

Darlington College

General further education college

Inspection dates	17–20 May 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	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors, leaders and managers have made significant progress in tackling the serious weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, and all of these aspects are now good or improved.
- A well-planned, coherent curriculum offer meets the priorities of the local enterprise partnerships, the needs of employers and the local community.
- A robust and effective observation process, supported by an effective professional development programme, results in swift interventions that make improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment for learners.
- Learners develop very well the technical and employability skills they need for work and their future careers.
- Staff provide highly effective and comprehensive support, which ensures that learners stay on their course and are successful.
- The provision for adults is outstanding. Adult learners gain confidence and self-esteem which often results in transformative changes in their lives.
- The vast majority of current learners make at least the progress expected and many make good progress taking into account their low starting points. All learners gain relevant and valuable personal and social skills that help them to grow in confidence.
- The provision for learners with high needs is excellent; learners achieve well and develop their independence through good-quality work experience.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Not enough apprentices achieve their qualification in the planned time in subcontracted provision.
- Attendance in mathematics subjects for adults and for young people is low.
- Learners' understanding of mathematics and English in relation to the skills they need for study and work is insufficient.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Darlington College is a medium-sized general further education college with the main campus situated in Darlington. The catchment area includes Darlington and the neighbouring areas of North Yorkshire and County Durham.
- The college provides basic skills for army personnel based at the Catterick Garrison. Unemployment levels in the locality are above the national rate. In 2014, the proportion of school pupils in Darlington achieving five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was slightly above the national rate.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of apprentices who achieve their qualification in the planned time on subcontracted provision. Managers should monitor the progress that apprentices make on their qualifications and where progress is slow, support subcontractors to improve their provision.
- Improve attendance in mathematics subjects for adults and for young people.
- Improve learners' understanding of mathematics and English in relation to the skills they need for study and work by:
 - ensuring that tutors plan learning to meet all learners' needs so that they have a good understanding of concepts before moving on to new topics in mathematics lessons
 - helping apprentices extend their English and mathematics skills beyond that of the minimum requirements for their apprenticeship framework, so that they can develop the skills they need in their current role and for promotion at work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Governors, leaders and managers have made significant progress in tackling the serious weaknesses identified at the previous inspection; all areas for improvement are now good or improved. They have transformed the management of apprenticeships, study programmes and mathematics and English provision. A refreshed and strengthened board of governors provide effective challenge to senior leaders. Leaders have considerably strengthened performance management, linking arrangements explicitly to the observations of teaching and learning and ensuring that weak performance is swiftly improved. There is now an extensive programme of good-quality work experience on study programmes.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good for the vast majority of learners. Tutors recognise and greatly value the individual coaching they receive to improve specific aspects of their teaching. Where tutors are not able to improve following intensive support, they leave the college much more rapidly than under previous arrangements. In a very few instances, this has led to disruption for learners until new staff are recruited.
- The college's strategy of close collaboration with partner schools and the neighbouring college results in a well-planned, coherent and continuously updated curriculum that meets the needs of employers and the priorities of the three local enterprise partnerships very well. Curriculum managers use detailed and extensive information about learners' destinations well to inform curriculum planning and to ensure the effectiveness of information, advice and guidance in guiding learners to the right courses and levels. Curriculum managers have introduced specific industry-recognised qualifications to support learners' progression into employment such as in journalism, computer games development and sports coaching and development. Managers have worked closely with partners and subcontractors to ensure those courses for adults with low skills or a history of unemployment meet their needs and many of these learners progress into jobs as a result.
- Excellent communications and a highly visible leadership team underpin collaborative working. Partners greatly value the role of senior leaders in helping to raise aspirations for young people in the region and in keeping other providers aware of the changing landscape in post-16 education and training.
- Leaders have established a culture of high expectations in the college and most learners respond well to the challenge to achieve their potential. Parents are proud when their children progress to the college. Local authority managers acknowledge the important role the college plays in trying to reverse the decline in mathematics achievement in secondary schools, but this remains an area for improvement in the college.
- Managers have made significant improvements in monitoring how well learners progress on their courses. All learners have clear, specific targets to support their progress and know how well they are doing. Progress coaches work intensively to support learners at risk of not achieving. Curriculum managers know their learners very well and regularly report on their progress to senior managers.
- Staff work exceptionally closely with a network of specialist tutors and coordinators in schools across the region to ensure transition arrangements for learners with high needs are effective. Managers take a leading role in strategic planning to support the reforms required under recent legislation and improve provision for learners with high needs. Managers are diligent in assessing the changing support needs of learners with high needs, which leads in some cases to individual learners no longer requiring the high-needs funding. These learners achieve well, develop good levels of confidence and independence through work-related learning and external placements where appropriate and many progress to further courses, higher education or employment.
- Self-assessment is a continuous, effective process; evaluations made are accurate and underpin improvements. Curriculum managers use a good range of evidence such as feedback from learners and employers, observations of learning and monitoring how well tutors use targets and tracking to ensure learners make good progress. Curriculum managers' reports are robustly scrutinised by senior managers to ensure the final self-assessment report gives sufficient emphasis to the areas for improvement.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board of governors has reduced in size following a restructure since the previous inspection. Governors now have the necessary range of skills, experience and expertise to challenge senior leaders and support the college effectively.
 - Governors know the college well; they analyse data and performance information meticulously to challenge leaders and support the rapid improvements made. They are adept at requesting specific

