

NCG

General further education college

Inspection dates	9–13 May and 28 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Full-time provision for 14 to 16-year-olds	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- The chief executive has successfully established a more collaborative and consultative management culture that effectively engages and motivates staff and partners for the benefit of learners.
- After a period of decline, most 16- to 19-year-old learners now make good progress. Learners develop a good range of vocational and practical skills, and a high proportion progress to apprenticeships, work or higher-level study.
- Governors and senior leaders have invested in high-quality, industry-standard resources that help learners make better progress.
- Leaders and managers plan a broad and varied curriculum that is highly responsive to meeting local priorities and employer demand.
- Staff provide excellent support to learners and create a positive rapport in the classrooms.
- Teachers have engaged enthusiastically in the college's extensive professional development programme with the result that the quality of teaching and learning has improved.
- As a result of leaders' and managers' strong focus on continuous improvement across complex and disparate provision, weaknesses identified in the self-assessment reports have been dealt with.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Learners' low attendance in English and mathematics lessons has resulted in low pass rates in these subjects.
- Too many learners in 2014/15 did not achieve as well as expected on A- and AS-level courses at Newcastle Sixth Form College.
- Not enough apprentices achieve their qualification within their planned timescales.
- The quality of provision at West Lancashire College needs further improvement.

Full report

Information about the provider

- NCG (the Group) is one of the largest providers of education, skills and employability provision in the United Kingdom, with an annual turnover in 2014/15 of almost £180 million. The Group consists of divisions comprising the four colleges, a work-based learning provider and a registered charity. As the last two providers are subject to separate inspections, the scope for this inspection only includes the four colleges within the group; Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College, Kidderminster College and West Lancashire College.
- The inspection team used a subset of the Qualification Achievement Report containing the NCG achievement rates, which corresponded to the four colleges in scope for the inspection. Performance data relating to the work-based learning provider and the register charity was disaggregated from the qualification achievement report.
- The largest proportion of the provision is at the two Newcastle sites. Unemployment in the North East is high; the region has the highest proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 in England who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). The proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is just below the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Integrate fully the recent changes in management and teaching, learning and assessment to improve the quality of provision and the achievement of learners, especially in English and mathematics. Ensure that staff provide demanding work for learners, especially those who are most able, so that they achieve better than expected from their prior achievements.
- Ensure that learners on A- and AS-level courses at Newcastle Sixth Form College make the progress expected based on their starting points.
- Develop further the current strategies to improve attendance across all divisions, so that more learners attend their classes regularly, especially for English and/or mathematics classes.
- Improve the management of the apprenticeship programme to ensure that all apprentices receive regular and frequent assessment and detailed tracking of their progress by their assessors to ensure that they all complete qualification requirements within their planned timescales.
- Take appropriate action to ensure that the quality of provision at West Lancashire College improves so that learners across the divisions enjoy the same good level of experience.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders are implementing an ambitious vision to become a high-quality provider of vocational provision reaching learners and partners nationally. To achieve this goal, they are successfully devolving responsibility for the performance and quality of provision across the Group to each of its constituent divisions. Accountability for performance and the capacity to improve outcomes for learners and standards in teaching and learning now rest firmly with the heads of division.
- The chief executive of the Group and the team of divisional principals have effectively used these new arrangements to arrest a decline in the achievement of groups of learners, such as those on level 3 programmes, and a deterioration in the quality of teaching and learning. Managers analysed accurately the causes of this decline and put in place actions that have led to the majority of the current cohort of learners making better progress. However, given the size of the group, the impact of these changes is not yet evident at every division, or for every provision type, such as apprenticeships delivered through Newcastle College and West Lancashire College.
- The chief executive, through an extensive consultation exercise with governors, staff and learners, has transformed the culture and values of the Group. Now staff at all levels are committed to the delivery of the strategic objectives of the organisation, and they are motivated and enthusiastic to perform to the high standards set by managers. External partners recognise and value the more collaborative style of management, and are therefore more willing to enter into partnerships that benefit students. For example, relationships with secondary schools in Newcastle are now more positive than before, resulting in higher levels of recruitment into the college.
- Managers work effectively with teachers to evaluate and improve their performance. Managers use the findings from the observation of teaching and learning to inform the appraisals of individual members of staff. Specific and detailed action plans from observations also inform an extensive professional development programme, supported by the Group's school of education. Tutors receive skilled coaching to improve their practice. Consequently, the great majority of tutors who do not perform to the expected standard improve within a short space of time.
- Managers self-assess the provision accurately, identifying its strengths and areas for improvement. However, in the 2014/15 report, managers over-estimated the quality of outcomes for learners. Quality improvement plans are detailed and specific, and managers monitor their implementation rigorously. As a result, the key weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, such as retention and challenging the most able learners on academic programmes, have improved in the current year.
- Managers ensure that curriculum planning is highly responsive to regional economic priorities. Senior leaders use their well-established links with major employers and local enterprise partnerships to inform investment in training facilities and the design of courses. For example, the new Rail Academy is a direct response to the Northern Way strategy and now supplies railway companies with skilled construction and engineering staff. The curriculum is broad and varied, with strong progression pathways from entry level through to higher education. However, insufficient vocational options are available for the small group of current 14- to 16-year-old learners.
- The contract management of subcontractors is rigorous. Managers have devised an effective overarching framework for the Group through which they commission subcontractors. Divisional managers ensure that the performance of individual subcontractors improves continuously through regular monitoring and sharing of best practice. They decommission subcontractors who do not respond quickly enough to improvement plans to prevent exposure of learners to poor provision for prolonged periods.
- Managers have increased their level of monitoring of the performance in English and mathematics by using data-rich reports well. They have employed new specialist teaching staff and invested significantly in the training of all staff to integrate the development of English and mathematical skills into vocational provision. As a result, this has improved learners' progress but has yet to have a positive impact on achievement rates.
- The commitment of staff to the promotion of equality and diversity is good. Managers are assiduous in their analysis and follow up of data relating to the attainment of different groups of learners with the result that no significant or persistent differences between groups have emerged. Support for children looked after is well organised, and many of them make good progress, often from a low starting point. Students enjoy and respect the diversity of campus life.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governors have been instrumental in resetting the strategic direction of the Group and have supported

