

Inspection of South Gloucestershire and Stroud College

Inspection dates: 30 January to 2 February 2024

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

Information about this provider

South Gloucestershire and Stroud College (SGS) was formed from the merger of Filton and Stroud colleges in 2012. The college has six main campuses. The Filton campus in North Bristol provides vocational and technical education, including T levels. Academic education, including A levels, is provided at SGS Sixth Form on this site.

The WISE campus in South Gloucestershire provides specialist facilities for sport, arts and media. The nearby Horizon campus was opened in 2023 to provide specialist construction facilities for apprentices. The Queens Road campus in central Bristol specialises in art.

The Stroud campus in Gloucestershire provides a range of vocational education programmes. It is also the site for learners aged 14 to 16 who study full time on the 'SGS Create' programme.

The Berkeley Green campus is based within the Gloucestershire Science and Technology Park. Skills Bootcamps have previously been offered to adult learners at

this site in green construction skills, including retrofit. There were no Skills Bootcamps at the time of the inspection.

Around 3,800 learners aged 16 to 18 study on programmes at levels 1 to 3. Around 50 learners study T levels in education and childcare, and health. Around 80 learners aged 14 to 16 study full time. Just under 200 learners aged 14 to 16 study part time at SGS. Most of these learners are electively home educated.

Around 3,800 adult learners study a wide range of courses from entry level to level 3, with a very small proportion studying professional qualifications at levels 4 and 5. Leaders work with one subcontractor, which provides art therapy to support the rehabilitation of learners.

Around 900 apprentices study apprenticeship standards. Over half study at level 3 and around a third study at level 2. The remainder study at levels 4 and 5.

Around 400 learners aged 16 to 24 with high needs study at SGS. Of these, just over half study courses specifically designed for them, at both the Filton and Stroud campuses. Just under half study academic, vocational and technical programmes in the wider college.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy studying in the highly inclusive environment created by staff at all levels and in all areas of the college. Leaders value and nurture diversity. They work with a range of partners highly effectively to develop curriculums that meet the varied needs of their communities exceptionally well. For example, leaders recently started a new full-time provision for learners aged 14 to 16, many of whom have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. Leaders and managers are successfully meeting the needs of this growing cohort of learners, who would otherwise not be in education and training.

Learners and apprentices are taught curriculums that have been thoughtfully designed. Teachers provide learners and apprentices with opportunities to develop their personal attributes and employability skills, as well as to gain a wider understanding of how to contribute positively to society. Young learners enjoy studying a carefully planned and resourced tutorial programme. This includes taking part in a wide range of activities, such as external visits, visiting guest speakers, and open day events, as well as many other initiatives, including collaborations with mental health charities. Tutors relate tutorial topics well to the subjects learners study. As a result, learners gain a valuable understanding of the relevance of what they learn and how it applies to them personally.

Learners and apprentices are prepared very well for their next steps, including employment, apprenticeships, further or higher education, or their successful integration into society. For example, teachers of adults studying English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) skilfully teach important interview and job application skills. Teachers of adults studying access to higher education (access to HE) health and social care teach learners using a highly effective career programme; they successfully introduce learners to a wide range of careers options and university courses through their positive collaboration with academic healthcare professionals. As a result, learners make well-informed decisions about their next steps and make strong and often successful applications.

Young learners take part in valuable work experience that extends and deepens their understanding of their chosen subjects and/or career pathways. Leaders and managers use their extensive contacts with employers well to provide worthwhile opportunities for learners to develop their knowledge of work and practical employability skills. Learners value their work experience coaches, who develop their work readiness skills and behaviours well, in preparation for their placements at work. Learners studying the T level in early years education apply well what they have learned in the classroom and integrate this into their developing professional practice. As a result, learners feel fully accepted in their work placements and are treated as respected members of staff.

Learners with high needs studying on programmes specifically designed for them often participate in work-related activities that are not sufficiently personalised. Leaders recognise rightly the need to ensure that these learners have the same opportunities to develop their interests and pursue their career ambitions as other

learners. They have recently appointed a manager to develop the work experience offer for these learners further.

