

# Inspection of Waltham Forest College

Inspection dates:

12 to 15 March 2024

## Overall effectiveness

## Outstanding

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| The quality of education                     | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Behaviour and attitudes                      | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Personal development                         | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Leadership and management                    | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Education programmes for young people        | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Adult learning programmes                    | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Apprenticeships                              | <b>Good</b>        |
| Provision for learners with high needs       | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good               |

## Information about this provider

Waltham Forest College is a medium-sized, general further education college in Walthamstow, east London. The college has a single campus and most of the teaching and training takes place there. Some courses are taught at employers' sites or at one the college's six subcontractors in and around London.

Learners and apprentices can study from a broad range of subjects. At the time of the inspection, the college had 6,247 learners. There were 2,189 learners aged 16 to 18 on full-time study programmes, of whom 44 were studying T levels in healthcare, digital and construction skills. There were 4,014 adult learners on full-time vocational courses, or part-time provision during the day or in the evening. The college had 40 apprentices. There were 225 learners in receipt of high needs funding. Of these, 94 learners were within the discrete provision.

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

Learners and apprentices flourish in an environment where they experience excellent teaching and training. Learners and apprentices, including those with high needs, demonstrate a great sense of responsibility for their studies. They are highly motivated, ambitious and work hard to reach their goals. Most learners achieve well and go on to higher-level qualifications or gain employment in high-demand sectors.

In lessons and around the college, young learners' behaviour is exemplary. Learners live up to the high standards of behaviour and conduct set by staff. They are extremely committed to their courses. They arrive well-prepared and participate enthusiastically in lessons. Through their participation in the excellent tutorial programme, they develop incredibly well as thoughtful young adults who make a positive contribution at college and are very ready to take their next steps.

Adult learners are prepared exceptionally well for their next steps. Leaders provide a wide range of highly beneficial additional qualifications to teach learners new knowledge, skills and behaviours to help with their day-to-day lives. For example, learners studying English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) complete a short course to develop their understanding of citizenship and employability. Spectator safety learners take courses to learn how to manage their money. Consequently, learners are equipped very well to integrate into their communities, find employment and manage their finances.

Learners with high needs have life-changing experiences at the college. They are taught exceptionally well by lecturers who are highly qualified and experienced SEND professionals. Staff consistently encourage learners to try new things and provide highly effective support to them to take part in challenging activities. They work very effectively with learners to develop their confidence. For example, learners who lack the confidence to enter the classroom at the start of the year progress to reading aloud at the front of the class, or welcoming customers into the college restaurant. Others, on supported internships, confidently deal with patient enquires when they work on the hospital reception desks.

Apprentices are supported effectively by lecturers who are experts in their field. Lecturers use their industry knowledge well to enrich apprentices' learning experience. They promote the commercial standards specific to the industries in which apprentices work. Throughout their programme, apprentices quickly learn advanced technical knowledge and skills, develop expert professional behaviours and learn how to apply them in the workplace.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have thoughtfully created a broad curriculum offer that aligns exceptionally well with the skills needs in their local and regional areas. They have a thorough understanding of the skills needs in east London and beyond. They carefully use

labour market information to identify and respond to the key strategic priorities of the region.

Leaders are highly effective at making sure that the courses they offer meet the needs of the growing number of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in their local borough. For example, leaders offer courses that are suitable for refugees and asylum seekers. They have redesigned the employability and ESOL programmes to ensure learners develop the English skills and professional behaviours they need to work in high-demand sectors such as childcare and construction.

Senior leaders play a crucial role as members of local, regional and national skills forums. They have a significant impact in shaping the policies related to skills needs. Leaders engage exceptionally well with a broad range of stakeholders, such as employer representative bodies, sub-regional partners, local authorities and funding authorities. They work collaboratively with the Greater London Authority and other local further education providers to plan courses carefully that provide a rich choice for learners across Waltham Forest.

Leaders work exceptionally well with employers and industry experts to plan and teach the curriculums offered. For example, restaurant owners and industry specialists provide expert advice on the content of the level 3 cookery curriculum to ensure learners can gain employment in the hospitality sector. In the vast majority of subjects, learners and apprentices frequently benefit from guest speakers and attend workshops taught by subject specialists and leading employers. As a result, learners and apprentices learn the most up-to-date skills needed for industry.