the establishment of the new leadership style and culture across the divisions.

- They support the current devolution of responsibilities to the separate divisions but continue to exercise effectively their role to scrutinise and challenge the performance of managers. For example, governors were quick to hold managers to account for the decline in performance in 2013/14 and oversee the improvement plans put in place to deal with the key areas for improvement.
- Governors' astute financial management has enabled the Group to invest in high-quality training facilities, such as the Rail Academy and the new Newcastle Sixth Form Centre.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.**

- Staff and learners understand the system for reporting safeguarding concerns, and to whom they need to report. Designated safeguarding officers have the appropriate level of qualifications for their role, and all staff complete their mandatory safeguarding training. Managers have good relationships with their local social services and police forces, and use them effectively to protect vulnerable learners, such as those at risk of child sexual exploitation.
 - The Group's safeguarding arrangements demonstrated their resilience during two major recent incidents when staff and students' security was threatened. Managers worked closely with the police and counter-terrorism agencies to increase security.
- Managers have implemented the 'Prevent' duty effectively. Staff understand how to identify any students at risk of radicalisation and extremism, with the result that they refer them to the right support agency. Managers devise imaginative ways to raise students' awareness of 'Prevent', such as a theatre production attended by 2,000 Newcastle College students. Staff at West Lancashire College do not inform learners on apprenticeships on these topics as well their colleagues in the other colleges. A minority of teachers do not reinforce British values often enough in lessons, particularly for a minority of adult learners and apprentices.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good across most provision types. They require improvement on apprenticeships where progress is slow. Learners benefit from well-qualified teachers who use their extensive industrial experience to devise activities that help learners develop the skills they need to gain employment or progress to higher-level education or training. Lessons in practical and vocational skills are particularly effective.
- Excellent resources, available across all divisions, support teaching and learning. These provide plentiful opportunities to help learners develop techniques and gain expertise. Teachers take care to keep up to date with industry standards and changes, such as in the gaming industry, so that they are able to enhance learners' employability skills very effectively. Learners enjoy their work and are motivated to progress to higher levels of study as a result. Opportunities for learners to help train and mentor younger learners at lower levels, in areas such as hospitality, promote employability through applying supervisory skills. Teachers and trainers promote health and safety well in lessons.
- Teachers are highly committed and dedicated to supporting their learners. They understand well the barriers some learners face and work very hard to help them overcome these. Learners value highly their approachability and willingness to provide extra help when needed.
- Teachers make good use of the Group's many professional development opportunities and are thoughtful teachers. They are very keen to develop their own teaching skills and apply what they have learned. The beneficial impact of this on learners is evident. For example, work on behaviour management has helped some teachers to adapt teaching styles to capture learners' interest more effectively and reduce low-level misbehaviour. On courses where learners have not made enough progress over time, teachers have adapted their practice, planning a variety of different strategies to improve learners' progress. As a result of these changes, learners are making better progress this year. Most teachers have high expectations of learners, but occasionally their focus on support and encouragement means they do not place enough demands upon learners, especially the most able.
- Teachers plan lessons well and use a wide range of activities and tasks to ensure that they improve learners' knowledge and understanding of their subjects. In classroom-based lessons, they use a variety of techniques to support learners who are finding the work difficult, such as helping them devise mnemonics to remember important terms.
- Teachers use a good variety of effective methods to check learners' understanding in lessons. For example, through skilful questioning and the use of mini-whiteboards for learners to present their answers, and through the monitoring of individual learners' work. Teachers assess learners' work regularly and most teachers carefully monitor progress and skills development. Teachers' effective oral and written feedback ensures that many learners understand what they need to do to improve further,