reports where they need to understand more clearly aspects of work that leaders acknowledge they need to improve. Governors challenged one of the proposed grades in a draft version of the recent self-assessment report, using their good understanding of the data, and leaders moderated the grade down as a result.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Staff maintain an appropriately structured and up-to-date single central record of the checks made during recruitment, including additional checks on staff working in the college nursery. Designated safeguarding officers ensure that all staff have introductory safeguarding training and refresher training at least every three years. Senior officers attend numerous events organised by the local safeguarding children board of which the college is a well-established member. Staff respond quickly and effectively to any safeguarding concerns raised by learners and where appropriate refer to relevant external agencies for support. Managers have maintained the good arrangements identified at the last inspection.
- Learners know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and accessing social media sites. They are aware of the requirements to work safely in practical workshops and on employers' premises. Learners have access to a multi-faith room for contemplation, reflection and private worship.
- The senior safeguarding officer has received training in order to introduce workshops on raising staff awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and its application to the college and its subcontractors. All progress coaches, and most tutors and other staff, have received training under the 'Prevent' arrangements. Progress coaches have made learners aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism in group tutorials and have discussed modern British values. Most have a basic understanding of these concepts. Senior officers are well informed about the main extremism risks in the region. However, not all tutors and managers can identify them and a few cannot articulate clearly and precisely what is meant by modern British values.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Managers have made significant improvements to teaching, learning and assessment since the last inspection. There is now a more robust approach to the observation process. This includes effective moderation, swift intervention to make improvements where necessary and a well-linked professional development and training programme to identify and share good practice. Managers have an accurate and clear picture of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Tutors across all programme areas are well qualified, use their vocational and teaching skills very well to model professional practice and inspire learners. This helps learners develop their vocational and employability skills and motivates them to make progress. For example, in a level 1 catering session, learners confidently spoke about the ingredients they used and the importance of health and safety in the kitchen, and displayed high levels of awareness about the required etiquette needed to work in a professional kitchen.
- Tutors use initial assessment well, including for apprentices, to identify learning gaps and plan learning. They are particularly adept at tailoring their approach to suit individual learners to ensure they make progress. For example, in a hairdressing session, good attention was paid to ensuring level 2 learners had clear instructions about angled cutting and level 3 learners were completing more complex colouring tasks and working on their own with clients.
- Tutors plan the large majority of sessions well, including individual assessments for apprentices, and learners make good progress in these sessions. Tutors use a wide variety of activities to keep learners interested, providing regular and motivating verbal feedback to keep them on track. Learners are actively encouraged to link theory to practice and many make good use of their work experience to develop their wider employability skills.
- In a small number of instances, particularly on study programmes, the pace of learning is too slow, teaching is uninspiring and tutors do not effectively review or consolidate learning before moving to the next topic. In a very small minority of lessons, learners experience too many changes in tutors and, as a result, expectations about the course are not always clear, which affects their attitude to learning and their progress.
- Highly effective teaching for those learners with high needs ensures they make excellent progress and enjoy their studies. For example, in one session, learners with high needs very confidently used the computer to locate their house on online maps and could discuss what was available in their local

communities. They also displayed a well-developed understanding of e-safety and of the potential risks using the internet might pose. Tutors identify learners with additional needs early, which ensures a successful transition into college life.