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning. Teachers have expert knowledge of the subjects they teach, including, where relevant, significant experience in industry. Teaching staff are qualified teachers or working towards higher-level teaching qualifications. Most teachers combine their expert knowledge and teaching skills well to plan and teach interesting and suitably challenging lessons. For example, level 4 supply and procurement apprenticeship teachers use a variety of business types and employment sectors to expand discussions and to reveal to apprentices scenarios beyond their current workplaces. As a result, most learners and apprentices make good progress in developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours, including in their understanding of how these relate to the workplace.

Learners and apprentices develop quickly their positive attitudes to learning and high standards of professional behaviour. This is because teachers set high expectations and role model professional standards and behaviours consistently well. Learners and apprentices studying on construction programmes start their lessons earlier in the morning, to mirror industry standards. Learners value the high-quality facilities available to them and treat their teachers and peers with mutual respect. Most learners and apprentices attend well. Leaders have appropriate processes in place to monitor and follow up on non-attendance. Despite this, although improved, too few young learners studying GCSE mathematics attend their lessons.

Learners and apprentices are very well supported by staff, particularly in relation to their well-being and mental health. Leaders and managers place a high priority on ensuring learners and apprentices feel confident to ask for help if and when needed. As a result, learners and apprentices feel valued by staff.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college. They rarely experience harassment or discrimination and are confident that staff would listen and take swift and appropriate action. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and know how to stay safe online. Young learners are taught well and know the characteristics of healthy relationships.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work highly collaboratively with South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire and City of Bristol local authorities, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), Business West, the regional Employer Representative Body, and over 1,500 employers, including many small, medium and large organisations, such as the NHS and Amazon. Leaders and managers use the knowledge they gain from these associations to inform and continually develop the curriculum. For example, in response to feedback from employers in the creative sector, managers have introduced the digitisation of learners' work. Learners studying art learn the skills

needed to convert artwork into digital files, and learners studying musical theatre learn how to select and edit their stage performances to create self-tapes to be used at auditions. Leaders used funding from the Local Skills Improvement Fund to create new digital learning suites where learners use high-tech equipment and develop the digital skills needed to showcase their work to future employers. Leaders have responded positively to the local need for construction skills. The new purpose-built Horizon campus provides apprenticeships in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, and electrical and plumbing at levels 2 and 3. As a result of the changes to the curriculum, learners and apprentices develop the up-to-date knowledge and skills required in each employment sector.

Leaders and managers have an in-depth understanding of, and respond positively to, the skills priorities and needs of the locality. They work highly effectively in partnerships to support the implementation of the local skills improvement plans. Leaders have worked successfully with Gloucestershire local authority and Leeds City College to develop new full-time provision for learners aged 14 to 16, as well as to help reduce the high number of young people not attending education.

Leaders are proactive in their response to meeting future skills needs. They have developed Skills Bootcamps for adults in green skills, such as air source heat pump and solar photovoltaics. Learners studying electrical and plumbing at level 2 now study additional courses in renewables and retrofit techniques to help to prepare them for local employment opportunities.

Leaders have established annual employer partnership boards in every curriculum area. During these meetings, staff and employers discuss the design of the curriculum. Staff then update the content and teaching of their curriculum so that learners and apprentices learn the relevant knowledge and skills that prepare them very well for future employment, education or training. For example, managers of the supply and procurement apprenticeship adjust the sequence and assessment of the curriculum to meet the needs of local employers, including Babcock and the Ministry of Defence. Learners studying the T level early years educator at level 3 learn new storytelling techniques from a visiting professional storyteller. Through collaboration with the Red Robe Theatre, level 2 creative media learners study scene creation and analysis techniques, and as a result of input from the BBC, learners now use the same industry-standard software as major broadcasters. Level 3 musical theatre learners work with an external professional actor to develop and perform their end-of-year production to a high commercial standard. The University of the West of England provides learners studying on the access to HE health and social care programme with workshops on values-based recruitment. Leaders work with Amazon to design and implement supported internships for learners with high needs. This enables them to gain experience working in the parcels industry and supports their progression into paid employment.

