

Inspection of Barnsley College

Inspection dates:

11 to 14 March 2025

Overall effectiveness

Good

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	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Barnsley College is a general further education college with eight sites in the town of Barnsley. At the time of the inspection, there were 8,048 learners and apprentices studying on courses from entry level to level 6. The majority of learners were aged 16 to 19 and were on level 3 courses.

There were approximately 5,100 learners aged 16 to 19 enrolled at the college. Of these, approximately 3,000 study vocational programmes. On A-level courses, there were approximately 900 learners on over 30 different courses, with the largest cohorts in biology, mathematics, psychology and sociology. Approximately 600 learners were studying T levels in several subjects, with the largest numbers in construction, digital and creative, and business courses. Approximately 420 learners study applied general qualifications. There were 384 learners with high needs, of whom 259 were studying on A-level and vocational courses and 125 on specialist provision. There were 53 learners aged 14 to 16 studying on a range of vocational courses and English and mathematics courses.

There were 1,090 adult learners studying a range of subjects, including English for speakers of other languages, English and mathematics, as well as short courses for unemployed adults.

There were 1,346 apprentices on 75 apprenticeships in a variety of subjects, with the largest being level 3 electrical installation and maintenance and level 2 bricklaying.

The college works with three subcontractors. The largest number of learners on subcontracted provision study sports development and coaching in local football clubs, with a small number of unemployed adults studying courses in welding and manufacturing.

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

Learners and apprentices consistently demonstrate very high standards of behaviour. Staff have created a highly inclusive environment where everyone can thrive together. For example, teachers on foundation-level courses create a very calm and respectful environment for learners, many of whom have significant emotional difficulties. The physical environment that staff have designed incorporates sensory and stimulating spaces. Staff set very clear expectations for learners and ensure that learning begins with checking that learners are 'ready, respectful and safe'. This ensures that learners are clear about how they should behave in the class.

Most learners and apprentices attend well. They are punctual and arrive ready to learn. For example, learners in level 3 public services demonstrate good work-related behaviours. They put on personal protective equipment to prepare for forensic tasks with minimal direction from teachers. Staff maintain communication with learners should they miss any lessons and inform employers if any apprentices are absent.

Learners and apprentices are taught by teachers who have expert knowledge of their subjects. Teachers participate in industry upskilling events to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. For example, on the level 3 diploma in criminology, teachers continue to work in the sector. They carry out work for law firms, including representing marginalised members of the community and visits to court. They link theoretical classroom discussions well to real-life examples so learners can develop their understanding of theories.

Learners with high needs studying in the learning for living and work department are very well supported by specialist and well-qualified staff. Staff ensure that learners' therapies and support needs are met effectively without disruption to their learning. Learners on supported internships work in a wide range of roles at a local hospital, including working in children's and neonatal wards, procurement, housekeeping and administration. They develop a sound understanding of various job roles and responsibilities. Learners develop very useful skills to help them towards their long-term career goals.

Learners and apprentices participate well in the extensive enrichment programme on offer. A substantial number of learners and apprentices take up activities beyond the academic curriculum that help to develop their interests and talents. For example, learners and apprentices compete in competitions including World Skills, and catering learners enter the Nestlé Toque D'Or. Trainers provide apprentices with an age-appropriate and contextualised personal development programme. They tailor learning to topical news or issues that affect apprentices' lives. For example, in level 2 bricklaying, trainers provided information on gambling awareness as apprentices had been discussing gambling among themselves.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college. They know how to report concerns to staff should they need to. Learners and apprentices are provided with helpful information about any support that they may need. Learners understand and comply

well with safety instructions. For example, adults studying manufacturing and welding understand and adhere to safety regulations such as wearing personal protective equipment, including safety boots, gloves and welding masks. Adult learners on digital courses feel a sense of belonging to a community while at college. Learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities feel very well supported and value the opportunity to learn and achieve their goals.

Staff provide learners and apprentices with valuable careers information, advice and guidance that prepares them very well for their next steps. Learners and apprentices get the opportunity to visit employers, attend careers events, go on university visits and listen to a wide range of guest speakers. This helps learners and apprentices to feel inspired and develop their future ambitions. Learners and apprentices have a very clear understanding of what they need to do to succeed in their chosen careers.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have a very clear understanding of skills needs locally, regionally and nationally. They liaise very closely with a wide range of stakeholders, including strategic authorities such as the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, local councils and large employers in sectors such as logistics, healthcare, construction and children's services.

Leaders have established over 20 college academies that cover a wide range of employment sectors. They have worked closely with large multinational construction employers to fund and develop state-of-the-art facilities to train apprentices in the use of modern methods of construction. This includes using large modular components when working on infrastructure projects such as large-scale house building. In the healthcare academy, there are dedicated simulation suites where learners train in a realistic ward environment with support from NHS nursing professionals to prepare them for work in a hospital.

