

Inspection of Inspire Education Group

Inspection dates: 7 to 10 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Inspire Education Group (IEG) is a large general further education college based in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. On 1 August 2020, Peterborough Regional College and New College Stamford merged to form Inspire Education Group. The college has two substantial sites in Peterborough and Stamford. The college has four other smaller sites, including the Media & Journalism Centre and the Jobsmart centre in Peterborough.

The college offers a wide range of courses for students aged 16 to 18, adults and apprentices. The curriculum offer covers most subject areas. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,058 students aged 16 to 18 and 2,288 adult students. There were 991 apprentices, most of whom are on standards-based qualifications in construction, engineering or health and science. There were 341 students in receipt of high-needs funding. There were 105 students aged 14 to 15 who study part time at the Peterborough campus.

IEG works with eight subcontractors. Two subcontractors offer apprenticeships, three offer education programmes for young people and four offer adult learning programmes.

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

Students and apprentices enjoy their time at IEG and demonstrate a positive attitude to their education and training. Most have high levels of attendance and participate fully in sessions. Students attending GCSE mathematics sessions arrive early and are ready to learn. Level 2 carpentry students follow instruction and develop good teamworking skills. Level 3 musical theatre students are highly motivated and excited about their learning. As a result, most students make good progress in their studies.

Staff at all levels care passionately about the well-being of their students. For example, the college was recently awarded the College of Sanctuary status. This reflects the work staff undertake with asylum seekers and refugees, who often suffer from trauma and poor mental health. Adult students on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes in community settings attend health and well-being coffee mornings. At these sessions, they receive a range of valuable additional health advice and support. Younger students benefit from a comprehensive tutorial programme that prepares them highly effectively for their next steps.

Students build their confidence and character. Many students undertake useful work experience, or they work on live briefs with employers. This enables students to usefully apply their knowledge and understanding of their subject in real-life settings. Other students take part in competitions or social action projects. For example, level 2 photography students work with a local mental health charity on a Christmas card project. Hospitality students participate in external competitions. Level 2 carpentry students take part in community projects with a local charity. As a result, students develop a good understanding of how to be a good citizen.

Students behave appropriately during sessions, in communal areas at the college and when on work placements. Most have not experienced bullying and harassment at the college. On the few occasions when this does occur, most students identify that staff take swift appropriate action.

Adult students study demanding programmes in an exceptionally positive, supportive learning environment. Students develop respectful and trusting relationships with one another and with staff, who often inspire them in their studies. Lecturers know their students well and provide them with individualised feedback, so students know what they need to improve. As a result, most see a swift improvement in their knowledge and skills and make excellent progress on their courses.

Apprentices gain valuable new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, engineering apprentices learn how to manufacture products such as a swinging hammer to the exacting standards expected in the industry. Apprentices benefit from high-quality industry standard equipment when at college. However, too few apprentices make good progress. Managers and lecturers do not consistently ensure that on- and off-the-job training is sufficiently linked to help apprentices apply their learning in the classroom to their workplace.

Students in receipt of high-needs funding enjoy being at college and make excellent progress. They benefit from ambitious programmes and study in calm, inclusive environments where they feel safe to ask questions and participate fully in sessions. Students are respectful of one another, listen to each other's opinions and are aware that people have different views.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college. Students understand the overall risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices are not always aware of local risks where they live and work or how to keep themselves safe from radicalisation and extremist views.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders ensure that the strategic aims and curriculum offer of the college are closely aligned to the priorities for skills needed within the region. For example, engineering managers have developed the level 3 engineering technician apprenticeship to help meet the need for mechanical, maintenance and product design engineering roles. The Air and Defence College, offered to students at Stamford and Peterborough, works very effectively with the Royal Air Force to plan and teach students about the Royal Air Force and wider aerospace industries. Leaders are developing the Green Technology Centre to offer new skills in areas such as electric vehicle technology. Leaders and managers are agile in developing new courses. They have worked closely with the Road Haulage Association to rapidly provide HGV driver training, and with Peterborough City Council to provide a taxi licensing course.

Leaders are key contributors to many strategic bodies. Leaders are proactive and work closely with the chamber of commerce, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and other local authorities. Leaders have been instrumental in the development of Peterborough Citizens. This programme aims to develop community leaders and take action to bring about positive, sustained change in the local community. Leaders have worked with partners to prioritise the development of courses for adult students who wish to study in their local communities. As a result, leaders have successfully developed high-quality innovative online English and mathematics courses for adults. Leaders and managers work with Gladstone District Community Association to provide high-quality employability skills training and English courses to asylum seekers and refugees.