although this is weaker at West Lancashire College.

- In Newcastle Sixth Form College, managers have introduced a new online system that allows much closer tracking by staff of learners' attendance and progress. Individual teachers and learners use this well; as a result, college data shows that the progress of current AS- and A-level learners has improved. The system has encouraged more parents to become involved in supporting their children at college, for example by improving the young person's attendance. Where learners fall behind, staff offer additional sessions to help them catch up, and many subjects and courses offer additional revision sessions near the end of the course.
- Learners and staff treat each other with care and respect. Well-qualified staff support learners who have additional needs through highly effective partnerships with other agencies, and through careful planning of support. Staff are very attentive to learners' well-being and provide support and guidance promptly when required. Highly skilled support staff work successfully in a variety of ways with learners to ensure they can benefit from their studies fully. Support staff provide very effective individual in-class help, additional small group sessions or supervised one-to-one private study, which all help individuals make good progress. Specialist staff, technology and facilities support learners with high needs exceptionally well.
- Divisional managers have established appropriate and effective systems to improve teaching in English and mathematics. Staff use systems for tracking learners' progress thoroughly and comprehensively, particularly at Newcastle College, and managers are able to use the information to identify areas or classes where areas for improvement, such as slow progress, exist. Mentors successfully support mathematics teachers to develop their skills; this work is having a positive impact on learners' progress. Teachers of discrete English and mathematics lessons are patient, encouraging and supportive and build learners' confidence successfully.
- Despite these improvements, not enough learners make the progress needed to gain their English and mathematics qualifications, often because of poor attendance. Teachers' marking is usually thorough, and often highlights topics or features that learners need to revise or practise, but not all learners follow this guidance well enough. In lessons where learners are working at different levels of study, teachers do not consistently provide a range of activities to meet the needs of individual learners sufficiently.
- In most areas, the integration of English and mathematics into vocational lessons is effective for younger learners and helps them improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers give good attention to subject-specific vocabulary. However, not all teachers make best use of initial assessment information to give enough attention to particularly weak literacy skills among learners in vocational lessons. In a small minority of adult lessons, teachers do not give sufficient attention to English and mathematics.
- In a few instances, teaching, learning and assessment do not reflect the generally good standards seen across the divisions. Assessors do not plan all apprentices' targets and training well enough, resulting in slow progress. In a minority of college lessons, particularly on higher-level courses and among most-able learners at West Lancashire College, learners do not always work at the required level and therefore do not make sufficient progress. A minority of teachers fail to plan adequately for learners to deepen and extend their learning, and do not always establish what a learner can or cannot do before progressing to the next activity. Not all staff at Kidderminster College set sufficiently ambitious targets for learners.
- All teachers have had training in British values and helpful summaries are included in planning files. The majority use these materials well. A mathematics teacher used the forthcoming European Union referendum and learners' voting intentions to encourage a brief discussion about democracy before using the voting data to draw pie charts, and then work out proportions and percentages. Other teachers are less confident and do not reinforce British values often enough in lessons.
- Many teachers promote understanding of diversity well. They make effective use of presentations, handouts and class discussions. Posters on display around colleges reinforce this. Some departments, such as performing arts, build themes into the curriculum and use them in performances that are widely shared with other learners. Learners recognise the importance colleges place on promoting equality and understanding diversity, and understand their responsibilities in respect of these topics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are good

- Learners and apprentices show good attitudes to learning. They display a willingness to learn, follow instructions and carry out tasks readily, working independently or collaboratively. Learners' behaviour and conduct around the college sites and in learning areas are good. They are polite, courteous, and highly respectful of staff and their peers.
- Teachers and the dedicated specialist support staff develop the social skills of learners very effectively

through collaborative activities in lessons, and by participation in well-managed enrichment activities. Staff support learners through an exemplary range of support services. Innovative examples include a 'buddy dog' used to support learners with autism that has enabled individual learners to settle into situations they normally find stressful. A breakfast club has helped others to establish more regular and healthy eating habits.

