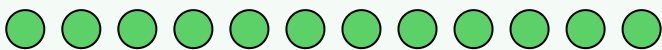


Heart of Worcestershire College

Address: Peakman Campus, Peakman Street, Redditch, Worcestershire, B98 8DW

Unique reference number (URN): 130713

Inspection report: 10 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, leadership and governance, and contribution to

meeting skills needs

Strong standard



Expected standard



Strong standard

Contribution to meeting skills needs

Strong standard 

Since the previous inspection, leaders have significantly strengthened partnerships with employers and other stakeholders. They have devised and implemented a highly effective skills strategy that places stakeholders at the centre of curriculum design, teaching and review. Leaders have assessed the impact of this strategy accurately, elevating the focus on subject-level skills development and re-establishing and strengthening the college as an anchor organisation in the region.

Leaders are highly responsive to the needs of local and regional stakeholders. They have actively collaborated with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the courses that they provide address local and regional skills needs and raise learners' aspirations. This has resulted in an increase in applications to local universities, more skilled and work-ready students entering the construction industry and enhanced work experience opportunities for learners on health and social care programmes.

Leaders closely align their skills strategy with the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Managers meet with employers and other stakeholders frequently to understand their needs and update the curriculum accordingly. Leaders actively encourage stakeholders to teach on the programmes, enriching learners' experiences and helping learners to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that they need for employment and future progression.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Leaders have fostered a culture of inclusion that is fully embedded across the college. They have significantly improved communication between the inclusion and curriculum teams to enable them to review and adapt systematically the support provided, which enhances learners' and apprentices' experiences and opportunities. Staff professional development is highly effective and relevant, including training on the graduated approach.

Staff quickly and accurately identify learners' and apprentices' learning and support needs. They work effectively with the virtual school, specialist providers, the local county council, charities and, where appropriate, parents to shape learners' and apprentices' support and aspirations.

Leaders successfully implement strategies to remove barriers to learners' and apprentices' learning quickly and consistently. They hold a weekly learner equity and opportunity panel, where learners at risk of not achieving are discussed and actions are agreed. Leaders have

developed a comprehensive inclusion dashboard to monitor the progress of all learners and their levels of need, including temporary needs. This information is used very effectively to ensure learners receive tailored support when necessary.

Leaders ensure that work experience providers receive relevant information to support learners with additional needs. They also ensure that these learners receive tailored support to reduce the impact of any barriers to learning.

Expected standard ●

Leadership and governance

Expected standard ●

Leaders have developed a culture across the college in which they have built trust with staff by explaining the reasons for change, consulting widely and remaining true to their values. They are visible and accessible across campuses. Staff have responded positively to the call for improvement.

Suitably qualified and experienced governors provide effective support and challenge for senior leaders. Governors understand the key strengths and areas for development. They have a clear vision for the college and make decisions in the best interests of learners and apprentices.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have addressed the key recommendations. They have improved qualification achievement rates across all provision types. Leaders have enhanced the quality of teaching through a revised teaching and learning strategy, which includes effective training to improve teaching practice, increased oversight of performance and detailed plans for improvement.

Leaders have enhanced the quality of careers information, advice and guidance through the introduction of a planned but responsive personal development curriculum. This ensures that learners are well prepared for their next steps.

Through a broad range of quality assurance activities, leaders gain an understanding of the provider’s strengths and areas for development. They have clear plans to improve areas that have not yet reached their targets and to enhance teaching across all subject areas so that it is consistently of high quality. Leaders monitor the quality of subcontracted provision closely and effectively.

Leaders value their staff and offer opportunities for promotion and career growth. They take staff wellbeing and workload into account when making decisions.

2. Education programmes for young people

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Learners broadly make appropriate progress from their starting points and achieve their qualifications. Leaders have worked to improve qualification achievement rates, which have been steadily increasing over the past 2 years. These rates are now generally in line with national averages. The proportion of learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities or other disadvantages who complete their studies is in line with that of their peers.

Learners generally produce work to the required standard. However, in a few areas, teachers do not guide learners to produce work to the highest standard or to a distinction grade level.