- Progression coaches work productively with learners and effectively focus on helping them overcome any barriers to learning. Tutors use target-setting very effectively and, as a result, retention is improving steadily and is now high. All learners benefit from a wide range of support arrangements, including personal support and counselling, individual sessions and additional support in the classroom. Large numbers of learners who receive this support make good progress.
- Assessors make good links with employers. For those learners on study programmes, tutors keep carers and parents routinely well informed about their progress, options and any concerns as they arise. Tutors monitor attendance carefully and take action promptly where it declines.
- Teaching and learning resources at the college are of a high standard, including a very well-used learning resource centre. This enables learners to develop their skills and knowledge in practical, safe and well-equipped learning environments. Tutors use technology well on a regular basis to support learning. The college is developing its approach to online learning and the majority of learners are using this well to extend their learning beyond the classroom, but this is not yet used consistently across all programmes.
- All learners spoken to recognise the need to develop good mathematical skills and are keen to do so. For a small number of learners on study programmes, changes in teaching staff have meant they have not been well prepared to take the necessary tests or exams and this has hampered their progress. For apprentices, there is insufficient emphasis on developing their mathematical skills beyond that required of their programme.
- For a small number of apprentices and learners on study programmes, tutors do not consistently comment on their written work or check for spelling or grammatical errors. As a result, learners and apprentices are not always sufficiently clear about how well they are doing or challenged to improve, particularly in developing their English skills. However, this is not impeding the vast majority of learners achieving their desired learning aims.
- Assessment of learners' work is generally timely, helpful and ensures the vast majority of learners progress. However, for a very small minority of learners on health and social care programmes, lack of timely assessments means they are significantly behind in their work. Managers have recognised this concern; remedial sessions are in place and learners are receiving support to make up for lost time.
- A college-wide tutorial programme ensures that learners are developing a greater understanding of British values. Their awareness of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism is growing. Inspectors saw some good examples of promoting equality and diversity in the classroom, for example in a hairdressing session learners are able to consider what other techniques they could use to cut and colour the hair of Black clients.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

- Learners improve their self-confidence and are well prepared for their next step to further study or employment. For example, adults who have been long-term unemployed develop the confidence to apply for jobs through the support tutors provide.
- Learners, in particular those with high needs, benefit from the high-quality support they receive from a range of support staff, their tutors and progression coaches. As a result, more learners stay on their course, achieve their qualification and progress to further study or work.
- Learners receive good impartial advice before joining the college and, as a result, the majority make good choices which meet their individual needs and career aspirations. Good careers guidance throughout their course directs them to achieve the necessary technical and employability skills to meet the needs of their chosen pathway.
- Learners benefit from the wider aspects of their study programmes. They participate in a variety of good-quality activities to prepare them for work, including external work placements, interview practice, careers fairs and projects. Learners with high needs benefit from external work experience, which tutors carefully select to ensure learners develop their self-confidence and learn new skills. They develop practical skills and knowledge on their courses and, as a result, they progress to full-time vocational courses.
- Progression within the college to higher level courses is good and the vast majority of learners progress into further study, higher education or employment when they leave the college. Apprentices' progression into sustained employment is very good; however, their progression to a higher-level apprenticeship is

low. Apprentices improve the personal skills and confidence that they need in their job roles to progress into roles with higher levels of responsibility.

