

Sparsholt College

Address: Sparsholt College, 34 Westley Lane, Sparsholt, Winchester, SO21 2NF

Unique reference number (URN): 2888968

Inspection report: 9 March 2026

1. Further education and skills

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ **Compliance, including safeguarding: standards met**

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders ensure that trainees benefit from a highly supportive and open culture. They have a very well-informed understanding of the barriers that their trainees may experience. Trainees feel welcomed and valued, regardless of their backgrounds or prior experiences. They are confident to share their support needs.

Skilled staff implement support strategies focused on the needs of individual trainees promptly. They offer additional support sessions or deadline extensions for trainees facing personal challenges or vulnerabilities. Trainees benefit from bespoke support including speech-to-text technology and support to enhance academic writing skills. This helps trainees to gain the skills needed to teach theory lessons with the same confidence as when teaching practical sessions.

Leaders consistently act on trainees' feedback. They systematically review feedback and implement very well-considered actions to respond to trainees' views. Their focus on meeting trainees' needs has a demonstrable impact on trainees' experiences and ensures that trainees feel a keen sense of belonging and are confident practitioners. Trainees provide plentiful examples of how their feedback has led to adjustments that support them.

Trainees benefit from a comprehensive range of support for their health and wellbeing.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Trainees develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Many are already capable and skilled teachers. They manage classroom behaviours confidently and use questioning effectively to check and deepen learning. Trainees can adapt their practices to meet learners' needs.

Trainees produce work of an appropriate quality and standard. Staff provide helpful feedback that enables trainees to reflect on their strengths and areas for development. For example, trainees consider strategies to re-engage learners more quickly when they return from a break. However, feedback on written work does not consistently have sufficient focus on the development of English skills.

Trainees develop their understanding of their role as teachers. They reflect on how they can work with support staff to enhance their learners' experiences. They understand their statutory safeguarding duties and comply with college procedures.

Most trainees complete their programme and achieve their qualification. Previous trainees have achieved promotions or additional responsibilities.

Curriculum, teaching and training

Expected standard

Leaders have designed and implemented an ambitious and logically planned curriculum. It prepares trainees well to teach in the further education and skills sector. Trainees focus initially on setting professional boundaries and managing classroom behaviour before moving on to learn about developing pedagogic skills.

Trainees, all of whom work for the college, follow a programme that integrates theoretical and practical learning well. They use the skills that they learn in class, such as the use of timers during activities, to keep learners motivated and engaged. They use theoretical models such as Gibbs when reflecting on lessons that they have planned and taught.

Teaching staff are very experienced practitioners with strong backgrounds in teaching in the further education and skills sector. They draw on this experience to bring theoretical learning to life for trainees. They model best practice, teaching carefully planned, well-paced sessions that break concepts down and support trainees to build schemas that embed learning effectively.

Trainees undertake a range of appropriate assessments which encourages wider engagement with the profession and adds value to their roles. They benefit from helpful feedback that enables them to reflect on the strengths and areas for development in their written and practical work. Trainees know how to achieve high grades. They understand the progress that they are making and the grades that they are currently working towards because of the feedback they receive.

Trainees benefit from teaching which includes helpful input on identifying and supporting students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They learn how to reduce cognitive load and how to minimise barriers using explicit instructions. Leaders arrange for relevant guest speakers to contribute to the course, so trainees are able to learn how to access support for their learners from external professionals and college wellbeing support services.

Trainees learn how to keep learners and apprentices in their care safe. They are vigilant to signs and symptoms of harm. Where they identify concerns, they record them carefully and confidentially and report them using the college's systems. They teach learners relevant content to help them stay safe. For example, they teach learners with high needs about online safety. They teach engineering students about safe working practices in workshop settings.

Highly experienced pastoral mentors provide very effective support for trainees. Curriculum leads provide appropriate subject level support, which trainees value highly. Leaders rightly recognise the inconsistencies in the way that subject mentoring is currently planned and managed. They are in the process of appointing to new subject mentoring roles which will streamline and strengthen this part of the training programme.

Leadership

Expected standard 

Leaders have a well-articulated vision for their provision. It is rooted in the needs relating to their curriculum specialisms and the skills needs of their region. Leaders have established a culture that aligns with their strategic values that all learners, including their trainees, are 'known, valued and supported'. Trainees benefit from a research-informed curriculum.