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

Senior leaders and governors provide exceptional leadership and management to widen participation. They work relentlessly to ensure learners and apprentices, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, receive consistently high-quality teaching and training. During their studies at the college, learners and apprentices make considerable progress from their often-low starting points. Most learners, including learners who have high needs and those at their subcontractors, achieve extremely well.

Senior leaders, governors and staff have very high ambitions for all learners. They passionately promote a culture in which learners are challenged, motivated and supported to achieve. Staff and learners are equally committed to push themselves and strive to aim high.

Staff thoroughly assess learners' and apprentices' prior knowledge and experience at the start of the course. They use this information effectively to advise learners of the most suitable courses for them. Lecturers carefully plan teaching and assessment on the key areas where learners have gaps in their knowledge and skills. They continue to use suitable types of assessments throughout the course to monitor closely the

knowledge that learners and apprentices gain, up to the point of their final assessments and examinations.

Lecturers skilfully teach topics in a logical order, which build in complexity over time. For example, in electrical installation, lecturers teach apprentices to apply their basic knowledge of different diagnostic and problem-solving techniques to find, assess, and resolve electrical faults in residential environments. Adult learners on the spectator safety courses learn about different hazards and conflict situations. They apply this knowledge to then complete dynamic risk assessments of stadiums with different spectator groups, such as at rugby and football matches.

Leaders have been very successful at recruiting skilled practitioners from industry to teach subjects in which there is a shortage of teachers. They provide intensive support and training to these new lecturers to develop their teaching skills quickly. Experienced teaching and learning coaches provide highly effective and focused support to lecturers in areas where they are less proficient. Lecturers also take part in a wide range of industry-specific training to keep their subject knowledge up to date. Consequently, lecturers feel greatly supported to develop their practice and provide consistently excellent teaching to their learners and apprentices.

Lecturers skilfully use their professional expertise and subject knowledge to teach effectively. For example, they provide detailed explanations with examples from the workplace to link theoretical concepts with real-life practices. In courses such as automotive engineering, cookery and beauty therapy, lecturers expertly give clear instructions that learners follow closely. Learners then have excellent skills that they apply in workshops and at work placements. Learners and apprentices greatly benefit from learning about current and emerging practices using industry-standard equipment and facilities at the college. They gain valuable industry insights and develop knowledge, skills and behaviours desired by their employers.

Lecturers expertly use questioning techniques and online tools to check learners' and apprentices' understanding. They frequently check that learners and apprentices can recall what they were taught in previous lessons. They are skilled at using questions to challenge learners to think more deeply about what they are taught. For example, in barbering, lecturers use questions adeptly during practical observations to extend learners' understanding. They prompt learners to think why they need to be mindful of the hair line and how to fold the foil when applying colour.

In lessons and workshops, lecturers encourage learners and apprentices to use the correct technical language and subject-specific terminology. During discussions, lecturers have a strong focus on the correct use of key terms and concepts. Across adult courses, lecturers provide useful glossaries to learners. In ESOL, lecturers use practice booklets skilfully when teaching new vocabulary. In English, lecturers frequently set spelling tests which help learners with the vocabulary required for the course. Consequently, learners confidently gain new vocabulary and can accurately use the technical language they have been taught.

Lecturers provide learners and apprentices with extremely helpful and comprehensive written and verbal feedback on their work. In GCSE mathematics, lecturers clearly explain rounding errors and how to work out the right answer. Learners quickly correct their work and do not make similar mistakes. On level 3 engineering, lecturers provide detailed information and guidance on what detail learners should include to improve their work to the highest standards. They make sure that learners understand the essential concepts and principles for engineering, such as computer aided design and calculus, in preparation for a foundation year in university. Learners produce work which is suitably detailed, neat and well-presented.

Leaders and staff monitor learners' and apprentices' progress extremely effectively. They have an accurate oversight of the progress their learners and apprentices make. Lecturers support learners exceptionally well to catch up and use a broad range of suitable interventions if they fall behind. This contributes to a high proportion of learners making excellent progress and achieving highly.

In apprenticeships, leaders do not always teach English and mathematics qualifications early enough in the course. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices do not make good enough progress and are not suitably prepared to take their final assessments. Leaders have identified the issue and taken suitable action to ensure current apprentices receive effective teaching to achieve these qualifications in a timely manner. While achievements have improved in apprenticeships, they are not high enough.