Learners develop their English, mathematical and digital skills, which helps them study the curriculum and prepares them well for work in the sectors related to their course.

On completing their studies, most learners progress into further education or employment in subjects and sectors related to their studies.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching on the courses that they provide. They monitor its effectiveness and use data wisely to inform staff development initiatives. This has resulted in improvements to the teaching that learners receive. The curriculum follows the principles of 16 to 19 study programmes.

Leaders ensure that, in most cases, the curriculum is well sequenced and builds on what has already been taught. In electrical installation, the curriculum is logically organised and designed so that learners can practise in the workshop the concepts they learn in the classroom. Learners begin by studying cable types, installation techniques and how to avoid electric shocks. As they progress in their studies, they are taught more advanced topics, such as how to perform cable calculations and select the most appropriate cable for various installations.

Teachers typically use appropriate teaching strategies to help learners understand and remember what they learn. In GCSE English, teachers assist students in recalling key creative writing techniques using scaffolding strategies that introduce complex concepts gradually and securely. For example, they use 'story mountain' frameworks to give students a structure for their story writing. They also employ audio-visual stimuli and pre-prepared stories to stimulate creative ideas.

Teachers do not routinely use information on learners' starting points to tailor their learning and set meaningful and challenging targets. Learners' individual progress is not closely monitored to ensure they make more than expected progress and aim for higher grades.

Learners attend well. They develop confidence and resilience, and establish positive professional relationships with their peers and teachers. Learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities in art and design are taught to experiment and avoid overreliance on perfectionism, as it can hinder their artistic skills and performance. Learners cultivate this vital behavioural trait, which contributes to them becoming more independent, confident and self-assured.

Leaders provide learners with training on age-appropriate information about mental and physical health, as well as healthy sexual relationships, which learners retain well. The 'Thrive' curriculum allows staff to tailor topics based on current themes and trends, such as in hairdressing and beauty therapy, where staff focus on body image and the influence of social media.

Learners benefit from a curriculum shaped by employers in related sectors and incorporates a well-organised work placement programme as part of their studies. On T-level health courses, leaders give learners a broad experience across different settings and with various service users. Over time, they match placement opportunities with learners' interests, such as radiography.

In most cases, industry-experienced teachers provide learners with effective career advice and guidance. This helps learners to make well-informed decisions about their next steps in education or employment.

3. Adult learning programmes

Expected standard



Expected standard

The proportion of learners who complete their studies has increased each year for the last 3 years. The achievement rate is now slightly above the national rate.

Learners are well prepared for their next steps in education and employment, with most progressing to positive destinations. Learners on courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) often move on to higher-level courses or into employment. Learners on access to higher education courses are well prepared for their next steps, with most progressing to university or an apprenticeship.

Learners develop substantial new knowledge and skills on their courses. Those on short employability-based courses quickly develop the technical skills and personal behaviours

needed to enter the job market. Learners on ESOL courses use their new skills to integrate more easily into their communities.

Learners produce work at least to the standard expected for their level of study.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear rationale to provide adult learning courses that meet vocational and community needs and provide an access route to higher education. They have an accurate understanding of the quality of these courses.

Teachers are appropriately experienced and well qualified. Teachers of courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) draw on their diverse backgrounds to share practice. They use their understanding of different approaches to help learners develop new skills and knowledge. Teachers of access to higher education courses use their subject expertise to explain complex topics clearly and introduce learners to the technical vocabulary of the subjects.

The adult curriculums are well designed and sequenced. Access to higher education courses provide learners with a solid foundation in study skills, which is revisited throughout the course. Many new topics start with an ungraded introduction to the subject, which teachers build on with increasingly complex theories.

Teachers ensure that the curriculums they provide are accessible for learners. On ESOL courses, they use interactive activities that give learners regular opportunities to practise their English skills and address gaps in their knowledge. Teachers also focus on developing study skills, such as collaboration and critical thinking. Additionally, they use technical language to describe language features, such as collocation and modal verbs.

In most cases, teachers give learners constructive feedback that helps them to improve the quality of their work. However, in a few cases, teachers do not provide feedback that explains how learners can improve, which results in these learners repeating the same mistakes and not enhancing the quality of their work.

