

Inspection of New City College

Inspection dates:

11 to 14 March 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

New City College (NCC) is a very large college group that was formed in 2017 following the mergers of Tower Hamlets College, Hackney Community College and Redbridge College. The group is now made up of the following colleges: Tower Hamlets College, Hackney Community College, Redbridge College, Epping Forest College, Havering College of Further and Higher Education, Havering Sixth Form College and Brooke House Sixth Form College (BSix). The most recent to join was BSix College in August 2024.

In 2023/24, there were 18,500 learners enrolled across the group, which has an annual turnover of more than £132 million. It is one of the largest providers of further education in England. The group is led by a group principal and chief executive officer. Pairs of former colleges are led by a principal and a team of locally appointed deputy principals. Principals are accountable to the corporation board through the NCC executive board.

The group provides academic, vocational and technical courses from pre-entry level to degree level and apprenticeships from level 2 to 4. At the time of the inspection, there were 10,133 learners on education programmes for young people, including their largest subject areas of creative arts, media, business and information and

communication technology. There were 7,071 adult learners on a wide range of courses, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), functional skills English and mathematics.

The group had 694 apprentices. A high proportion of apprentices complete level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships within the construction trades and in business administration. Most apprentices study at the construction and engineering campus at Rainham and at the Hackney campus.

There were 921 learners with high needs, studying mainly at Poplar in Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Ardleigh Green in Havering, Epping and Redbridge campuses. The group also had a small full-time alternative provision for 129 learners aged 14 to 16 at Ardleigh Green in Havering and Arbour Square in Tower Hamlets.

At the time of the inspection, leaders worked with five subcontractors to teach courses in a community setting to 453 learners. The largest subcontractors were Jewish Training Academy for Girls (JTAG), Get Set Girls and Beer Miriam Seminary, who taught programmes of study to female learners within the Orthodox Jewish community.

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

Learners and apprentices thrive while learning in diverse communities across all campuses. They have a sound understanding of each other's differences and celebrate their varied backgrounds, creating a dynamic learning environment. Learners and apprentices greatly appreciate the freedom to be themselves and feel valued as individuals. They demonstrate high levels of mutual respect towards each other and their teachers.

Learners and apprentices excel in the challenges set for them by their teachers. They find their studies demanding and highly rewarding. Teachers, who are subject experts, teach the curriculum exceptionally well so that learners and apprentices quickly develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and behaviours. This helps them succeed in their courses and progress to their next steps. Most learners achieve their qualifications and go on to further or higher education or into employment.

Across the group, learners benefit greatly from a curriculum offer which is exceptionally well considered. They study courses that help them to achieve their ambitions for work or further study. Learners and apprentices are supported in this by the extra knowledge that teachers include that goes beyond the requirements of their qualifications. For example, T-level engineering learners at Rainham learn about pneumatics and mechatronics to enhance their knowledge and skills. Staff also teach further mathematics to engineers to support their progression to university and higher apprenticeships.

Young learners on study programmes develop a strong understanding of their subjects and related industries. Staff collaborate effectively with employers to ensure that learners have purposeful contact with the world of work. Learners complete meaningful work experience in sectors that align with their career goals. For example, learners on bookkeeping courses at JTAG gain hands-on experience managing and recording financial transactions at local accountancy firms. Learners on business courses complete placements at prestigious city banks and the Ministry of Defence, focusing on developing their work-related skills. This prepares learners well for their next steps.

Adult learners have access to a broad and comprehensive curriculum, which is planned flexibly to support their individual needs. Staff teach many courses both in the evening and during the day to ensure that adults with multiple commitments can attend their courses and gain qualifications. Through the courses they study, learners make valuable contributions to their local communities.

Adult learners take part in courses, such as sector-based work academy programmes for unemployed adults, in sectors where there is high demand for a skilled workforce. For example, learners on railway track maintenance courses at Epping Forest campus receive highly specialist training and become qualified rail track operatives. A high proportion of learners gain jobs on completion of their courses, which reduces staff shortages in these sectors.

Apprentices benefit from expert teachers and high-quality learning resources that closely replicate work environments. Apprentices at Rainham construction and engineering campus appreciate learning in well-resourced workshops and gain valuable hands-on experience with tools and equipment commonly used in their industry. They learn about green skills in low carbon and retrofit labs with heat pumps, solar photovoltaic systems and electrical vehicle charging stations. Most apprentices develop essential technical knowledge and skills rapidly and learn how to apply them in the workplace. However, for a few, trainers and employers do not align their on-and-off-the-job well enough. Most apprentices successfully gain or sustain employment at the end of their apprenticeship.

