

Inspection of West Thames College

Inspection dates: 28 September–1 October 2021

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

Information about this provider

West Thames College (WTC) is a medium-sized general further education college with two main sites in the London Borough of Hounslow. WTC offers a broad curriculum in most subject areas for full- and part-time learners. The largest subject area in the college is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), followed by courses in technical and skilled trades, hair and beauty, pre-employment training, business and information and communications technology (ICT), and sport, travel and public services.

At the time of the inspection, there were 3,664 learners enrolled at the college. Of these, 1,993 were on adult learning programmes, 1,434 were on education programmes for young people, and 21 learners were on apprenticeships. There were 216 learners in receipt of high-needs funding.

WTC subcontracts a small part of its provision to the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sikh temple to run ESOL courses in the community. WTC also runs small groups of full-time provision for 14 to 16-year-old learners. These courses had not started at the time of the inspection.

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

Learners find the college a welcoming and inclusive place in which to study. They overwhelmingly enjoy their learning. They benefit greatly from friendly and helpful teachers who challenge them appropriately. Teachers give learners useful one-to-one support if there is something they do not understand. As a result, learners are extremely satisfied with the education and training they receive.

Learners benefit from good-quality resources and facilities across the college. For example, on adult ESOL courses, teachers skilfully use digital boards to stimulate discussion and extend learners' vocabulary. In adult mathematics courses, GCSE learners supplement their learning in their own time through good-quality online course materials. As a result, learners retain well the new knowledge they learn, and recall easily topics learned previously.

Learners receive good support to help them find employment. For example, on study programmes, learners gain valuable remote work experience at an international airport. Learners on health and social care courses volunteer to work with the NHS. They speak with industry experts about the degree-level job opportunities available to them. On back-to-work courses for adults, learners improve their confidence sufficiently to apply for jobs in customer service roles. Consequently, a very high proportion of adults successfully get jobs or progress at work after the end of their course.

Learners benefit from a secure, calm and orderly environment in which to learn. Leaders ensure that staff set consistently clear and very high expectations for learners' behaviour in the college. Learners therefore show exceptionally high levels of respectful behaviour to staff and their peers.

Learners understand well the importance of attending and being on time for lessons. As a result, learners' attendance on courses is consistently high across most of the college provision.

Learners value the highly visible security and staff presence around the college. Female learners report that the college is a space in which they are comfortable to be themselves. There are no places on the college site where they feel unsafe. Learners have a good understanding of who to go to if they have a concern about their own or others' well-being. Learners with learning disabilities receive helpful information illustrated with pictures which helps them understand how to keep themselves safe. Learners have full confidence that staff would act quickly and effectively if they reported any incidents of sexual abuse or harassment. Learners say that they have seen this happen.

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

Leaders have carefully chosen a curriculum that offers an appropriate range of programmes, subjects and levels of learning. These courses prepare learners well for progression onto higher levels of study within the college, to go to university and to gain employment. Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused strongly on working collaboratively with local employers. They have developed useful partnerships with regional education and skills networks. As a result, the curriculum successfully meets local employment opportunities, such as in the creative arts and media industries.

Leaders and managers plan a highly appropriate suite of courses for learners in receipt of high needs funding and learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These courses prepare learners well for living independently, progressing on to other courses and gaining employment. Learners studying catering and hospitality and business administration courses, for example, benefit from clear pathways starting at entry level through to level 2 courses. Learners in receipt of high needs funding on catering courses develop a good understanding of the subject. They learn about safe working practices, such as using knives with care. They talk knowledgeably about keeping surfaces clean and preventing cross-contamination when preparing food. Learners with high needs receive the support they need to acquire skills and knowledge at a level similar to that of their peers.

Across most subjects, managers and teachers accurately assess learners' starting points. They use this information to ensure that learners are on the right level of programme. For instance, in GCSE mathematics, during the first four weeks of the course, teachers track learners closely. Teachers are quick to step in to help learners when they make slower than expected progress. Teachers move learners onto a more suitable level of course if the subject content is too easy or too hard.

In most courses, teachers plan and teach the curriculum effectively. This helps learners build their knowledge securely over time. For example, on GCSE mathematics courses for adults, teachers start with teaching the basic rules, before moving onto decimals and fractions. In hairdressing, employers discuss jointly with teachers the order of topics taught in the classroom. Consequently, learners successfully apply the knowledge and skills they learn in the workplace. On a small proportion of study programmes, teachers do not plan courses well. This means that in a few cases, learners do not grasp new knowledge thoroughly enough before moving on to more difficult subjects. As a result, learners struggle to complete more complex tasks.