- Across the college, tutors and learners develop an inclusive and purposeful learning atmosphere. Learners are courteous, interested, enjoy their programmes and display a good understanding about the diverse communities in which they live and work. Learners are encouraged to develop a positive attitude to their studies often overcoming significant barriers to learning. Tutors celebrate and take pride in their learners' achievements.
- The college places a strong emphasis on improving the health of learners. Learners access the services of a specialist nurse and doctor who provide sexual health support; as a result, the number of teenage pregnancies has decreased. Learners benefit from a professional counselling service, and a high proportion of learners who receive support stay on their programme.
- Learners feel safe and are fully aware of how to report any concerns they may have about possible risks to themselves or to others. They receive helpful information and support about risks related to the use of the internet, bullying and all forms of abuse. When learners raise concerns, managers investigate and deal with them appropriately and sensitively.
- Tutors and assessors have recently started to develop learners' understanding of radicalisation and life in modern Britain. They are developing their understanding of how to respect and consider cultural values and differences in their workplace. Assessors promote learners' general understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace effectively.
- While the majority of learners understand the importance of attending lessons, this is not always the case, particularly for mathematics. While tutors promote English and mathematics effectively and the numbers taking GCSE level have increased, learners do not always understand why mathematics and English are skills they need for work.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- The college provides study programmes across a range of vocational subject areas for around 1,432 learners aged 16 to 19 and 2,148 learners on adult programmes. There are around 697 learners on apprenticeship programmes at intermediate, advanced and higher levels. A significant number of learners access learning through subcontractors for adult programmes and apprenticeships.
- Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve underperforming vocational courses and apprenticeships. Curriculum managers closely monitor individual learners' overall progress. As a result, most current learners' and apprentices' progress is now good.
- Overall achievement rates for adults are outstanding, have improved year on year and are now 10 percentage points higher than those of similar providers. Achievement rates are very high in all subject areas, the exception being engineering where they are below those of similar providers. The success rates that learners with high needs achieve are high. Progression to vocational courses from the 'next steps' programme is good.
- In 2014/15, a high proportion of children looked after stayed on their course, achieved and progressed to further study. In the current year, children looked after receive high-quality support, which helps them stay on their course and make good progress.
- Retention rates for young people and adults on the very large majority of programmes have improved in the current year and are now high, and fewer learners leave the college after one year. A much higher proportion are now continuing with further study at the college.
- As part of their study programme, the vast majority of 16- to 18-year-old learners extend their learning through formal external work placements and a range of work-related activities. Learners develop the broad range of skills they need for employment, such as customer service skills, communication and technical skills.
- The majority of current learners make at least the progress expected and many make good progress. Nearly three quarters of learners come to the college with low levels of prior attainment and aspirations and tutors support them well to develop their confidence and employability skills. All learners gain relevant and valuable personal and social skills that help them to grow in confidence. Learners' work is often good and they develop skills that they can apply to their current study and future employment.
- The majority of learners progress to further study, employment or apprenticeships. The large majority of learners who apply to higher education successfully obtain a place at university. The courses that they go on to study match well to their initial goals and ambitions. Learners benefit from the comprehensive and

specialist guidance that they receive from staff. College managers have been very successful in monitoring the destination of every student who left the college in the previous academic year.

- In 2014/15, the overall achievement rates for young people on study programmes were below those of similar providers. While the vast majority pass their vocational qualification, the proportion of learners who pass functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics is low. The proportion of learners who achieve a high grade in English and mathematics is similar to that of other providers and is low. In the current year, learners are making better progress in these subjects and the proportion predicted to achieve their vocational qualification has increased.
- Apprenticeship overall success rates improved slightly in 2014/15 but remained low. In the current year, the progress of the large majority of apprentices within their planned timescales is good. Not enough apprentices achieve their qualification in the planned time in subcontracted provision and success rates are lower than those in college provision. College managers have recognised this and taken effective steps to reduce significantly the number of subcontractors and the volume they deliver.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The college has approximately 1,432 learners on vocational study programmes in 11 subject areas. The largest subject areas are health, public services and care; hair, beauty and catering; arts, media and journalism; sports, travel and tourism; and engineering.
- In the very large majority of lessons, tutors set high expectations and learners make good progress. Learners make particularly good progress in revision sessions for GCSE English where imaginative resources are meeting the different needs of learners. This allows learners to focus and work on individual targets. In these sessions, learners enjoy their learning and tutors help them to address the areas they need to develop to improve their examination grade.
- In a small minority of sessions in mathematics, activities do not engage and involve learners well and the pace of activities is too slow, meaning learners lose interest and do not make good enough progress.
- Tutors promote a supportive and caring environment and sensitively manage learner support needs in the classroom. Learners recognise and value the support they receive and, as a result, they make good progress.
- Tutors provide interesting and challenging work for learners to complete, both in and out of lessons. Tutors use information and communications technology effectively to support teaching, learning and assessment. Learners use a well-resourced virtual learning environment to develop their subject knowledge and independent research skills. For example, they use mobile technology outside the classroom to work on assignments. They develop good time management skills through being able to access and work on assignments on the move.
- Learners develop their skills and confidence levels well in practical sessions that are relevant, brisk paced and challenging. For example, in a public services session, the tutor used a recent field trip to help learners to visualise navigation skills in a real-life context. In computing, learners work well together to service and rebuild computer components and solve practical problems, equipping them with skills they will need for employment.
- Tutors set high expectations for the standard of learners' work. As a result, learners develop good technical skills that prepare them well for progression to higher-level programmes or employment. For example, construction learners demonstrate precision and accuracy in brickwork; in art and design, learners take pride in industry-standard photography work, and strive to achieve distinction level in graphic design work.
- In a small minority of sessions, tutors do not challenge the most able to make the progress that they are capable of.
- Tutors assess learners effectively to check that they fully understand topics and are able to use the skills or knowledge gained before moving on to the next stage of learning. Tutors track and monitor progress very carefully and discuss this information with their learners. As a result, learners understand what they need to do to make good progress and achieve. For example, learners studying electrical installation use tracking information productively to help them work independently to high standards to complete the range of assessment tasks required.
- Learners benefit from good-quality external work experience, work-related activities, and extensive and