Participation and development

Expected standard 

Leaders create learning environments in which adult learners feel safe and respected. Learners on access to higher education courses are encouraged to organise regular coffee and cake mornings to foster collaboration. Learners respect and support each other to succeed.

Leaders have created a personal development curriculum through which learners have an awareness of issues, such as safeguarding, radicalisation and extremism, healthy sexual relationships and fundamental British values. Learners recall covering these topics and possess a secure understanding of them. They also feel the content is suitable for adults and useful for their lives.

Learners on courses in English for speakers of other languages benefit from enrichment activities that develop their civic literacy and enable them to integrate into society more

easily.

Leaders provide a valuable range of careers advice that helps learners to make well-informed decisions about their next steps. On access to higher education courses, learners receive this advice from their teachers, from specialist speakers invited to discuss various pathways into health professions and from university admissions staff.

Learners' attendance generally meets the college's standards. In a few cases, access to higher education courses have lower than expected attendance. Leaders monitor this closely and have taken actions that are beginning to show some impact.

4. Apprenticeships

Expected standard



Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Most apprentices make positive progress from their starting points. Leaders monitor apprentices' progress and achievement thoroughly. They identify where apprentices fall behind with their studies and implement interventions to help them catch up quickly.

Apprentices mostly complete their studies, with a high percentage gaining distinction grades. Apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve at a rate higher than their peers.

Apprentices acquire significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Professional accountancy technicians confidently handle tax liabilities, reporting and compliance responsibilities across various legal entities, including limited companies and partnerships. However, level 2 carpentry apprentices do not develop their English writing skills sufficiently.

Apprentices' work is typically completed to the expected level. Most apprentices produce well-written and well-presented work.

Most apprentices are well prepared for and progress to positive destinations. They often advance to higher-level training and receive promotions and extra responsibilities at work.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of the apprenticeships that they provide. They accurately identify areas for further development and implement measures to improve apprentices' experience.

Leaders and teachers plan and teach the curriculum in a logical way to enable apprentices to gain the foundational knowledge they need before progressing to more complex topics. For example, level 2 finance assistant apprentices first learn the fundamentals of bookkeeping and then move on to learning about fixed and flexible budgets and preparing financial statements. Carpentry apprentices learn to use hand tools before they progress to measuring angles and cutting timber.

Teachers are industry specialists, who have the knowledge and experience needed to teach apprentices. They explain new topics clearly. They break learning down into small steps that help apprentices to understand new concepts, such as fixed and flexible budgets, in accounting lessons. Teachers mostly use assessment effectively and ensure that gaps in apprentices' knowledge are identified and fixed quickly. They provide examples taken from the world of work that help apprentices to link theory to practice.

Teachers and learning and skills development officers (LSDOs) mostly provide apprentices with feedback that helps them to improve. For example, they help accountancy apprentices to add more detail to their writing, such as how finance is linked to sustainability in practice. In a few cases, teachers and LSDOs do not provide carpentry apprentices with sufficient feedback to help them to improve their written work.

Participation and development

Expected standard 

Apprentices work in supportive and safe environments. They are respectful and professional in their interactions with others. Employers regularly participate in progress reviews. Apprentices follow leaders' clear expectations for attendance and behaviour closely. They feel secure online and in the workplace. Teachers and staff frequently check on apprentices' wellbeing and, where apprentices have identified barriers to learning, tutors provide appropriate support.

Leaders and teachers offer apprentices suitable careers advice and guidance. Most apprentices understand their next steps and are clear about the progression routes open to them. For example, accountancy apprentices are aware of their career path through to management accounting.

Most apprentices develop a secure understanding of fundamental British values, and mentors discuss topics related to social and local risks during progress reviews. Apprentices also have a clear understanding of radicalisation and extremism. They recognise the signs to look out for in others, which could indicate someone has been radicalised, such as changes in behaviour.

Apprentices build professional relationships in the workplace. They become confident and skilled and are valued by their employers. They overcome challenges and develop effective problem-solving skills, preparing them well for their future careers.