Many curriculum area leaders have wide-ranging industry connections. Leaders use these links extensively to ensure that stakeholders and employers provide valuable input into the taught curriculum. For example, leaders chair the Peterborough Catering Association. Through this partnership, they have worked to update the catering curriculum to include more teaching on allergies and plant-based food. Within the arts, students work on live briefs, such as working with a local start-up business on their product photography. In a very small minority of curriculum areas,

such as business, stakeholders are not yet involved in the design or implementation of the courses.

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

In most curriculum areas, adults and younger students study courses which lecturers design and sequence highly effectively. Consequently, most students learn the right concepts in the right order and build their skills over time. On level 3 early years courses, students develop practical skills, such as safeguarding and writing observation records, in the first six weeks. Once students have experience working with babies and young children, they study child development and child health. On English and mathematics online courses, lecturers teach the fundamental skills first before moving on to more complex topics. For example, English teaching starts with skills such as organisational features of text. Students then learn more complex skills, such as language features and comparing texts. However, on a very small minority of courses lecturers do not sequence learning appropriately. For example, bricklaying students studying on courses for young people are not given adequate opportunity to learn essential brick-cutting skills.

Lecturers are appropriately qualified and have good levels of industry experience. They use a good range of effective teaching strategies to skilfully help students make good progress. Lecturers use effective techniques to ensure that students retain new knowledge and skills in their long-term memory. Within level 3 games development, lecturers plan highly effective sessions so that students practise using the core concepts they have learned. For example, when mixing music to video, students work with different styles of video and sound to develop synchronisation and tone choice skills. As a result, the quality of their games design improves over time to a high standard. In Year 2 physics A level, lecturers plan activities which revise previous topics very effectively and test students' knowledge and ability to recall key terms, such as spherical aberration and chromatic aberration. On adult ESOL courses, lecturers carefully repeat pronunciations and encourage students to practise their language skills. As a result, adult ESOL students develop significant fluency in speaking English.

Lecturers make highly effective use of adult students' starting points to plan ambitious programmes and to individualise teaching and learning. For example, on the new online English and mathematics functional skills courses, lecturers undertake detailed assessments. Lecturers then use these assessments to ensure that students gain the specific knowledge and skills they need to develop extremely good English and mathematics skills. As a result, high proportions of adult students achieve their qualifications. On apprenticeship courses, the apprentices' starting points are not always used effectively to inform teaching. For example, engineering lecturers do not check subjects that apprentices have studied in previous qualifications. As a result, a few apprentices must repeat subjects that they have previously studied.

On courses for adults and young people, lecturers use assessment highly effectively. Feedback identifies students' strengths and weaknesses and further develops their knowledge and understanding. As a result, students produce work of an appropriate, and in many cases, a very high standard. For example, on level 3 musical theatre courses, lecturers provide very detailed feedback on students' performance skills. This feedback helps students identify what they need to improve. Consequently, students make rapid improvements in their performance techniques throughout the course. On level 3 business courses, feedback allows students to recognise their strengths and weaknesses. For example, feedback on assignment work on the role of an event organiser encouraged students to discuss and reflect on how to overcome the challenges of planning different-sized events.

Lecturers on apprenticeship courses do not always use assessment appropriately. For example, apprentices on engineering technician and bricklaying standards do not receive feedback in a timely manner. This is frequently due to staff shortages and changes in staff in these areas. Consequently, many apprentices are unclear of the quality of their work and what they need to do to improve. Leaders and managers do not ensure that the very small number of apprentices with additional support needs receive the help they require. As a result of these factors, a significant proportion of apprentices are behind with their studies. Most apprentices are prepared appropriately for their final assessments.

Staff at the college have high expectations of their adult and younger students. As a result, achievement rates for adults and young people are mostly high, having improved significantly since the time of merger. Staff intervene swiftly to ensure that adults and young people, including those students in receipt of high-needs funding, do not fall behind. For example, younger students receive frequent academic reviews. Where student's attendance or the quality of their work falls, they are set action plans which enable them to improve rapidly. These action plans are closely monitored. Within adult courses, lecturers ensure that most students receive frequent support and feedback. Students value the support they receive from their lecturers, tutors and mentors.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that staff monitor the progress of the apprentices studying on the college's own apprenticeship provision in an effective manner. Leaders and managers have not ensured that most apprentices that start their apprenticeships remain in learning and achieve. Too few apprentices in construction, engineering and business administration achieve their qualifications. Apprentices on health and social care and sports coaching apprenticeships make good progress and achieve their qualifications in a timely manner.

