

Inspection of Blackburn College

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 November 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Information about this provider

Blackburn College is a large general further education college in Blackburn, Lancashire. It is situated on one campus in Blackburn town centre. The college was founded in 1888 to provide technical, employment-focused education for the people of Blackburn and the surrounding area. Leaders offer a range of academic, vocational and technical education, including A levels, T levels, Skills Bootcamps (bootcamps) and apprenticeships, for students aged 16 and over. Almost all students come from Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire local authorities.

The college provides education and training to 2,921 young people. Most students study vocational and academic courses from entry level to level 3 in most subject areas. Just under a third of students follow courses at entry level and level 1, over a third study courses at level 2 and one third of students are on level 3 courses. A few students study from a choice of around 20 A-level subjects and six T-level courses.

There are 1,422 adult students, most of whom study on a part-time basis, including bootcamps in electric and hybrid vehicles. Most students study courses at entry level and level 1 and the rest follow level 2 and level 3 courses. The highest enrolments are in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), skills for work, English and

mathematics. A few students follow full-time courses, including access to higher education (HE), construction, catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy.

There are 427 apprentices who study apprenticeships from levels 2 to 6. Most apprentices follow apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 with the largest enrolments in accounting, hairdressing, joinery, early years, automotive, electrical, plumbing, housing and people professional.

The college receives high-needs funding for 141 students. Over half of these students study vocational courses from levels 1 to 3 or A levels. There are 23 students who study at level 3, 29 students study level 2 courses and 31 students follow level 1 courses. Just under a half of students follow foundation-level courses, including 21 students who are currently following pre-supported internship courses or supported internships.

The college works with one subcontractor, Blackburn Rovers Community Trust, which provides training for 46 students. Most students are aged 16 to 18, and a few are aged over 19 years. Students study sports coaching courses at levels 2 and 3.

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

Students and apprentices really enjoy coming to college, where they are treated equally and respectfully by supportive and helpful tutors. They appreciate the cohesive and harmonious culture that leaders, managers and tutors create. Students and apprentices have incredibly positive attitudes to their learning. They are exceptionally courteous and respectful towards each other in college and at work. Attendance is high across all provision types.

Students and apprentices take part in a wide range of activities that build their confidence, employability skills and character. They participate in charitable fundraising and overseas visits. Level 3 business students are involved in a sustainability working project in Bali. Adult students studying ESOL courses create artwork to raise funds for charity. Students with high needs on uniformed and public service courses develop their communication and social skills when they visit a local fire station. Apprentices participate in training to become first aiders and fire marshals.

Students aged 16 to 18, many of whom have not achieved well at school, enjoy extremely ambitious curriculums. Those who study level 2 and 3 sports curriculums gain additional qualifications, including Football Association playmaker and introduction to Futsal. Students benefit from highly purposeful and stimulating work placements. Level 2 health and social care students practise theoretical concepts such as caring for people with dementia in clinical settings. They develop the key knowledge and skills they need for their future employment. Students are very motivated to achieve their qualifications. They make excellent progress on their courses, and their achievement is high.

Adult students, many of whom begin their courses far from the job market, make outstanding progress. Students recognise and are proud of the rapid progress that they make. They benefit from logically sequenced and carefully designed courses that help ESOL students build language skills swiftly. Access to HE students develop academic knowledge and skills confidently and competently. Students' lives are transformed because of what they learn on their courses. They move on to positive destinations, including employment and further study such as degrees in radiography and midwifery.

Most apprentices make good progress on their apprenticeship and develop substantial new knowledge and skills. Plumbing apprentices confidently shape and fit copper pipes in recesses. Apprentices develop the behaviours that their employers need because of their apprenticeship. They are committed to their learning and take pride in their achievements. Early years practitioner apprentices have key worker responsibilities at work. They communicate successfully with parents and carers during end-of-day handovers. Apprentices who stay to the end of their course achieve their apprenticeship.

Students with high needs benefit from effective transition arrangements into college. A designated member of the transition team helps them prepare for their new

course and settle into college life. Students learn in a fully accessible environment. They use specialist equipment such as speech-to-talk software. Most students make good progress in their academic, communication and teamwork skills, which prepares them for their next steps. Most students move on to supported internships, paid work, volunteering or further education courses.

Students and apprentices feel safe and know who to contact with any concerns. They learn about local issues such as right-wing and Islamic extremism and knife crime. Students know how to keep themselves safe in their local communities such as walking in well-lit areas and taking a bus if possible. Students and apprentices follow health and safety practices effectively. Electric and hybrid bootcamp students work safely such as testing category zero gloves with a pneumatic tester. Plumbing apprentices know the risks to look out for in ventilation equipment in different buildings.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders are highly responsive to meeting the skills needs of a wide range of relevant stakeholders. They identify accurately local and regional priorities and use this information successfully to strategically plan their curriculum offer. Leaders work closely with Lancashire Skills Hub, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Blackburn Jobcentre to respond innovatively to skills shortages. They have developed courses in ESOL that support those who are hardest to reach to move on to further learning and enter employment. Leaders work closely with community groups and charities to support local needs and the economy. They partner with the Youth Zone to engage with young people who are not in education, employment or training. The college offers a 12-week employability course that supports young people in re-engaging in education or employment.

