

Inspection of Lakes College – West Cumbria

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 January 2024

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

Information about this provider

Lakes College – West Cumbria is a general further education college based predominantly on one campus situated between Workington and Whitehaven, Cumbria. The college is a founding member of the National College for Nuclear (NCfN), an employer-led organisation designed to meet the skills needs of the nuclear sector.

At the time of the inspection, there were around 900 learners on vocational education programmes for young people in most sector areas, including a growing T-level provision. College leaders have opted not to offer academic A-level courses as they believe there are sufficient other opportunities in the locality for learners to study.

Around 300 adult learners study courses from entry level to level 3. Most adult learners study vocational courses at level 3 in retail and commercial enterprise or health and social care. At the time of inspection, 11 adult learners were studying a level 3 access to higher education (HE) programme.

There were 64 learners with high needs studying at the college at the time of the inspection. Thirty of these were studying a full-time vocational course, seven were on the Next Steps programme, 19 were on a pre-supported internship, and the remaining eight learners were on a supported internship.

Around 1,000 apprentices study with the college at levels 2 to 6 across a large number of standards in almost all sector areas. The largest of these standards are in health and social care, nuclear, and skilled trades related to the nuclear supply chain, including fabrication, welding, maintenance and operations, and engineering. Approximately one-third of all apprentices are under the age of 19.

The college has a subcontracting agreement in place with one subcontractor. However, at the time of inspection, no learners were studying as part of this arrangement.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning at the college. They routinely attend their classes and practical sessions, arrive on time and are prepared to learn. As a result, most learners and apprentices receive the teaching they need to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours to be successful in life and at work.

Leaders and teachers provide calm and inclusive environments in which to learn. Learners and apprentices contribute enthusiastically to their learning sessions. Teachers support learners with high needs to manage their behaviour through self-regulation.

Learners and apprentices behave well in communal areas around the college. They routinely display respect towards each other, are polite and courteous to visitors and hold doors for staff in corridors.

Learners and apprentices develop and demonstrate professional behaviours in the workplace. In service industries, such as hospitality and catering, they routinely receive positive feedback from customers, who praise them for their politeness, knowledge, professionalism and customer service.

Most learners and apprentices take pride in their work. Learners and apprentices take their learning seriously as they know how important it is to their next steps in apprenticeships, employment or further study.

In the large majority of cases, learners and apprentices, including those with high needs, are supported to develop their confidence and independence. There are many examples of how learners and apprentices become confident to undertake new tasks. For example, on T Level Health, learners make decisions independently and use their knowledge and skills confidently on placement when taking blood pressure and completing patient observations.

Leaders and managers have put in place a personal development curriculum which provides a rich set of experiences for learners and develops their understanding of both their locality and the wider world. The programme includes guest speakers who discuss key topics related to life in modern Britain. For example, recognising that the locality has very few ethnic minority residents, leaders arranged for a guest speaker to talk to students about Muslim life in British society.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have about themselves or others. Learners and apprentices are confident that staff will deal quickly and effectively with incidents reported to them.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers engage with a broad range of stakeholders to understand skills needs locally, regionally and nationally. They are active members of several strategic boards and partnerships and use these to inform the curriculum and to develop additional services for learners, apprentices and other stakeholders who use the college and its facilities.

Leaders and managers actively encourage community groups and social action projects to use the college to host large community and education events, enabling those with barriers to education and training to access high-quality industry-standard resources. For example, the 'Festival of Work' event resulted in over 1,200 children from local schools meeting with regional and national employers to develop an understanding of their career options.

Leaders work proactively with three other further education providers in the area, developing collaborative working practices and joint bids that have benefited the community. The college and its leadership team are the lead provider in several of these initiatives. This has included the Skills Hub Cumbria Project, which has led to five projects to enhance the skills offer in the region, including an apprenticeship hub, solutions for business, a digital hub and a skills centre located across these providers.

In the large majority of cases, leaders have sought the views of employers and stakeholders in developing the curriculums that they offer. They have developed effective relationships with employers and stakeholders, which result in the continual development of curriculums to meet both local and national skills needs. However, in a minority of cases, such as in some adult learning programmes, leaders have not yet fully engaged employers or stakeholders in shaping and developing the curriculums. Consequently, a small minority of learners do not benefit from this input into their learning.

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

Leaders use their acute understanding of local and regional needs and the challenges specific to the locality to inform strategic planning of curriculums and the college's offer. Leaders work collaboratively with stakeholders, such as the National College for Nuclear and National Nuclear Laboratory, to identify regional and national needs for various specialist roles, including nuclear decommissioning and civil engineering. Leaders design curriculums in response to learner and employer needs to respond to the technical and vocational skills needs of the region.

Leaders and managers have developed ambitious curriculums in line with the local skills improvement plan. They ensure that the curriculums meet the needs of most employers, learners and apprentices, including those with high needs. However, in

adult learning programmes, while the number of learners who successfully achieve their qualifications is high, not all learners receive the teaching they need to prepare them well for their potential next steps. Leaders have recognised this and, prior to the inspection, had begun improving aspects of these curriculums. However, the impact of these improvements cannot yet be seen.

