

# Kendal College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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# Monitoring visit: main findings

## Context and focus of visit

Kendal College was inspected in October 2023. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Kendal College is a small general further education college located in Kendal, Cumbria. The college provides a range of vocational, academic and higher education courses, as well as apprenticeships across its three sites in Kendal.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were just over 1,300 learners on education programmes for young people studying a range of academic and vocational courses at levels 1 to 3, including T levels, BTEC National Diplomas and A levels. Around 510 adult learners study courses at levels 1 to 4, with most studying part-time courses across a range of curriculum areas. There were 73 learners with high needs. These learners follow supported internships and a level 1 course to develop their independence, skills for work, English, mathematics and communication skills. The remainder study on full-time academic and vocational courses at levels 1 to 3. Just under 600 apprentices study at levels 2 to 5 in areas including construction, engineering, business, hair and beauty, pharmacy, education and agriculture.

## Themes

**How much progress have leaders made in improving quality assurance processes to accurately identify weaknesses in the quality of education and put actions in place to rectify them swiftly?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have overhauled quality assurance and improvement processes to gain an improved oversight of the strengths and weaknesses across the college. They use self-assessment and quality improvement processes to monitor and track performance more effectively. Investment in dedicated quality improvement and teaching and learning roles has helped leaders to focus on key areas of teaching and learning to develop an emerging cultural change from compliance to continuous improvement.

Leaders use curriculum performance reviews more incisively and thematically through the year. They link reviews to lesson observations, work scrutiny, the quality of feedback that teachers give to learners, learner survey results, retention and likely achievement to inform interventions. Leaders have ensured that more learners and

apprentices complete and achieve their courses and apprenticeships since the previous inspection.

Leaders have worked with teachers to design and implement a back-to-basics teaching and learning charter to improve the quality of teaching across the college. They now use a new negotiated observation process to plan relevant developmental staff training offered by new teaching and learning leads. All teachers have clear areas for development monitored by their managers and the quality team. They use this to improve their teaching practices.

Teachers talk positively about the changes they have seen at the college since the previous inspection. They appreciate that their opinions are valued by leaders. Teachers are empowered to help shape improvements in teaching and learning. Leaders have created a culture where teachers feel comfortable asking for help. Teachers value highly the negotiated observations where they ask for support in strengthening their teaching skills. Leaders and teachers have a greater focus on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback. They have a more consistent approach to quality assurance. Leaders recognise that some of their recent work has yet to demonstrate impact.

**How much progress have leaders and teachers made in improving the planning and teaching of the curriculums for learners on education programmes for young people, particularly on A-level courses? Reasonable progress**

Leaders have reviewed and adapted the curriculums to plan teaching more effectively. They have realigned and reduced the number of assessment points so that these align better with A-level assessment objectives. Learners on vocational studies benefit from taster sessions and experiential 'blocks' in a range of subject areas such as catering, animal care and hair and beauty. Teachers now individualise the learning to learners' passions. This means that most learners are better prepared to progress to their subject of choice at the end of year one.

Teachers use a range of strategies to ensure learners know more, remember more and develop their knowledge and skills sequentially. A-level English learners are taught the stages of child development and apply this knowledge when evaluating children's development from data sets. They identify that the child is in the holophrastic stage and therefore using single words. Learners evaluate the use of prosodic cues from the caregiver to encourage the child to communicate more. Psychology learners apply their knowledge of informative and normative social influences to case studies.

Most teachers use assessment skilfully to check learning and consolidate knowledge. Performing arts learners confidently discuss characterisation and how to stylistically present humour without sending cues to the audience. Sociology learners look in more detail at secularisation. They use journal articles and news reports to support

their analysis of whether there has been a decrease in the number of people with religious beliefs. However, in the less effective sessions, teachers do not use questioning effectively. They answer questions for learners and provide too much support. This inhibits learners in applying their learning to new concepts.

**How much progress have leaders and teachers made in providing all learners and apprentices with constructive feedback that tells them what they need to do to improve their work?** **Reasonable progress**

Teachers receive and use training on how to provide constructive and specific feedback that tells learners how to improve their work. Most learners and apprentices now benefit from useful feedback from their teachers and improve the quality of their written work throughout their course. Teachers clearly annotate pharmacy apprentices' assignment work, explaining how they can improve, even when the work is of a high standard. They remind apprentices of the need for in-text citation of any reference material used in their research. Apprentices use this feedback to demonstrate the comprehensive use of citation in subsequent assignments. T-level health learners benefit from feedback on structuring 12-mark questions. They accurately explain how to structure their answers more clearly to gain high grades.

In a few courses, teachers' feedback on written work is affirmatory but not developmental. Teachers do not identify what learners need to do to further improve their work, provide clear next steps or set appropriate targets. This means that a few learners do not make the expected improvements.

Learners and apprentices receive useful verbal feedback in practical workshop sessions. Hairdressing apprentices benefit from hints and tips about using a mirror to see hair graduation more easily when restyling long hair into a bob or providing aftercare advice on product use to maintain colour vibrancy and hair condition between salon visits. They develop their practical knowledge, skills and behaviours swiftly.

**How much progress have leaders made in working closer with employers to coordinate apprentices' training at college with the skills they are learning in the workplace?** **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have provided apprenticeship facilitators with effective training. This training supports their role as the key coordinator in planning, linking and involving employers in all elements of on- and off-the-job training to help apprentices to make progress in the workplace.

Apprenticeship facilitators routinely visit employers and apprentices in the workplace to secure a greater understanding of workplace environments and challenges, and to plan training more effectively. They ensure that apprentices benefit from timely

tripartite reviews to monitor their progress and plan their next steps and future development. Facilitators and tutors discuss any gaps in knowledge, skills and behaviours, and plan college and workplace opportunities to fill those gaps. For example, facilitators and employers plan additional training and practice in college for hairdressing apprentices so that they can practise techniques and develop skills, such as traditional wet sets, that are not in demand for their regular client base.

Employers now have a clearer oversight of apprentices' training plans. They influence the order and content of teaching where appropriate and facilitate opportunities for apprentices to enhance their new knowledge and skills. On the pharmacy technician apprenticeship, employers and tutors work together to adapt the teaching of dispensing and accuracy checking to meet the job demands. Apprentices learn about dispensing early in their programme so that they can begin to practise this task at work. They revisit this topic later as part of accuracy checking that requires more in-depth knowledge and skills as a vital part of the dispensing process.

**How much progress have leaders and teachers made in planning teaching effectively to meet the needs of learners with high needs enrolled on level 1 vocational studies? Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders and staff have established a positive working relationship with a local specialist school to help them to revise the curriculum offer. They have improved the planning and structure of the level 1 vocational curriculum. Leaders have appointed a new specialist team, better informed in meeting the needs of, and setting, education, health and care plan targets for learners with high needs to achieve their preparation for adulthood outcomes. However, leaders recognise that some academic targets remain too broad, making progress difficult to measure.

Learners now benefit from meaningful opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours linked to preparation for adulthood targets. They have worked on a social project to reduce food waste. This included a short cooking course with a Michelin-star chef, followed by learners selling their food in a community café.

Teaching staff benefit from improved training opportunities to better support learners with high needs. They receive training on the use of neurodiversity strategies. Teachers benefit from work shadowing and training in emotional regulation and sensory processing with a specialist provider.

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