Teachers use a range of highly effective strategies to teach their subject knowledge. In arts and media study programmes, for example, teachers guide learners step by step through a series of complicated commands for creating digital artwork. Learners, as a result, develop the high-level technical skills in software applications required for employment in this sector. In cookery lessons for learners with high needs, teachers use probing questions well. They encourage learners to think about

what they need to do to cook pasta safely in boiling water. Consequently, learners confidently recognise the need to take care when carrying out this activity.

Teachers' feedback to learners in most subjects is of a good standard. It is particularly strong on adult learning programmes. For example, on access courses, teachers highlight learners' work where there is not enough detail. Teachers return marked work with useful feedback that helps learners improve their work. On apprenticeship courses, teachers challenge learners to explain what they have written in their assignments. Teachers ask apprentices how they apply the theory at work. Teachers rigorously check learners' understanding and question any misconceptions. Consequently, teachers on these programmes help learners to raise the standard of their work.

On study programmes, however, the quality of teachers' feedback to learners is not consistently good. On ESOL courses, for example, teachers do not consistently correct errors. In a few instances, teachers do not check that learners amend their mistakes. This means that learners continue to make the same errors over time. Leaders accurately identify that the quality of teaching needs to further improve in a minority of study programme subjects.

Leaders ensure that most learners receive suitable careers advice and guidance. This helps learners make well-informed choices about the options available to them at the end of their college course. For example, specialist careers staff coach learners through the different routes available to them. Staff support learners with course and job applications. Learners on level 3 engineering courses receive helpful and informative careers advice about degree apprenticeships. As a result, most adults and young people have a sound awareness of what they need to do to prepare for their next steps. A high proportion of learners progress onto higher-level courses at the college.

On business administration apprenticeship programmes, however, apprentices do not receive sufficient careers advice. In a small number of cases, apprentices at the end of their course do not know what they can do next. Leaders accurately identify the need to improve the careers advice available to apprentices.

Managers and teachers ensure that learners have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Learners receive useful information at the start of their course about learning safely online. As a result, learners know how to keep themselves safe.

Learners recall well the shared principles and values of living in modern Britain that they have been taught. They recognise appropriately how these values apply at college and in their wider lives. For example, on adult learning beauty courses, learners confidently discuss the importance of establishing a relationship with their client based on the values of mutual respect and tolerance.

Teachers ensure that learners on study programmes have a sound knowledge of healthy relationships. Learners understand well the meaning of terms such as

consent and coercive control. For example, learners describe situations where consent is inappropriate, such as when someone is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Learners know that they have a right to say 'no' if they are asked to do something they are uncomfortable with. They feel confident to raise any concerns they have with a member of staff.

Learners benefit from a broad range of extra-curricular activities in college, such as team sports, and drama and dance groups. Learners with SEND practise their singing and dancing skills during their lunchtime. Learners then put on a performance at the annual talent show. As a result, learners maintain positive attitudes, and gain wider social skills and confidence.

Governors have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Since the previous inspection, new governors have joined the governing body. Governors have a suitable range of specialist expertise, such as education, finance, and links with the local community. They receive useful information about learners' progress and the strengths and areas for improvement in the curriculum. They use this information effectively to challenge and support leaders and managers to improve college provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and managers have successfully created a culture of mutual respect and tolerance across the college. Learners feel safe and are safe. Bullying is rare and learners respect one another's differences. All staff know and look after their learners exceptionally well.

The well-qualified and experienced safeguarding team provides very effective care and support for learners. The designated safeguarding lead liaises appropriately with a wide range of welfare organisations. Staff from these organisations train learners in relevant safeguarding topics. For example, before the start of the summer holidays, learners received useful information about the dangers of misusing drugs and alcohol.

Leaders check and follow through rigorously any safeguarding concerns that arise, including those involving sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that the quality of education in the small proportion of subjects where it requires improving meets the high standard of other subject areas across the college.
- Managers and teachers should consistently provide learners with high-quality feedback on marked work, so that all learners know what they have done well and how to improve.
- Leaders should ensure that managers and teachers on apprenticeship courses plan and teach an effective personal development curriculum, including access to suitable careers advice and guidance.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130447
Address	London Road Isleworth Middlesex TW7 4HS
Contact number	02083262000
Website	www.west-thames.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Ms Tracy Aust
Provider type	FE College
Date of previous inspection	14–17 November 2017
Main subcontractors	Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sikh temple

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-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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