Leaders and managers work very effectively with WECA to plan and provide curriculums for adults who are disadvantaged or disengaged from education and employment. Partnership work with employers from a local abattoir, a manufacturing and production company, Job Centre Plus, Bristol MIND and local community groups

has resulted in a reshaped ESOL curriculum that helps to prepare adults for specific local employment opportunities. A new pre-entry ESOL programme meets the needs of learners who are refugees or asylum seekers.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision for providing education and training that contributes strongly to meeting the needs of local and national employers. Leaders consider carefully their local communities and demographics when designing and building curriculums that aim to empower learners and apprentices, enable social mobility and improve life chances. For example, leaders work closely with schools and Bristol and South Gloucestershire local authorities to develop an apprenticeship for teaching assistants to help to fill the large numbers of employment vacancies. Leaders and managers have worked closely with the probation service to develop a successful programme for ex-offenders and those recovering from addiction to train as fitness instructors and personal trainers. As a result, these learners achieve professional qualifications, gain successful employment locally, contribute positively to their communities, and substantially reduce their risk of re-offending.

Leaders have been courageous in their development of new full-time provision for learners aged 14 to 16. They have committed substantial resources, time and research into developing the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of these young learners extremely well. The first cohort of learners joined the college in September 2023. Early indications suggest that the learners, many of whom have previous low rates of attendance at school, are on track to achieve their curricular goals. Leaders care deeply about providing opportunities for these learners, many of whom have experienced disadvantage, have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or negative prior experiences at school. By supporting these learners to stay on their programme and achieve qualifications, and by advising them on their next steps, leaders aim to contribute to the reduction of young people who are not in education or training.

Leaders have recently made improvements to the design and implementation of programmes designed specifically for learners with high needs. They have rightly raised staff's aspirations for these learners. They have improved the emphasis on learners progressing into employment, further training and independent living. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum mostly contains appropriate qualifications or learning opportunities, providing learners with the right level of challenge based on their starting points. However, leaders have yet to implement their plans in all programmes for learners to study a more ambitious English and mathematics curriculum.

Leaders have rightly introduced new helpful processes for the teachers of learners with high needs. These support teachers to recognise and record the progress that learners are making throughout their programmes. However, the processes are not yet fully developed. For example, learners are not encouraged to reflect sufficiently

on their achievement, and teachers are yet to use the information consistently well to inform the planning of teaching sessions. Leaders recognise rightly there is further work to do to track the progress that learners make towards challenging goals.

Leaders and managers promote an effective culture of continual improvement. They provide teachers with many opportunities to develop further their teaching skills. For example, staff take part in useful training on college themes such as giving learners time to practise the retrieval of knowledge and the importance of learners asking questions, as well as in subject-specific areas such as staying up to date with developments in curriculum and assessment. Teachers who are new or have identified areas for development are supported to improve through impactful mentoring from trained staff. As a result, most teachers use a range of effective strategies to help learners and apprentices learn.

Teachers plan the curriculum well. They consider carefully the sequence of topics and activities to ensure that learners and apprentices can build on previous learning. For example, in level 3 sport and exercise science, teachers teach learners about bones and joints before moving on to how muscles attach to these bones and how movement is produced. Level 2 creative media and production technology teachers prioritise building learners' confidence and communication skills through activities involving working with new groups of people. They first work with peers in their class, then with staff and learners in the wider college and then external clients, such as local businesses, in preparation for work placements in industry. Level 3 teaching assistant apprenticeship teachers explain different theories of behaviour management for children before apprentices explore the policies at their employers, to compare and evaluate them. As a result, learners and apprentices make sense of their new learning and build confidence in their new knowledge and skills.