valuable enrichment opportunities. For example, the college's own radio station enables media and journalism learners to gain the additional skills and confidence to prepare them for working in the broadcast media industry. Learners work in realistic working environments, for example in catering, hair and beauty, construction and engineering. In addition, learners have access to a comprehensive programme of additional activities that support the development of their personal, social and employability skills well.

- Learners behave well and respect one another. They feel safe at college and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and in their daily lives. Tutors challenge lateness rigorously using a late card system; they ensure that learners adhere to college policy and understand the importance of punctuality for study and work.
- Careers advice and guidance is effective, and learners benefit from a well-planned and resourced pastoral tutorial system. They receive high-quality impartial careers guidance that supports them well to prepare for next steps and make well-informed decisions about their career plans.
- In a small minority of sessions, tutors do not maximise naturally occurring opportunities to develop learners' English and mathematical skills or promote the importance of English and mathematics in life and work. Learners do not always have sufficient opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills. In a small minority of marked work, tutors and learners do not pay sufficient attention to correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Consequently, those learners do not make good enough progress in improving their written English skills.

Adult learning programmes

are outstanding

- Around 2,148 adults study at the college or at community sites; 1,933 are part time with significant numbers on community-based employment programmes. Fifty-six adults study GCSE English and 55 GCSE mathematics subjects. Around 215 adults are on full-time study programmes. The majority are on programmes in health and social care, hair and beauty therapy, catering and hospitality, and education and training, and a small number are on engineering programmes. Fifty adults are on a full-time access to higher education programme.
- Managers have an excellent understanding of the local labour market and they work highly effectively with partners. This ensures that learners have access to a wide range of courses that develop their employability skills and career prospects. Employability courses improve the confidence of those with barriers to learning and help them to develop the skills they require in seeking and gaining employment. For many learners, studying at the college has transformed their lives.
- Managers plan their community learning courses exceptionally well to meet the needs of learners and to encourage them to take their first steps to improving their prospects and personal skills. Courses to improve English language skills for lone parents, unemployed over-fifties and Syrian refugees are enabling learners to develop the vital skills they need for their personal lives and work.
- Managers have excellent relationships with the officers at the Army Infantry Training Centre. This enables them to design flexible and responsive programmes that effectively meet the needs of the army's new recruits and soldiers who are leaving the army at the end of their contract or because of health reasons. The vast majority achieve the English and mathematics qualifications they require to gain employment or progress to higher-level courses, for example in teaching and electrical installation. For many soldiers, this is the first crucial step in making a new life outside of the army and starting on a new career pathway.
- The vast majority of learners make excellent progress in lessons and are on target to achieve their qualifications. A significant number of the most able learners on full-time programmes are achieving their qualification early.
- Learners develop the very good practical skills they need to progress to employment or to further study. For example, hairdressing learners cut and colour hair, and beauty therapy learners complete pedicures and facials to industry timings in the well-equipped salons.
- Learners are able to apply their very good subject knowledge to their experiences in the workplace and in their written assignments. Learners on placement in schools understand the importance of play and plan activities that help children to explore their feelings. For example, they set up a dolls' hospital and this helped children to express their anxieties about going into hospital. Learners on counselling courses demonstrate a good understanding of how cognitive behavioural therapy is used to change behaviour by changing thinking.