- Learning support assistants offer effective one-to-one private study support as well as in-class support to those with specific needs. Learning mentors provide day-to-day support and successfully improve learners' attendance, self-esteem, confidence and independence. Learners become more confident and resilient, and persist with their studies as a result of the support they receive. Support for learners who are vulnerable due to their personal circumstances is particularly effective. Highly effective collaboration between college welfare officers and other agencies, including social services, ensures a smooth transition to and from the college.
- Learners and apprentices develop good employability skills. For college learners, effective teaching and support contribute well to the development of these skills, together with the wide-ranging additional activities including many that are work-related. Teachers make good use of occupational contexts and examples to reinforce industry standards and expectations. Learners working in the college restaurant and hairdressing salons demonstrate good customer service skills and many learners develop good team working skills. Not all study programme learners on vocational courses have the opportunity to undertake external work experience, which limits their opportunities. Nevertheless, work-related experiences such as 'live' briefs, realistic work environment sessions, project work and performances provide valuable opportunities that develop skills well.
- College staff promote equality well. The colleges are inclusive learning environments where mutual respect and tolerance are emphasised. Learners have a reasonable understanding of diversity in modern Britain. Many learners understand the risks; they know how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremism and to whom they should report any concerns. Staff at West Lancashire College do not inform learners on apprenticeships as well on these topics as their colleagues in the other colleges.
- Vocational teachers use their links with industry and employers well to advise learners about future options and job opportunities. Specialist staff provide very good help with applications for university, for example in drafting personal statements and choosing suitable courses. A-level learners not intending to progress to university benefit from specialist careers advice. Most learners have clear ideas and plans about their future options and career opportunities. In many cases, learners' aspirations are now higher because of the encouragement of college staff.
- Attendance across the divisions has improved slightly this year, except at West Lancashire College where it fell slightly. Attendance is not yet good enough, especially on English and mathematics courses, where it is significantly lower than the overall average. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons is particularly poor at Kidderminster and West Lancashire colleges.
- The tutorial programme covers many topics relevant to learners' lives and their plans for their futures, but the topics covered vary between tutors and sites. Staff know their learners well. They help to create a safe and secure environment for their learners, which learners value highly. Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media, at work and in their daily lives. Displays around the college help them develop their understanding further.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- The majority of learners attending the different divisions within the Group make good progress. Those on vocational courses develop good practical and employability skills that reflect demanding industry standards and support high levels of progression into training and employment. College staff have obtained detailed progression and destination information for learners who left in 2014/15. This shows that the large majority of learners either progressed to a higher level of study, into training or employment. In some areas, such as the Rail Academy at Newcastle College, the rate of such progression is 100%.
- The very small number of pupils on the full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-olds make good progress in most subjects, with particularly good progress in English and mathematics. Pupils develop their academic skills and understanding, achieving qualifications that enable them to progress to further study.
- Learners on adult provision make strong progress in the development of practical skills and knowledge. High numbers of adult learners are on courses that help them to progress successfully into employment, with learners developing good work-related skills. Adult learners achieve well and achieve high levels of progression to further study, including higher education. For example, at West Lancashire College, where they know the destinations of the large majority of adults, just under half continue in education, nearly a

third go into work and around a fifth to higher education.