Leaders have a detailed oversight of their provision. They now offer the level 5 learning and skills teacher apprenticeship as this better meets the needs of their trainees. They use a broad range of processes to evaluate the quality of this provision and to identify key improvements that are needed. For example, they have adjusted the sequencing of the curriculum following trainees' feedback and are enhancing the subject mentor role.

Those with responsibility for oversight of the provision ensure that all statutory requirements are securely met. They meet the requirements of apprenticeship provision. Leaders recruit trainees with integrity. Staff ensure that trainees are well prepared to teach in the further education sector.

Leaders place a high priority on relevant training and professional development so that teachers and mentors maintain and build their expertise. Leaders' actions ensure that staff feel very well supported and benefit from processes to protect them from bullying and harassment. They would be confident to report any concerns.

Leaders use relevant stakeholder links and partnerships to enhance their provision. For example, they work with other land-based colleges and other further education colleges to share best practice and learn from others.

Professional behaviours, personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have high expectations for trainees' attendance and engagement, which trainees respond to well. Attendance is high.

Trainees know about the wide range of pastoral and wellbeing support that leaders make available to them as trainee teachers at the college. They know how to access confidential counselling and financial support. They receive support for academic writing and digital learning. Trainees understand how they would raise any concerns about bullying or harassment if they had them. They are confident that their concerns would be acted on.

Trainees know how to ask for help and are typically well supported. For example, at busy times, trainees contact mentors and line managers who provide practical support and advice, including time management strategies. When trainees experience short-term barriers due to caring responsibilities, managers accommodate flexible working arrangements wherever possible. Trainees build their resilience and skills at managing demanding workloads as they move through the programme, mostly successfully.

Trainees understand and demonstrate well the professional behaviours associated with teaching. They are well prepared to enter the profession because of the teaching that they receive. They plan sessions carefully. They focus diligently on classroom management, tackling unwanted behaviours calmly and mostly effectively.

Next steps

Leaders should ensure that trainees benefit from appropriate and helpful feedback on the development of their English skills and academic writing skills so that trainees can achieve the high-grade outcomes that many aspire to.

Leaders should ensure that their newly recruited subject mentors benefit from high-quality training and support to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.

What it's like to be a trainee at this provider

Trainees enjoy their training and are proud of their learning. Many come direct from industry, including from the many land-based specialisms that the college provides. Others benefit from a strong culture of internal promotions into teaching roles from, for example, learner support and progress coach roles.

Trainees feel welcomed from the very start of their programme. They benefit from a comprehensive induction programme which helps them understand quickly about their roles,

professional boundaries and the support network around them. Trainees consistently refer to the professional and caring ethos that helps them to feel valued.

Trainees benefit from a very consistent focus on their wellbeing and any support needs that they may have. Staff promptly identify appropriate support strategies and implement these quickly and effectively. This has a demonstrable positive impact on trainees' experiences. Trainees consistently endorse the impact of this support on their ability to cope with challenges or vulnerabilities.

Trainees rate highly their weekly taught training sessions. Many describe these as a 'highlight of the week'. They value the significant expertise of their tutors and the practical support that they receive from knowledgeable tutors and mentors. They enjoy the multi-discipline, cross-college network of peers that they swiftly become part of as a result of the course. They peer observe or shadow colleagues to learn from expert practitioners and reflect wisely on their learning and what they can bring back to their own practice.

Leaders make effective use of internal stakeholders to teach part of the curriculum, which ensures that trainees gain a good understanding of the roles of other specialists such as learning support and digital skills colleagues. Trainees enjoy opportunities to co-teach with other trainees across specialisms and levels to widen their understanding and apply their emerging skills in other contexts.

About this inspection

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

Inspectors spoke with leaders, managers, teacher educators, mentors, trainees and former trainees during the inspection.

Sparsholt College is a further education college in Hampshire. It has 2 campuses, one is in Sparsholt and the other is in Andover. Sparsholt College is a specialist agricultural and horticultural college which also offers a broad vocational curriculum at its Andover campus. Almost all initial teacher education trainees study the level 5 learning and skills teacher apprenticeship, with a few trainees completing the level 5 diploma in education and training. All new trainees will study the level 5 apprenticeship standard.

At the time of the inspection, there were 21 trainees in scope for the inspection. They are all employed by the college.

Lead inspector:

Ann Monaghan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Viki Faulkner, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This 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 9 March 2026

Number of partners and trainees

Education phase	Number of training partners / partner colleges	Number of trainees
Further education and skills	N/A	21

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 training. 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 training.

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