Most teachers explain key concepts to learners and apprentices clearly. For example, level 3 T level early years educator teachers use their knowledge and industry experience well to pitch their explanations at the right level. They use frequent question-and-answer sessions to involve all learners and to check their understanding. Teachers of learners with high needs use a range of methods, such as using British Sign Language, visual aids and augmentative and alternative communication devices, to communicate effectively with learners with the highest levels of need.

Teachers know their learners well. They provide appropriate and additional support to those who need it. For example, teachers of ESOL provide additional one-to-one support for learners whose first language is Arabic, to provide practical support for the application of letters and numbers. Learners who begin to fall behind in GCSE mathematics also receive additional one-to-one support from teachers to support them to make better progress in learning the curriculum content. Teachers make appropriate adjustments to support the needs of learners with SEND, such as altering seating plans in lessons, providing quiet spaces during breaktimes, and the use of digital resources or equipment to support learning.

Teachers support learners and apprentices to develop their English, mathematical and digital skills well. For example, level 2 electrical installation teachers teach calculations and scientific equations early in the course. This enables learners to use them in practical applications, such as laying cables. Level 3 musical theatre teachers develop learners' writing skills from descriptive writing to analytical and evaluative assessments, using digital platforms to present reviews of their work.

Most teachers design teaching and assessment activities well in order to help learners and apprentices apply and practise what they are learning. For example, level 3 T level early years educator teachers frequently set learners homework that builds usefully and explores further the content of lessons. Level 2 carpentry and joinery apprenticeship teachers build apprentices' skills sequentially, such as how to progress from making simple to more complex joints. They use frequent repetition of apprentices' skills to increase the level of accuracy and the speed of work. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not plan sufficient opportunities for learners to develop fluency and deeper knowledge. For example, in GCSE mathematics for learners aged 14 to 16, teachers do not provide enough variation in learning activities to allow learners to develop their reasoning skills by tackling problems in different ways.

Most teachers provide learners and apprentices with useful feedback that helps them to improve the standard of their work over time. For example, level 2 electrical installation teachers provide learners with useful feedback on the standard of their work and set clear personalised targets for each learner so that they know what they need to do to improve further. Level 1 art and design teachers provide learners with clear guidance on the criteria for achieving higher grades. They provide learners with helpful feedback on project work, including guidance on how to reflect, and they signpost them to further areas of research. However, in GCSE mathematics, teachers often do not provide enough useful feedback to support learners to know what to do differently when they provide incorrect answers to questions.

Teachers gather useful information about what apprentices already know and can do at the start of the apprenticeship. However, not all teachers use this information consistently well to plan teaching activities. As a result, some apprentices, such as a few in carpentry and joinery, repeat prior learning and therefore do not make progress as swiftly as they could. Most teachers work with employers well to review the progress that apprentices make and to set them appropriate and challenging targets. However, the reviews of the progress apprentices make are not consistently useful. For example, level 4 procurement and supply apprentices are set targets that are too open-ended. As a result, apprentices do not always achieve the targets as rapidly as they could.

Teachers mostly coordinate apprentices' on- and off-the-job training effectively. In some cases, this strongly supports apprentices to develop their skills rapidly and securely. For example, level 3 teaching apprentices first learn about behaviour management in lessons, and then, through coordination with their workplace mentor, they are given opportunities to practise dealing with increasingly difficult

behaviours by children in schools. However, in a few cases, apprentices have limited opportunities in their workplaces to practise their full range of skills. For example, a minority of carpentry and joinery apprentices complete repetitive tasks in their workplaces that lack variety.

Most apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Employers value the positive contribution that apprentices make to their businesses. Leaders and managers have ensured that the apprenticeships meet all the requirements of an apprenticeship.

Most adult learners achieve their qualifications. Apprentices studying at levels 2 and 3 mostly achieve well but, too often, the small cohort of those studying at higher levels 4 to 6 do not stay on their apprenticeship. However, those who remain on programme achieve well, with many achieving distinction standards. Learners on study programmes do not achieve consistently well, with learners at levels 1 and 2 often achieving less well than learners studying at level 3. In part, this is owing to leaders' approach to supporting learners who are the hardest to reach, ensuring all have an opportunity to attend and succeed by offering courses at lower levels that require few or no prior qualifications. Leaders train staff to help learners to overcome barriers to education, and retention and achievement are improving. Learners who remain on programme develop a wide range of knowledge and skills and are making the expected progress in learning the content of the curriculum.