- Learners with high needs make good progress in their lessons, produce work of a high standard and achieve well, supported by excellent specialist resources. Learners become more independent in their learning and their living, with the majority reducing their need for support in learning.
- On 16 to 19 study programmes in 2014/15, learners' success rates were around those of similar providers, although achievement rates on A- and AS-level courses and on English and mathematics courses were low. Following successful intervention, including more effective tracking of learners' progress, college data shows that in-year retention on AS courses has improved and learners on English and mathematics courses are making better progress. Achievement rates for learners on award and certificate programmes have been at or above the high national rates for the last three years.
- In previous years, not enough learners on level 3 courses made the progress expected of them compared to their prior starting points. Progress was particularly weak on A- and AS-level courses at the Newcastle Sixth Form College. The progress of current learners is now more closely monitored and college data shows that a high proportion of learners now make better progress on their courses.
- Teachers now use a much more effective system to track the progress learners make in GCSE and functional skills in English and mathematics. Learners' success rates for achieving A* to C grades on GCSE provision have improved significantly from a very low base, but still remain too low.
- Success rates for apprentices in 2014/15 across the divisions were not high enough, with lower numbers than those seen nationally completing their courses, and only just over half completing in the planned timescale. However, success rates for those apprentices at Kidderminster College, both overall and within the planned timescales, were strong. The proportion of apprentices across the divisions who have completed the course so far this year has improved and this rate is now good.
- Apprentices develop relevant skills and knowledge, such as good team-working skills. The large majority of apprentices progress into sustained employment. The proportion who complete in the planned timescale has also increased slightly but remains too low. Progress is weakest for apprentices at West Lancashire College. Apprentices currently on their programme make slow progress.
- No significant and sustained variations exist in the performance of different groups of learners. Where staff have identified differences, they have implemented effective strategies to address them. Staff place a strong focus on the performance of those who underachieve nationally, such as children looked after, and these learners make good progress.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The four college divisions that form part of the NCG group provide learning across all subject areas with progression pathways from entry to level 3. At the time of inspection, 6,230 learners were on study programmes at Newcastle College, 942 at West Lancashire College and 1,030 at Kidderminster College. In addition, Newcastle College offers a range of specialist industry facilities including railway and aeronautical engineering, performing arts, hospitality and beauty therapy. Some 1,127 learners are studying A levels covering 30 subjects and an access programme at Newcastle Sixth Form College.
- Learners are enthusiastic and motivated to do well. They develop confidence, behave well in and out of lessons and show a high level of respect for one another and college staff.
- Teachers have high expectations of learners that enable them to develop good industry-standard practical skills. For example, in hairdressing lessons, learners create imaginative cuts and styles for a show and in engineering learners create high-quality precision tools. Health and safety practices are consistently good in keeping learners safe in workshops, and learners know how to keep themselves safe within the workplace.
- Staff plan well to provide support in class for learners with additional needs and this is effective in building learners' confidence, keeping them on task and enabling them to make progress.
- Learners benefit from good work experience opportunities. The majority of learners have completed work experience linked to their course and staff have plans for the remainder before the end of term. Learners also benefit from regular visits from local and national employers, and from industry competitions that encourage learners to develop their employability skills effectively.
- Managers at Newcastle College have developed excellent links with local employers. The rail and aviation academies provide high-quality resources and work highly effectively with employers to develop relevant industry skills for learners. This prepares them well for employment. Many learners from the academies progress directly into employment or higher education on completion of their courses.
- Learners benefit from effective information, advice and guidance at the beginning of their programmes

that prepares them well for progression at the end of their courses. Teachers give good ongoing information about employer events, and learners gain a broad understanding of job opportunities and further learning. The majority of learners progress into further learning, higher education or apprenticeships.

- Teachers provide effective written feedback that is developmental and identifies where learners can make improvements to their work. Teachers also provide regular oral feedback in tutorials that enables learners to set short-term targets. Learners value feedback that helps them to improve their work and make further progress. A minority of learners at the Newcastle campuses do not present their work well and it is not of a sufficiently high standard.
- Learners make good progress in lessons, are able to demonstrate their learning well and give relevant examples linked to their area of vocational learning. Teachers check understanding effectively using a range of methods to encourage learners to give examples to illustrate the depth of their knowledge.
- In a small minority of lessons at Newcastle College, teachers do not check the understanding of quieter learners sufficiently, and they do not make sufficient progress. At West Lancashire College, teachers' testing and checking of learners' knowledge is under-developed.
- In previous years, not enough learners on level 3 programmes, particularly at A- and AS-level, made the progress expected of them on all their courses. Teachers now track the progress of learners at all levels more effectively. College data now shows the majority of learners make at least the expected progress from their starting points. In-year retention has increased significantly.
- Achievements in English and mathematics have been low for the last two years. Teachers at Newcastle and Kidderminster Colleges now integrate English and mathematics more effectively into vocational lessons. Teachers track learners' progress in English and mathematics more effectively to enable learners to achieve qualifications and improve their skills. However, attendance and achievement at English and mathematics lessons is still too low.
- Not all teachers use the results of initial assessment well enough to inform learning and to meet learners' individual needs. Teachers do not sufficiently extend the learning of the most able learners to ensure they meet their full potential. For example, target grades set for learners at Kidderminster College are not sufficiently ambitious in relation to their starting points.