In the majority of cases, managers and teachers have developed logically ordered curriculums that build effectively on earlier learning. For example, level 3 installation and maintenance electrician apprentices benefit from a curriculum with high academic, technical and vocational ambitions. In Year 1, apprentices develop their skills in the state-of-the-art apprenticeship academy. This enables apprentices to move into their work placements in Year 2 well equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to work to a high standard from the outset. As a result, most learners and apprentices benefit from curriculums that support them to develop their knowledge and skills throughout their studies.

Leaders have redesigned the curriculums for learners with high needs with support from external practitioners. They now have a curriculum that is ambitious and well tailored to meet learners' individual needs. The new curriculums focus on preparing learners for adulthood, including being more independent and to consider employment opportunities, whether paid or voluntary. Learners with high needs who study in vocational areas of the college, such as catering and beauty, benefit from suitable curriculums and support that meet their needs and helps them to prepare for their next steps.

In the large majority of cases, managers and teachers use the starting points of learners and apprentices effectively to plan their learning. Learners and apprentices complete a range of initial assessments in mathematics, English, digital and study skills and logical thinking skills. This information is used effectively to plan individual learning and review the progress of most learners and apprentices from their starting points. However, in adult learning programmes, teachers do not always use the results of initial assessments well enough. As a result, too many adult learners are not supported to make rapid progress.

Teachers monitor the progress of most learners and apprentices effectively. When learners and apprentices fall behind, staff rapidly intervene to help them to catch up. Consequently, most students and apprentices are on track to achieve their qualifications. However, in a small minority of cases, such as in T-level digital support services, teachers' target-setting is not always precise enough. As a result, in these cases, learners' progress is less clear, hampering teachers' ability to provide support where needed.

In most lessons, teachers use questioning and retrieval techniques skilfully when building on knowledge and skills over time. As a result, the large majority of learners and apprentices learn more and remember more throughout their studies. In T-level Health, teachers use quizzes and rapid-fire answers to check learners' knowledge and understanding of blood constituents to ensure that their knowledge is secure.

They then discuss how many litres of blood are in the body, how blood loss impacts patients and blood transfusions.

Teachers have the appropriate expertise and experience in their subject area to teach. They participate in regular professional development to ensure that they keep their knowledge current in their sector area and undertake effective training to improve their teaching skills. This means that learners and apprentices benefit from current industry knowledge and practice, which is taught effectively.

Teachers routinely support most learners and apprentices to develop their English and mathematical skills. For example, in level 2 Plumbing, students develop their mathematics skills in real-world applications. Students can calculate wall areas to determine the number of tiles, adhesive and edging required in line with customer requirements, account for wastage and move between imperial and metric measurements in line with trade standards. This means that learners and apprentices develop the English and mathematical skills they need to prepare them well for their next steps.

Leaders and managers use quality processes effectively to identify underperforming courses. Leaders have identified a minority of poorly performing apprenticeships, such as those in health and social care, and have taken appropriate steps to significantly reduce recruitment to these apprenticeships while the quality is improved in line with the other apprenticeships that they offer. They have also restructured the management of adult learning programmes and begun work on improving curriculums in these areas.

The large majority of learners and apprentices are provided with timely and effective feedback on their work. For example, most apprentices complete online skills competency assessments in health and safety and are given clear and helpful feedback, which helps them to identify areas of weakness in their knowledge and improve their practice. As a result, learners and apprentices know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work.

Leaders have recently revised their careers programme and strengthened the team to offer learners a broader suite of services. In education programmes for young people, careers options are routinely discussed in tutorials and through guest speaker visits. Apprentices discuss career opportunities during regular progress reviews. However, leaders recognise that the number of adults and apprentices who access the new service on campus is low and are working to improve engagement by promoting the offer further.

In most cases, learners and apprentices can discuss their understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Some learners demonstrate a developed understanding of the local risks, such as county lines and far-right activity in the locality. Other learners discuss the risks of creating an online footprint to their personal safety and future careers. As a result, most learners and apprentices are well equipped with the knowledge they need to keep themselves safe. However, the understanding of these topics for learners with high needs is less well developed.

Governors provide strong support and challenge to leaders and clearly understand and support the college's strategic plan. They clearly articulate changes to the curriculum in recent years and their roles in the rationale for these changes; for example, the benefits of a diverse apprenticeship offer for young people from disadvantaged areas that the college serves, where full-time education may not be viable financially.

Governors prioritise the safeguarding and well-being of learners. They understand local and regional risks well and prioritise the mental health and well-being of learners and staff. They have undertaken appropriate training, understand their responsibilities and take these very seriously when supporting leaders.

The large majority of learners and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their courses and progress to positive destinations on completion of their studies. Most apprentices who successfully complete their studies achieve high grades. However, on a few adult learning programmes, such as level 3 access to HE, learners do not benefit from sufficient teaching to ensure that they achieve their full potential and are consequently not well prepared for their next steps.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the quality of teaching that adult learners receive to provide them with the support they need to prepare them for their next steps.
- Improve the quality of teaching on the minority of poorly performing apprenticeships so that all apprentices receive the same high-quality teaching.
- Ensure that all teachers set sufficiently precise targets for all learners and apprentices to enable the effective monitoring of their progress.
- Ensure that all learners and apprentices, including those with high needs, understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Provider details

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| Contact number | 01946 839 300 |
| Website | www.lcwc.ac.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Chris Nattress |
| Provider type | General further education college |
| Dates of previous inspection | 5 to 8 December 2017 |
| Main subcontractors | Learning Curve Group |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal – curriculum & 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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