Leaders and managers work with key stakeholders to design curriculums that have a strong focus on employability outcomes for learners. The college's curriculum offer closely aligns with industry needs. Leaders involve stakeholders very well in the design of curriculums. For example, the local council sponsors a health and childcare academy through which learners on these vocational programmes receive input from qualified social workers. As a result, learners are able to apply for one of a number of social work apprenticeships ring-fenced for them by the council.

Leaders and managers use their industry links very well to ensure that learners gain essential employability skills that prepare them for the workplace. Employers teach helpful sessions to learners. On the T level in design, planning and surveying for construction, learners are taught by quantity surveyors from a large construction company to develop their understanding of the job roles. The local council works in partnership with the college to promote career opportunities to learners who do not

want to pursue higher education. They offer work placements in information technology and technical support for these learners.

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

Leaders and managers have developed an ambitious curriculum offer with a clear rationale. Department managers plan curriculums to ensure that learners and apprentices experience good-quality education and training that prepares them well for their next steps in education, training and employment. Leaders offer effective challenge to the departmental heads to help them achieve agreed goals and meet targets to enhance further the quality of provision.

Teachers and trainers plan their curriculums in a logical order that enables learners and apprentices to remember more and build up their knowledge over time. For example, in A-level sociology, learners develop their knowledge and understanding of different theoretical approaches. They explore early in the course the differences and similarities between competing structuralist theories such as Marxism and functionalism. They revisit and apply these theories later in the course to topics including media, crime and deviance.

Most teachers and trainers are skilled in using a variety of strategies to help learners and apprentices understand and remember complex concepts and master practical and technical skills. They recap previous learning and get learners and apprentices to repeat tasks frequently. On the bricklaying apprenticeship, trainers ask apprentices questions similar to those asked in end-point assessments. This helps to identify any gaps in apprentices' knowledge and enables trainers to tackle apprentices' misconceptions effectively.

Teachers use assessment effectively in most cases. They use short tests and mock examinations to identify common errors. Teachers support learners with group feedback activities and one-to-one sessions to focus on areas where learners need to improve their skills, such as managing time and producing more evaluative writing. On provision for learners aged 14 to 16, teachers use assessment information well to plan further learning. For example, in mathematics, teachers plan starter activities to secure understanding on the types of triangles covered previously.

Teachers and trainers in most cases provide helpful feedback on work, which enables learners and apprentices to make improvements. Trainers meet with apprentices and line managers to discuss apprentices' performance in the workplace and progress in college training to plan further learning. In a very few cases, teachers' feedback is limited and does not identify what learners need to do to improve their work. This results in a few learners continuing to make the same mistakes.

Learners with high needs make very good progress during their course. They produce work that is of at least the expected standard and achieve at least in line

with their peers. For example, in level 3 games design, learners learn basic technical skills to produce an animated stick man to move through a basic walk cycle, a running cycle then a jump cycle. They then develop their skills to stylise the characters to do a 'sad' walk and a 'happy' walk. They apply their learning of anatomy very well to complete more complex tasks, such as adding bones to the characters. As learners progress through the course, they produce work that is increasingly intricate in preparation for their next steps.

A very high proportion of learners on A-level and applied general courses achieve their qualifications. However, leaders have recognised that the progress that learners make from their starting points is below that of their peers nationally. They have begun to take appropriate actions, including increasing support in sessions for individual learners, increasing parental engagement, providing targeted sessions for those learners on grade boundaries to help them improve their grades and making better use of starting points to plan individual learning. Leaders report that their actions are starting to have a positive impact.

Approximately four fifths of learners in the sixth form progress into higher education, and many learners on vocational courses progress to higher-level courses, apprenticeships or employment. Most learners with high needs and those studying on supported internships progress to employment. Many apprentices gain promotions or take on additional responsibilities in their work.

Leaders recognised that a small number of apprenticeships did not provide apprentices with a good enough standard of training and education. Too many apprentices did not complete their training in the planned time. Leaders have taken appropriate actions to address this, and the proportion of apprentices who are past their planned end date is reducing. However, at the time of the inspection, it was too early to see the full impact of the interventions.

Leaders work effectively with their subcontractors to provide learners with good-quality education and training. For example, in welding, adult learners have access to industry-specific work environments and are supported by skilled experts in fabrication and welding. Leaders carry out sufficient checks and quality assurance activities throughout the contract. Subcontractor staff get the same support, scrutiny and professional development opportunities as college staff, which helps to ensure that the provision is of a high standard.

Leaders have in place an effective model of governance. Governors have sector expertise and a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, which enables them to hold leaders to account. Governors ensure that they understand the provision and the community through meeting learners and staff, conducting learning walks and involvement in the quality cycle.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that actions taken to reduce further the proportion of apprentices who are past their planned end dates are fully implemented.
- Implement fully actions to improve the rate of learners' progress on A-level and applied general courses and evaluate the impact of these actions.
- Provide all learners with specific feedback that identifies what they need to do to improve their work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130524
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Website	www.barnsley.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	David Akeroyd
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 March 2022
Main subcontractors	Barnsley FC Community Trust Ltd Sheffield United Community Foundation Betterweld Group Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal of quality as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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