachers' subject expertise and teaching knowledge develop well over time. Leaders and managers train new and unqualified teachers effectively. Leaders work well to improve the skills of managers. For example, they have implemented an effective middle-management training programme that allows staff to develop their skills in preparation for promotion to more senior roles within the organisation.

Governors are very knowledgeable and experienced. Leaders and managers work well with the board to ensure that governors receive clear and appropriate information about the college's performance. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses and provide leaders and managers with robust challenge.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead is suitably qualified and experienced. They are ably supported by well-trained deputies. They take appropriate actions to deal with safeguarding concerns and carefully record outcomes. Leaders and managers employ additional staff to increase learner safety, such as town ambassadors who monitor learner behaviour and safety outside of the college. Managers check the backgrounds of new staff thoroughly. New staff undertake safeguarding training, and managers provide ongoing updates on topics such as mental ill health, health and safety and radicalisation and extremism. Managers have developed strong relationships with relevant local organisations, such as the police, that they use to provide additional support where required.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that all apprenticeship programmes include a clearly defined curriculum, appropriate structure and enough well-planned tuition to enable all apprentices to develop a suitable range of skills and knowledge to the required level.
- Managers should review the small number of courses in which the curriculum is not ambitious enough so that course content and teaching are challenging for all learners.
- Managers should ensure that all courses provide enough opportunities for learners to revisit topics they have previously studied so that they can practise their skills and strengthen their recall of information.
- Managers should ensure that all learners' work is marked promptly. They should ensure that all staff understand and apply the principles of effective feedback.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130479
Address	1 Spon Lane West Bromwich West Midlands B70 6AW
Contact number	01216675000
Website	www.sandwell.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Graham Pennington
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and previous inspection and monitoring visit reports. 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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