Students and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills while studying at the college. Most progress on to positive destinations. Students enrolled on the Air and Defence College develop their skills in problem-solving. Apprentices on the community activator coach apprenticeship learn how to plan and lead coaching sessions. Students studying level 3 early years can explain the factors which may limit a child's development. Level 3 graphics students learn about colour

palettes and how to build up layers of colours. Adult ESOL students develop their competency in speaking English and learn how to apply for jobs.

Leaders and managers have a highly effective strategy that enables young students to develop good skills in English and mathematics. Attendance in English and mathematics lessons is high. As a result, younger students achieve very good results in their English and mathematics qualifications and develop the skills they need for career progression. For example, bricklaying students explain how they use ratio in mixing and building. Science students can explain how algebra relates to scientific formulas. Level 3 graphics students learn how to work to specific measurements or proportions and how to record scale, proportion and angles. Level 3 graphics students improve their communication skills when explaining their ideas and reflecting and evaluating their work. Community activator coach apprentices develop their communication skills when speaking to colleagues and coaching children.

Students in receipt of high-needs funding have an exceptionally positive experience at the college. Leaders and managers are extremely ambitious for students to achieve positive outcomes and participate fully. Most students studying on vocational and academic subjects across the college make excellent progress on their courses and achieve in line with their peers. Leaders have developed an ambitious, high-quality discrete curriculum with a broad range of pathways. These pathways provide students with opportunities to learn new skills and help them work towards semi-independent or independent living and/or work. For example, students on supported internships working within a healthcare setting can experience a range of roles, including those within data quality, patient records and transition care for young people. Other students experience working in local hotels and in local supermarkets. As a result of these programmes, students achieved paid or voluntary employment at the end of their course. Students benefit from using high-quality assistive technology and the specialist support they need to be successful on their courses. As a result, these students do not fall behind.

Leaders have adopted effectively an ethos that courses should be about careers rather than qualifications alone. Students benefit from a comprehensive programme of careers advice, information and guidance. This helps them understand the options available on completion of their programme. As a result, most students and apprentices progress to positive destinations at the end of their courses. Adult students benefit from the careers service one-to-one sessions at the Jobsmart centre. Students develop their confidence through CV writing and practising interview techniques.

Leaders and governors have high expectations of staff, students and apprentices. Governors are passionate and proud of the college. They add significant experience to the strategic oversight of the college. Governors frequently challenge leaders to set more stretching targets. Since the colleges merged in 2020, leaders have maintained the good quality of provision at the Stamford campus and have raised the quality of teaching and learning at the Peterborough campus. Leaders' actions have resulted in greater consistency in the standards of teaching across the two sites and the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications. Lecturers are

confident to be innovative in their teaching and assessment practice. Leaders continue to work towards improving those courses which are not yet good or better.

Leaders have improved their oversight of subcontracted provision. As a result, this provision is of a good quality. Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for their use of subcontractors. For example, leaders work in close partnership with The Eastern School of Performing Arts Limited to provide specialist performing arts courses in Stamford. Leaders work with Inspire Plus to provide sports coaching apprenticeships for young people working with schools across the region.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed an effective culture of safeguarding at the college. As a result, students and apprentices know how to keep themselves safe and they feel safe at the college.

Leaders have a good understanding of the local risks in the area. Leaders work effectively with safeguarding partners to ensure that they gather the information they need to inform staff of the key risks. Leaders take appropriate action when there are safeguarding concerns and make appropriate referrals.

Leaders have prioritised the teaching of healthy relationships. Students can identify types of inappropriate behaviours, such as sexual harassment, coercive control and domestic violence. As a result, students and apprentices develop a good understanding of healthy relationships.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers must ensure that staff accurately assess the starting points of apprentices. Staff must use this information to plan appropriate courses so that apprentices remain in learning, make good progress and achieve their course in a timely manner.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that staff work effectively with employers to plan and review the on- and off-the-job training so that apprentices have good opportunities to put their learning into practice in the workplace.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that staff track and monitor the progress that apprentices make on their courses. Staff must assess and return apprentices' work promptly. Staff must provide frequent and useful developmental feedback on the quality of apprentices' work, enabling apprentices to understand what they do effectively and what more they can do to improve their work further.

Provider details

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Website	www.peterborough.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Rachel Nicholls
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	20 to 23 May 2019
Main subcontractors	Inspire Plus Learning Curve Group Aspire Sporting Academy Ltd Gladstone District Community Association The Eastern School of Performing Arts Limited The Addict Dance Academy Ltd Peterborough City Council Peterborough Skills Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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