Adult learning programmes

are good

- At the time of the inspection, there were 7,530 adult learners. Over the full year, adult learners make up just over one third of the Group's learner population. The two Newcastle sites cater for around three quarters of the Group's adult learners. Courses for adults are available in most subjects, through short employment programmes, as well as full-time and part-time programmes at college sites and at community venues.
- Managers have a good understanding of their local communities and local labour markets; they ensure that adult learners have access to well-targeted courses and programmes. The Group has established effective partnerships with local authorities, employers and Jobcentre Plus. This ensures that learners, including unemployed adults, develop good skills in vocational areas where skills shortages exist, such as social care and hospitality.
- Learners develop good work-related skills such as working effectively in teams and paying close attention to safe ways of working. The majority of teachers at Newcastle College and at West Lancashire College use a good range of strategies to ensure that learners are making good progress. Work experience placements are well coordinated and effective.
- Teachers provide good support that ensures that learners achieve well. A large majority of teachers have high expectations of learners, and they plan sessions thoroughly and effectively. Learners participate well in the good range of interesting and stimulating activities, and make good progress developing their practical skills and knowledge. At Kidderminster College, music practitioner learners receive highly effective support and almost all of them enter the music industry.
- Teachers at Newcastle and Kidderminster Colleges provide learners with well-crafted oral feedback on their work that motivates learners and ensures that they continue to improve. A majority of teachers provide learners with detailed written feedback on assignment work; they provide particularly good feedback for learners on the access to higher education courses, which helps them to consider the wider implications of academic theories. However, at West Lancashire College teachers do not provide learners with sufficiently detailed oral feedback.
- The majority of teachers promote equality of opportunity well in lessons and successfully encourage learners to understand their rights and responsibilities. Learners enjoy learning and demonstrate good standards of behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. They arrive at lessons well prepared for learning

and take pride in their work.

- Staff provide learners with helpful information, advice and careers guidance that ensure that learners are clear about their next steps in employment and learning. A high proportion of learners progress into jobs and further learning. Learners feel safe at the college sites and in community venues.
- A minority of teachers do not always do enough to ensure that all learners receive the help they need to develop their English and mathematical skills. For example, occasionally they do not integrate English and mathematics well enough into practical sessions. Consequently, learners do not always recognise important spelling, vocabulary and methods of calculation and analysis.
- A minority of teachers do not make sufficient use of learners' initial assessment results in their planning for lessons. Consequently, a few learners do not receive an appropriate level of challenge to help them learn, develop new skills and reach their full potential.
- A minority of teachers do not do enough to ensure that learners have a good understanding of modern British values.

Apprenticeships

require improvement

- Around 2,276 apprentices are currently on programmes at the three college divisions in the Group. More than half of these are at Newcastle College. The large majority of apprentices are on business administration, customer service and management programmes. The remainder are on health and social care, childcare, construction, hospitality, hairdressing, horticulture, retail, information and communication technology and supporting teaching and learning programmes.
- In 2014/15, with the exception of Kidderminster College, the proportion of apprentices who successfully completed their apprenticeship in the planned timescale was low, and below that of similar providers.
- In the current year, the proportion of apprentices who have completed has increased. The proportion completing in the planned time has increased marginally but remains low. More than four out of 10 apprentices do not complete in the planned time. A high proportion of those apprentices still on their programme are making slower than expected progress. The large majority of apprentices who complete their programme progress into sustained employment.
- Too often assessors do not identify the skills that apprentices already have in order to plan training and assessment more effectively. This results in apprentices not making the progress they are capable of achieving. A minority of employers are not sufficiently involved in planning the learning and reviewing the progress of their apprentices.
- Assessors do not set apprentices challenging targets to ensure they rapidly improve their skill development and further enhance their knowledge beyond the minimum levels of their qualification. Consequently, the most able apprentices do not develop their skills to a higher level.
- Managers' and assessors' reviews focus too much on apprentices' progress towards fulfilling the basic assessment requirements of qualifications, and take insufficient account of the progress apprentices make in improving their occupational skills or their personal and social skills. A minority of apprentices do not develop new skills or knowledge but receive accreditation for things they already know or can do.
- A small minority of programmes lack substantial and regular off-the-job training and do not always successfully develop the broader work-related personal and social skills that apprentices will need in their future careers. Assessors do not routinely record the off-the-job training that apprentices receive.
- Most apprentices who need to achieve English and mathematics functional skills qualifications do so successfully. Tutors and assessors do not always give sufficient attention to improving apprentices' English and mathematical skills beyond the minimum requirements. The assessment of apprentices' written work is not always thorough enough and, as a result, apprentices produce written work that contains too many grammatical and spelling inaccuracies.
- The vast majority of assessors have good technical ability and subject knowledge that they use skilfully to coach and develop apprentices' practical skills in the workplace and in off-the-job training. For example, apprentices on dental nurse programmes learn how to use correct communication skills when dealing with a range of individual client groups. Hairdressing apprentices demonstrate an understanding of correct procedures and apply products safely on their clients' hair.
- Apprentices develop self-confidence and demonstrate their learning in the workplace. Learners develop good teamworking skills and build good working relationships with colleagues. For example, management apprentices are able to resolve conflicts in the workplace successfully. Business administration apprentices develop good telephone techniques and are able to communicate confidently with their clients.