Leaders collaborate exceptionally well with a wide range of employers and partners to ensure that they meet the future needs of key industries. They invest strategically in facilities and resources that ensure students can learn about up-to-date sector innovations, including retrofit in construction, hydrogen and hybrid technologies in motor vehicle, and digital and cyber technology. Digital students use the latest cybersecurity equipment to test their skills at defending servers from an attack in a controlled environment and to understand the ethical rules that run alongside cyberattacks.

Leaders use partners' expert knowledge to inform their curriculums and develop tailored education courses. For example, leaders have established a simulated hospital ward to provide essential clinical skills training for nursing cadets. Cadets practise hands-on skills in a controlled, realistic environment, bridging the gap between academic study and practical experience. In the T-level digital production, design and development course, guest lectures are planned in the curriculum. Speakers cover topics such as personal brand management and conduct on social

media. Employers appreciate how successfully leaders provide training that meets their business needs.

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

Leaders, governors and staff are passionate about the college. They have high expectations and aspirations for students and apprentices to succeed. Leaders provide carefully considered and ambitious curriculums that meet the needs of most students and apprentices very well. Students and apprentices develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their next steps. Students studying A-level law develop self-confidence and belief in their abilities to apply to prestigious universities.

Tutors and assessors are experts in their fields. They keep up to date with changes in their sectors through industrial updating. Leaders have strengthened the training that staff receive to improve their teaching practice through the introduction of 'transforming teaching'. GCSE mathematics tutors use the techniques they have learned, such as interleaving, successfully in lessons.

Tutors plan and sequence curriculums extremely well so that young people and adults build effectively on earlier learning. Access to HE health and social work students develop their academic referencing and study skills first. Next, they learn about biomolecules and professional behaviours. Finally, they learn more complex aspects such as conducting practical investigations. Although students with high needs benefit from learning that builds their knowledge and skills over time, too often, staff do not give them enough opportunities to develop their independent thinking skills. This means that a few students do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

Leaders and assessors work closely with employers to agree the content and order of apprentices' curriculums. They plan and coordinate on- and off-the-job training effectively so that apprentices apply what they learn in their training at work. Level 2 hairdressing apprentices confidently carry out consultations with customers, discussing hair types. Most apprentices develop swiftly the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to be successful. Managers and assessors put in place appropriate plans to ensure that apprentices who fall behind catch up swiftly.

Tutors teach their subjects to a very high standard so that young people and adults understand key concepts. Following tutor-led exposition, T-level digital design and production students create presentations to summarise their understanding. Tutors use employer-based recruitment tasks with adult students on skills for work courses. Students work collaboratively with their peers to succeed in the tasks they are set. Most students with high needs benefit from high-quality teaching that helps them to understand and retain the knowledge they learn. Where this is less effective, a few foundation learning students find it difficult to recall information they have learned previously.

Most tutors and assessors provide helpful feedback to students that tells them what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Access to HE health and social work students improve their referencing in their written work because of the feedback they receive. Most students with high needs benefit from the constructive oral feedback tutors provide. Tutors do not routinely give useful written feedback to students, which means that students do not always make improvements as swiftly as they can.

Students and apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills on their courses. They improve their technical vocabulary and use it correctly. Students on electric and hybrid bootcamps explain expertly the equipment they use such as multimeters. Plumbing apprentices accurately calculate the pressure drop values in different pipe sizes used in boiler ventilation outlets.

Leaders and managers have implemented a highly effective and well-planned careers strategy that students and apprentices benefit from greatly. Level 2 health and social care students have individual meetings with their tutor to talk about their employment options or further study. Students talk enthusiastically about the range of career opportunities they can move into. Students with high needs have access to an extensive range of bespoke advice and guidance, including adapted CV templates. They take part in reverse careers fairs where they highlight their abilities to potential employers.

Leaders are relentless in their efforts to improve the outcomes for students and apprentices. They have in place a range of suitable quality assurance and improvement processes to monitor and improve the standard of education that students and apprentices receive. Leaders' actions have been highly effective in bringing about sustained improvements to the progress and achievement of adult students and young people on most courses. They are unrelenting in their focus to improve attendance and higher grades for students who study GCSE mathematics. In apprenticeships, where leaders identify areas requiring improvement and put in place suitable actions, achievement rates improve. However, leaders have not put in place timely enough interventions across all apprenticeships or ensured that the improvements they make are sustained over time.

Leaders work closely and successfully with their subcontractor. They have an effective oversight of the quality of provision. Managers at the subcontractor appreciate the support of college leaders in improving the education that students receive. Leaders and managers accurately and swiftly identify areas of weakness and put in place actions to eradicate them. Subcontractor staff benefit from attending staff development sessions at the college.

Governors are committed to transforming the lives of students and apprentices at the college. They play an active role in understanding the quality of education across curriculums, for example when conducting learning walks and attending quality summits. Leaders provide governors with a range of useful and highly detailed reports that they use to challenge leaders and provide effective scrutiny. Governors

have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Implement effective, timely and sustainable quality improvement measures across all apprenticeships so that the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeships is consistently high.
- Ensure that staff give students with high needs enough opportunities to develop their independent thinking skills so that students make at least the progress they are capable of on their course.
- Improve students' attendance and the proportion of students who achieve higher grades in GCSE mathematics.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130736
Address	Blackburn College Harrison Centre Feilden Street Blackburn Lancashire BB2 1LH
Contact number	0125455144
Website	www.blackburn.ac.uk
Principal	Fazal Dad
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	10 to 13 January 2022
Main subcontractors	Blackburn Rovers Community Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-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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