Leaders and managers have designed a very impressive tutorial curriculum for learners and apprentices, which is taught extremely well by tutors. This provides learners and apprentices with an experience at the college which extends considerably beyond the main subjects they study. For example, on ESOL courses, lecturers manage discussions with adult learners on different points of view regarding emotive topics such as immigration and conflict in war zones. Learners discuss with sensitivity and maturity values such as tolerance and respecting each other's cultures. On public services courses for young learners, lecturers discuss with learners the importance of considering the Human Rights Act when responding to emergency situations such as protests. As a result, learners understand the importance of rule of law and democracy in the context of their lives at college and in society more broadly.

Learners and apprentices take part in a broad range of outstanding enrichment activities. Consequently, they broaden their experiences and widen their talents and interests. For example, young learners enthusiastically take part in external competitions, various clubs, such as book and music clubs, and sporting activities. All public services students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Learners with high needs attend an extensive range of enrichment activities. They participate in arts and fitness clubs and join college sports teams. They frequently go on trips to museums and cinemas and in the local community to shop for cooking ingredients. Consequently, learners with high needs securely develop skills for adulthood and strengthen social bonds with other learners.

Learners and apprentices, including those with high needs, participate well in voluntary and social action projects in the local community and at the college. For example, young learners volunteer for the British Heart Foundation charity shop and in a local community café to raise money. Learners with high needs act as ambassadors at college open evenings, host the corporation dinner and support a local film festival as volunteers. Adult learners on ESOL courses set up a 'bring and buy shop' to provide help with cost-of-living crisis and widen their understanding of recycling.

Learners and apprentices benefit significantly from high-quality careers education, advice and guidance throughout their time at the college. Specialist staff, including employability coaches and careers advisers, provide detailed information and individualised advice on the different progression options available to learners and apprentices. Staff provide extensive support for learners to complete university applications and prepare for the job interviews. A high proportion of learners and apprentices progress successfully to higher-level courses or university, or gain employment.

Learners and apprentices enjoy hearing from a host of industry specialists and employer guest speakers. They greatly benefit from learning about different employment opportunities. For example, apprentices in electrical and plumbing courses learn about opportunities to work on London's environmental initiatives to install air source heat pumps and photovoltaic panels. Young learners on study programmes complete meaningful work experience in sectors related to their career aspirations. As a result, learners and apprentices have ambitious and clear plans in place for their next steps.

Learners and apprentices, including those at the subcontractors and employers, feel safe. Young learners and those with high needs have a good understanding of appropriate sexual relationships. They know who to go to should they need to report a concern. Staff provide comprehensive support to young learners and vulnerable adults with a range of issues such as mental health concerns and financial hardships, to ensure their safety and well-being. Consequently, learners who face obstacles and challenges stay on their courses and achieve.

Leaders have very effective governance arrangements in place. Governors have relevant backgrounds and expertise in education, finance and safeguarding. They are passionate and highly committed to improve continuously the quality of education and learning experience for all learners and apprentices. They have a thorough oversight of the strengths and areas of improvement of their provision. Governors provide robust challenge and support to leaders to ensure the quality of education is consistently high across the provision. Leaders and governors are very aware of courses where improvements are needed, such as in level 3 engineering and GCSE mathematics. They take very effective action where necessary, such as to improve learner retention, examination preparation, curriculum sequencing and the quality of teaching.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## Provider details

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|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>      | 130456   |
| <b>Address</b>                      | Forest Road<br>Walthamstow<br>London<br>E17 4JB  |
| <b>Contact number</b>               | 02085018000  |
| <b>Website</b>                      | <a href="http://www.waltham.ac.uk">www.waltham.ac.uk</a>   |
| <b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b> | Janet Gardner  |
| <b>Provider type</b>                | General further education college  |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>  | 6–9 February 2018  |
| <b>Main subcontractors</b>          | D.T.K. Business Services Limited<br>MTC Training<br>Flourish Learning Trust<br>Leyton Orient Trust<br>Floortrain (GB) Limited<br>Future Connect Training and Recruitment |



## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal curriculum and 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.

### Inspection team

|                               |                         |
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