- Managers have very good links with a wide range of employers across the North East of England, and develop apprenticeship programmes successfully that meet local employers' needs. Managers align apprenticeship programmes well to the priorities of the local enterprise partnership in the North East.
- Apprentices are well motivated, enjoy their programmes and behave well. They demonstrate respect for their assessors, peers and colleagues and have a good understanding of how to stay safe and adopt safe working practices. They have a clear understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding and they know whom to approach if they have any concerns. However, a minority of apprentices do not have a well-developed knowledge of modern British values or understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Most tutors and assessors plan individual sessions well and use a wide range of teaching and learning strategies. Teachers link theory and practice well with good examples from the workplace. Apprentices undertake a wide range of relevant learning activities including additional qualifications, for example in first aid. Assessors give apprentices prompt and detailed verbal feedback on their work, which identifies what they have done well and how they can improve. Apprentices do not always receive written feedback, and when they do, it often lacks sufficient detail to enable them to understand what they have done well and what they need to improve.

Provision for learners with high needs is good

- The college divisions have 160 learners with high needs from seven local authorities, across four sites, and attract a small minority of learners with severe and complex learning difficulties and disabilities. The very large majority of learners study at Newcastle College, while others are on courses at West Lancashire, Kidderminster and Newcastle Sixth Form Colleges. Most learners follow mainstream vocational programmes at levels 2 and 3 in subjects such as health and social care, hospitality and catering, performing arts and creative studies. Other learners study on entry-level independent living programmes.
- Staff have high expectations of their learners and they develop good working relationships with local authorities and external partners to help learners to achieve their qualifications. They also successfully enable many learners to live more independently. The colleges make good use of funding to provide high levels of effective and accessible support provided by staff with excellent expertise, and to develop specialist facilities and equipment for learners with autism spectrum disorder or more complex needs, and for learners with visual and hearing impairment. Consequently, the majority of learners progress into higher levels of learning and become more independent, reducing their need for support in lessons.
- The large majority of learners make good progress during lessons, work collaboratively and contribute well in stimulating activities. Attendance and punctuality are good and learners achieve their core learning aims well. A wide range of excellent specialist resources such as assistive technology and transcripts for the visually impaired enable these learners to progress well. Learners take pride in their work and respond very well to staff requests and expectations. Learners on vocational programmes produce good-quality work and develop effective study skills.
- Learners participate well in their personalised learning programmes and in a good variety of relevant enrichment activities that help them to develop a range of practical skills, such as digital media skills, and performance and creative skills. Others enjoy visits to local shops and hotels where they develop good awareness of local employment opportunities and experience the world of work.
- Staff provide highly effective care and support, and work very successfully with health and social care partners, parents and guardians. They work very closely with a wide range of external agencies and professionals, such as sign language interpreters, speech and language therapists, mental health and sensory inclusion teams, to provide effective support. Highly effective care, advice and guidance help learners to achieve a smooth transition into college life, build their sense of self-worth, and significantly improve their personal and social skills and well-being. Young learners develop their social and communication skills and the confidence to achieve independence and prepare for adulthood.
- Managers have been highly effective in re-aligning the curriculum to local priorities. The recently opened Autism Academy provides a wide range of programmes and facilities to help young learners to achieve their goals, develop confidence and independence and to manage behaviour and anxieties. Learners with high needs progress well through a good range of vocational pathways, and the large majority develop knowledge of their industry well and gain useful practical skills.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. They behave well, respect others and understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They value their highly inclusive learning environment, enjoy taking part in debates and give their ideas and opinions freely. They identify examples of discrimination in workplaces and reflect well during discussions on diversity and current affairs. For example, two learners were enthusiastic when debating in their English lesson how religion affects dietary requirements, and a learner

on a custodial care services lesson produced a well-structured and reflective assignment on whether Britain should close its borders to migrants.