5. Provision for learners with high needs

Strong standard	
Expected standard	 

Strong standard

Participation and development

Strong standard 

Learners with high needs benefit from a highly ambitious development programme that boosts their resilience, confidence and independence. Staff use effective partnerships with stakeholders to enhance learners’ opportunities and broaden their learning. They create a curriculum that is expertly designed to prepare learners for adulthood.

Leaders set high expectations for attendance and behaviour. Learners on foundation courses maintain high attendance. Attendance is carefully monitored, and support measures to improve it are quickly put in place. Learners’ behaviour is exemplary.

Learners are highly motivated to learn and take pride in their work. They develop teamwork skills, such as designing and printing tote bags in the 'creation station'. Those on placements work with the public professionally and are proud of their improved communication skills.

Learners receive coherent careers education and personalised guidance. Support, advice and planning for next steps commence as soon as learners join the college. Leaders are ambitious for their learners and plan tailored programmes accordingly. This helps learners to make well-informed decisions about their next steps.

Learners feel safe and can identify what helps them to feel safe. They know how to report their concerns and are confident that should incidents of bullying or victimisation arise, they would be dealt with quickly and effectively.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Learners with high needs following vocational and technical courses achieve at the same rate as their peers. Learners studying on foundation learning courses perform well on their core qualifications and in mathematics. However, achievement in English is not high enough.

Learners acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to their goals. Teachers accurately assess learners' starting points. Learners on foundation courses develop independence skills, such as using a debit card, and build social confidence to engage in

their community. They become more comfortable socialising and forming friendships, often gaining the skills to progress to vocational courses and developing professional behaviours for employment.

Learners' work meets at least the necessary standard for their level. Learners are generally well prepared for their next steps. Learners on foundation courses are ready for internal progression, independent living and, where appropriate, employment. Most supported interns secure paid employment.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders typically provide well-sequenced learning opportunities. Curriculums are tailored to meet individual needs, including education, health and care plan outcomes. Teachers carefully plan and deliver lessons that build learners' confidence to tackle increasingly complex tasks. In the work skills curriculum, completing a unit on 'motivation for work' before focusing on interview skills helps learners to gain confidence to work with each other and practise their communication skills.

Teachers and support staff use effective teaching strategies. They link past, present and future learning to demonstrate its relevance. Teachers and support assistants work productively together. Teachers clarify the support needed and work collaboratively with support assistants to adapt learning for each learner, providing the right level of assistance.

Leaders ensure that learners with high needs can access the curriculum by making suitable and reasonable adjustments. The transition to college is tailored to individuals and thoroughly planned. Learners use a variety of technology and specialist equipment to give them access to the college environment and learning. This includes personal devices, such as a 'smartbox' for learners with communication difficulties and specialised equipment, such as an accessible chair and step stool, for learners with dwarfism, to minimise fatigue.

Leaders collaborate effectively with external agencies, such as the complex communication needs team, the visual impairment team and the hearing impairment team, to ensure that learners receive appropriate support for their progress. These specialists provide advice on support strategies and offer training to teaching staff and learning support assistants.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Learners and apprentices study in caring and respectful environments across all campuses. They are listened to by leaders and staff, which makes them feel valued and helps them to enjoy their studies. Learners and apprentices benefit from leaders and staff, who are attentive to their needs and any barriers to learning they may have. Specialist staff accurately identify these barriers and support learners and apprentices to overcome them.

Young learners generally perform well in their studies. The proportion of learners who complete their studies is high, except on electrical installation and motor vehicle courses. Young learners study curriculums that are carefully designed to prepare them for careers in their chosen fields. Employers with expertise in each curriculum area contribute to its

design, helping learners develop current, useful skills that prepare them effectively for the workforce. Learners respond well to this and typically gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to succeed in their chosen careers.

Young learners are well prepared for adulthood through the 'Thrive' curriculum, which includes age-appropriate content on mental and physical health, as well as healthy sexual relationships. They receive training on current topics, including challenges they may encounter in their personal lives.

Most adult learners complete their studies. They study purposeful curriculums that prepare them for future steps in education, employment or community involvement. Access to higher education for health courses prepare learners effectively for careers in the health professions. Learners grow in confidence and develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to succeed.