- Learners receive excellent learning support in and out of lessons that develops their confidence and skills, and aids their good progress. Learners on English for speakers of other languages courses increase their confidence in speaking and listening in different social situations.
- The vast majority of learners are motivated and keen to achieve, and their progression to further study and employment is very high. Learners on access to higher education programmes speak highly of their learning experience and the valuable advice and guidance they receive that helps them progress to higher education, including prestigious universities.
- Learners on advanced programmes have well-developed research skills and produce work of a high standard. For example, learners progressing to university to study nursing and allied health professions have a very good understanding of body systems and health promotion.
- Tutors assess learners' work accurately and provide detailed, constructive feedback to learners on how to improve their work further and achieve higher grades. Tutors comment consistently on how learners can improve their use of language, spelling and grammar.
- Tutors develop learners' English and mathematical skills well in vocational lessons. For example, learners on access to higher education courses skilfully analyse graphical information, and hairdressing learners, when cutting hair, use angles to cross-check the cut.
- Learners work well together, learn from each other and respect each other's views in a supportive, inclusive learning environment. For example, learners discuss how different religious practices are valued in colleges and schools.
- Learners' development of mathematical skills in a small minority of college functional skills and GCSE mathematical lessons requires improvement. Too often, tutors do not consolidate learning sufficiently before moving on to the next topic. Achievement of high grades for GCSE mathematics in 2014/15 was high, and the pass rates of the learners who have already taken functional skills mathematical exams in the current year are very high.

Apprenticeships

are good

- Around 697 learners study a range of apprenticeships at the college and in partnership with a small number of subcontractors mainly across Darlington, Durham and North Yorkshire. At the time of inspection, the majority of apprentices are at intermediate level, a minority at advanced level and a very small number at higher level. Darlington College delivers just less than two thirds of the provision and subcontractors just over one third.
- Assessors design apprenticeship programmes to meet local priorities and employers' needs effectively. They work well with employers to plan learning for apprentices that meets the demands of the job role. They involve employers very effectively in apprentices' progress reviews to track progress and ensure apprentices are developing the right skills to meet the demands of their jobs.
- Apprentices benefit from very good off-the-job training. Apprentices value their time in college and consequently their attendance and attitude to learning is good. Apprentices develop new skills that complement their learning in the workplace. For example, graphic design apprentices develop good underpinning skills, including fine art and photography, that they are able to apply in the workplace, and a third year apprentice produced complex parts for machinery used in the oil industry.
- Managers have improved processes to monitor subcontractors, which are now effective. They have taken swift action to improve the performance of subcontractors who were underperforming; as a result, the majority are improving. A subcontractor with significant underperformance has been suspended from recruiting any further apprentices.
- Assessors track and monitor apprentices' progress very well. The vast majority of apprentices on college programmes in the current year are making good progress and are close to completing by their expected end dates. However, further improvement is required to ensure that the small minority of apprentices on subcontractor programmes complete within the expected timeframe. Managers have recognised this and are monitoring them very closely.
- Assessors check apprentices' progress in developing occupational skills well in progress reviews and in their assessment of learning. Apprentices gain good new occupational skills. For example, at an army defence base, a motor vehicle apprentice was carrying out a major repair to an armoured vehicle, involving a multi-point inspection and removal of the suspension system. The learner carried out the work competently to a good standard with careful attention paid to health and safety.

- Apprentices make positive contributions in the workplace. They become effective members of staff, adding economic value.
- Apprentices benefit from good information, advice and guidance. They are well prepared for their learning and fewer apprentices leave early without completing the programme. A high number of apprentices gain permanent employment, but only a low proportion progress from intermediate to advanced level apprenticeships. Managers are working with employers to improve the opportunity to progress.
- A minority of apprentices do not develop their English and mathematics skills sufficiently. This is because assessors focus on apprentices meeting the minimum qualification standards required by the programme and not enough on further developing skills that apprentices can use within the workplace. A minority of assessors do not identify common spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' work or give advice on how to make improvements.
- A small minority of adult apprentices do not gain new skills relative to their starting point. Assessors do not challenge them enough to improve their existing skills or knowledge. As a result, a small minority of adult apprentices make slower progress.
- In the workplace, a minority of assessors do not reinforce or explore modern British values or the 'Prevent' duty sufficiently with apprentices. Apprentices do not always develop an understanding of what it is like to live in modern Britain or have a good awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16-18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	5,856
Principal/CEO	Kate Roe
Website address	www.darlington.ac.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)	268	1353	423	442	741	344	0	9
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	NA		NA		NA			
Number of learners aged 14-16	6							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)/Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Baltic Training Services ■ Nordic Focus Training Group ■ Optimum Skills Ltd ■ TICA ■ Working Links 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Andrea Machell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pamela Blackman	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Gadfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Cath Jackson	Ofsted Inspector
Lynne Paxton	Ofsted Inspector
David Sykes	Ofsted Inspector
Jonny Wright	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report and the monitoring visit reports. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners 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.

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