- Many learners benefit from relevant and worthwhile work experience in real work environments, for example outside the college in animal care, retail and garden centres, and on college sites where they practise their customer service and retail skills in a college cafeteria and shop. Many learners on discrete programmes do not access a work placement or an internship, although plans are in place to tackle this.
- Learners improve their understanding of the English language, produce well-structured assignments and are generally accurate in their use of spelling and punctuation. They develop effective communication skills and increase their knowledge of vocational terminology. Although the large majority develop their mathematical skills, for example in budgeting or in customer service contexts, staff do not always sufficiently challenge the most able learners to achieve at the higher levels of which they are capable.
- Staff skilfully assess learners' progress at the start of programmes and during lessons. Although in the initial stages staff are very thorough in assessing the needs of individual learners, a minority of teachers do not routinely use the findings well enough when planning lessons and reviewing progress. Not all teachers set targets for learners during progress reviews that are specific or measurable, and consequently not all learners have sufficiently clear guidance on how they can improve their work or achieve higher grades.

Full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-olds is good

- Newcastle College directly enrolls 13 14- to 16-year-old pupils. The curriculum meets statutory requirements for key stage 4 but the current year does not include vocational options and therefore does not meet all of the needs of the pupils.
- Staff, who are appropriately qualified, teach pupils well and have relevant subject knowledge of the 14 to 16 curriculum, with a balance of expertise between them from school and further education backgrounds.
- All pupils are well behaved. They have a positive attitude to learning, are highly motivated and display high levels of respect for their peers and staff. Attendance is good and the large majority of pupils arrive promptly for lessons.
- Teachers' planning and assessment for learning is highly effective, enabling pupils to make good progress from their starting points in the large majority of subjects, including those pupils in receipt of the pupil premium; pupils make very good progress in GCSE mathematics and GCSE English.
- Staff provide a dedicated and secure area for the pupils. Pupils feel safe at the college and are confident to approach a member of staff if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.
- The majority of pupils achieve their learning goals and qualifications, leading to very good sustained progression into further education. The majority of pupils progress to a higher level than might have been expected from their prior attainment.
- Staff carry out very good tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress, so that the majority know their target grades, their current progress and what they need to do to ensure they achieve.
- Teachers have very high expectations for all pupils. As a result, pupils improve the pace of their learning, achieving at least as well as expected and in the large majority of cases exceeding expected progress.
- Pupils develop their academic skills and understanding through varied teaching and learning activities. For example, in GCSE history, pupils chose a country to represent through discussion, enabling them to learn about the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In GCSE mathematics, information learning technology was used to very good effect to enhance the pupils' understanding of how to construct perpendicular lines, angle bisectors and rhombus shapes.
- The majority of teachers provide detailed and constructive written feedback to pupils, enabling them to improve their knowledge and understanding, highlighting spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	14+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	19,269
Principal/CEO	Mr Joe Docherty
Website address	www.ncgrp.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	2,030	3,423	3,262	2,547	4,854	1,560	9	91
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	361	831	116	872				94
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	124		121		245			
Number of learners aged 14-16	13							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside ■ The Development Manager Ltd ■ The West Midlands Creative Alliance Ltd ■ Claire Furness ■ Spokes CIC ■ Equitrain Ltd ■ Enabling Development Opportunities Ltd ■ Nova Recruitment Services Ltd ■ Universal Learning Streams Ltd ■ Training Event Safety Solutions Ltd ■ Acorn Training Ltd 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Tim Gardner, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Charles Searle	Her Majesty's Inspector
Heather Barnett	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ruth James	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Machell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jai Sharda	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jill Gray	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Aslett	Ofsted Inspector
Joanna Stokes	Ofsted Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Jonny Wright	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Lamb	Ofsted Inspector
Daniel Grant	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Hartmann	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Stella Owen	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Frear	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector

The above team, assisted by the Group director, quality and standards, as nominee, carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. On 28 June 2016, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors conducted an additional inspection visit under Ofsted's protocol for gathering additional evidence to secure an incomplete inspection. The focus of the visit was safeguarding following a letter of concern received before publication of the report.

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To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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