Most apprentices achieve well, with a high proportion obtaining distinction grades. Those facing barriers to their learning achieve at a rate higher than their peers. Apprentices enjoy their training, make progress in their workplaces and often gain promotions and additional responsibilities.

Apprentices successfully gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They often further enhance their English, mathematical and digital skills. Accountancy apprentices continue to develop their mathematical skills within the curriculum by preparing financial statements and using spreadsheets and formulae. Team leader apprentices learn to communicate effectively with their teams.

Apprentices become confident and competent and are highly valued by their employers. Level 3 team leader apprentices develop their confidence through their studies, such as giving presentations and managing difficult situations, including resolving conflicts within their team. They explain how their personal management skills have improved because of their studies and that this has led to them managing their teams in the workplace more effectively.

Learners with high needs make positive progress towards their targets. They develop the knowledge, skills and attributes essential for their development. They follow a well-designed curriculum that focuses on fostering their independence. Learners with high needs produce work that meets at least the expected level of study. For those on foundation courses, there is notable improvement in communication skills. A high proportion move from being hesitant to speak in class to making meaningful contributions to discussions. Learners with high needs typically develop the English, mathematical and digital skills necessary to support their broader studies and enable them to progress.

Learners with high needs participate in an ambitious programme of development that builds their resilience, confidence and independence. Well-developed partnerships with stakeholders enhance learners' opportunities. Preparation for adulthood themes are embedded throughout the curriculum.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to improve the quality of teaching, so that all learners and apprentices benefit from high-quality provision.
 - Leaders should continue to take action to increase the proportion of young learners, who complete electrical and automotive courses.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers consistently use the starting points of younger learners to inform teaching and monitor progress.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers provide carpentry apprentices with feedback that helps them to improve their English writing skills.
-

About this inspection

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the principal, governors, senior leaders, managers, teachers, learning support assistants, learners, apprentices, employers and other stakeholders during the inspection.

Heart of Worcestershire College is a general further education college with 4 campuses located in Worcester, Redditch, Bromsgrove and Malvern. The largest of these sites is the Worcester campus.

At the time of inspection, there were 2,606 16- to 18-year-old learners, 1,509 adult learners, 427 apprentices and 286 learners with high needs. Most young learners study vocational subjects from entry level to level 3, including arts, health, construction and engineering. Adult learners study a range of courses, with English for speakers of other languages, access to higher education, English and mathematics being among the most popular. The largest apprenticeships are in motor vehicle and carpentry. Most learners with high needs attend specialised classes.

The college works with 9 subcontractors. Of these, 6 provide learning for adult learners, 2 for apprenticeships, and one for learners with high needs.

Principal and Chief Executive: Michelle Dowse

Lead inspector:

Joel Dalhouse, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Martin Ward, His Majesty's Inspector

Steve Kelly, His Majesty's Inspector

Rachel Clark, His Majesty's Inspector

Tony Day, Ofsted Inspector

Jacqueline Ecoeur, Ofsted Inspector

Helen Kinghorn, Ofsted Inspector

William Baidoe-Ansah, Ofsted Inspector

Joanne Keatley, Ofsted Inspector

Ravinder Jhite, Ofsted Inspector

Jack Bullock, Ofsted Inspector

Maggie Fobister, Ofsted Inspector

Susan Gay, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 10 March 2026

Number of learners

Total learners

5266

Education programmes for young people

2606

Adult learning programmes

1947

Apprenticeships

427

Provision for learners with high needs

286

Percentage of learning aims successfully achieved

Education programmes for young people

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	79	83	Close to average
2022/23	74	81	Close to average
2021/22	76	81	Close to average

Adult learning programmes

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	87	87	Close to average
2022/23	83	87	Close to average
2021/22	88	86	Close to average

Apprenticeships overall achievement rate

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	59	61	Close to average
2022/23	39	55	Below
2021/22	35	53	Below

Apprenticeships pass rate

Year	This provider	National average
2023/24	100	98
2022/23	95	97
2021/22	98	98

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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