Leaders rightly recognise that achievement for the small cohort of learners studying at AS and A level is too low, and too few learners progress to the second year of A levels. They have recently made changes to teaching linear A levels to better prepare learners for exams at the end of two years of study, but it is too soon to see the impact of these changes.

Learners with high needs who study academic, vocational and technical programmes in the wider college broadly achieve in line with their peers. This is in no small part because of the training that staff who work with these learners receive, to ensure they understand and use strategies to support these learners well.

Most learners and apprentices who complete their programmes achieve their goals to progress successfully to their next stage of education, employment or training. For example, most adult learners on access to HE health and social care progress to university to study nursing or allied health, including a few at prestigious universities. A very high proportion of apprentices remain in employment in their sectors, and most level 4 supply and procurement apprentices gain promotions. The majority of young learners studying at levels 1 and 2 progress to higher-level courses, apprenticeships or gain employment. Most level 3 sport and exercise science and musical theatre learners pursue their interests and talents further at university. Many learners with high needs successfully progress to higher levels of study, and a few join supported internship programmes to support them into employment further.

Leaders and managers analyse a range of useful information well to ensure they have a robust oversight of the quality of provision in each curriculum area. They use their oversight of strengths and weaknesses to take suitable actions that they monitor well to drive improvements. For example, leaders and managers carry out reviews of curriculum areas to check the quality of teaching through visiting lessons, both formally and informally, and sampling the quality of learners' and apprentices' work. Leaders provide staff with useful feedback and use this to put in place additional training and coaching to target specific areas for improvement, such as making more frequent checks on learners' learning.

Leaders and managers use data well to understand trends in good or poor learner performance through frequent monitoring. The majority of curriculum areas track well the progress that learners and apprentices make during their studies. However, in programmes specifically designed for learners with high needs, new processes are still in development. Leaders recognise rightly that they need a more thorough oversight of the progress that these learners make, so they can intervene more rapidly to make further improvements.

Leaders have effective oversight of the small amount of subcontracted provision that they have with one provider for adult learners. They carry out similar processes to assure themselves of the quality of provision as they do with other curriculum areas. This includes visits to lessons and scrutiny of the provider's own assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, these learners have positive experiences.

Governors have relevant experience and expertise. They use this well to support and challenge leaders effectively. Governors take advantage of a variety of opportunities to meet with learners and staff. This helps them to understand their experiences and adds context to the useful reports they receive and carefully review. Governors scrutinise leaders' action plans effectively to identify the impact and to challenge them to make timely improvements. Governors use their expertise well to add value to the organisation. For example, governors made the decision to employ youth workers instead of security guards to support improved behaviour of learners and apprentices on college campuses. Governors place a high priority on safeguarding and ensuring the college is a safe space for learners and apprentices.

Leaders have successfully developed a positive culture that values and nurtures learners, apprentices and staff. Leaders are mindful and considerate of the workload of staff. For example, leaders have invested heavily in digital developments linked to artificial intelligence to help to enable teachers to produce high-quality teaching and learning resources more efficiently. Staff feel valued by senior leaders and are rightly proud to work at the college.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the retention and achievement of learners aged 16 to 18 studying at A level and at levels 1 and 2.
- Improve the retention and achievement of apprentices studying at levels 4 to 6.
- Improve the curriculum for learners with high needs who study on programmes specifically designed for them by, for instance, including meaningful work-related learning activities and challenging English and mathematics content.
- Improve the oversight that leaders have of the progress that learners with high needs make from their starting points and ensure that improvement actions are rapid and effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	139238
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Website	http://www.sgscol.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Sara-Jane Watkins
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	17 October 2017
Main subcontractors	The Nelson Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, 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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