Learners with high needs study in highly supportive environments. Staff, including teachers and job coaches, know their learners very well and fully understand their specific needs. They work closely with therapists and other professionals to develop helpful learning resources and teaching strategies to support learners in expressing their emotions and communicating independently. For example, staff use a range of effective techniques, such as Makaton, sentence starters, word maps and communication books, to support learners to communicate. This helps learners to develop their language and communication skills over time.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They value highly the presence of staff and the security team around campuses and have confidence in staff to deal with any inappropriate behaviour swiftly.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have a thorough understanding of the differing skills needs in East London and Essex. They engage well with their stakeholders, such as sub-regional partners and employer representative bodies, and play a key role as members of local, regional and national skills forums. Leaders work collaboratively with major stakeholders, such as the Greater London Authority, Business London and other education providers, to plan their curriculum offer. This has resulted in a broad choice of courses for learners across East London and Essex.

Leaders have developed a wide curriculum offer that aligns well with the skills priorities in their local area and region. They have introduced a variety of courses in priority areas such as creative arts, media, digital, engineering and construction. For example, staff at Tower Hamlets teach a level 3 course in artificial intelligence (AI) programming, including training on machine learning and Python, to fill skills gaps in this area. Staff have adapted their curriculum in response to developments in modern technologies and trends in industry sectors. For example, in electrical installation, teachers now include knowledge about green skills and electrical vehicle charging installation in their curriculum for learners and apprentices.

Leaders work effectively with local councils, Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions to create a curriculum offer that meets the needs of vulnerable

and disadvantaged groups in their local communities. For example, they offer ESOL courses from pre-entry up to level 2 for the growing population of refugees and asylum seekers in local boroughs. In addition, leaders provide a range of employability courses, supported internships and sector-based work academy programmes in engineering and computing to support learners to gain employment.

While leaders and managers involve employers well to shape the curriculums of a large proportion of subjects, this is still in development in a few subjects. For example, in motor vehicle and plumbing, employers do not participate sufficiently in the design and implementation of the curriculum and learners do not have sufficient exposure to the world of work.

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

Governors and senior leaders are highly committed to widening participation and tackling social inequality through excellent education and training. They provide exceptional leadership to drive improvements across the group and create a culture of high ambition and success. Leaders offer a wide range of accessible, innovative and challenging learning opportunities for local communities in east London and Essex. Across all campuses, including the newly merged BSix campus, staff support and challenge learners and apprentices to achieve well, whatever their starting points. Most learners and apprentices make significant progress in their studies and achieve highly.

Since the previous inspection, leaders, managers and staff have worked relentlessly to improve the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive. They have successfully implemented rigorous quality assurance processes across campuses, including at their subcontractors, to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching and training for their learners and apprentices. Leaders have continued to make notable improvements across the provision. This has resulted in year-on-year improvements in learners' experiences and outcomes.

Leaders and managers take a consistent and highly effective structured approach to curriculum planning across all campuses. This ensures that learners and apprentices experience a high-quality curriculum no matter where they study. For example, in GCSE English at Havering Sixth Form and BSix campuses, staff plan a comprehensive scheme of learning with excellent modelling of good practice that is shared across sites. This includes consistent marking of punctuation and grammar, live marking approaches and a commitment to equip learners with confidence through support and welcoming environments. As a result, learners across the college achieve exceptionally well.

Leaders ensure that curriculums are well sequenced so that learners expand their understanding and their ability to apply knowledge and skills well over time. For example, teachers in health and social care teach learners about the symptoms of and treatments for type 2 diabetes early on. Learners can then link this knowledge with different types of ailments to produce accurate care plans later in the course. In

applied sciences, learners learn about the use of microscopes and the structure of different kinds of hair before they carry out forensic analyses of hair. This means learners conduct experiments with skill and readily understand the results they get.

Across the group, teachers make skilful use of a range of effective teaching methods, such as clear explanations, instruction, presentation and demonstrations. In functional skills mathematics at Hackney and Epping Forest campuses, for example, teachers provide learners with step-by-step instructions to complete mathematical calculations. In A-level science at Havering Sixth Form campus, teachers provide detailed explanations and conduct experiments to clarify theoretical concepts such as biodiversity in biology and electric and magnetic fields in physics.

In specialist provision for learners with high needs, teachers make expert use of visual learning aids, such as coloured lesson schedules, pictures and symbols to introduce new concepts and tasks. This makes it easier for learners to understand and follow tasks. On level 1 construction skills courses at Hackney campus, teachers demonstrate how to cut and set out bricks accurately. They provide learners with plentiful opportunities over time to practise these skills on different types of walls and with complex variations. Learners develop these skills securely and apply them confidently in different situations.

In most cases, staff complete thorough assessments of learners' and apprentices' prior knowledge and experience at the start of their course. Teachers use the results of their initial assessment effectively to make sure learners are on the right courses and adapt their teaching to bridge gaps in learners' knowledge. They use strategies such as recapping, questioning, revision tasks, quizzes and mock examinations exceptionally well to help learners and apprentices commit their learning to their long-term memory. In business administration at Ardleigh Green, teachers set apprentices work-based projects and presentations throughout their course and plan mock professional discussions. Most learners and apprentices pass their assessments and examinations at the first attempt.

Most teachers provide learners and apprentices with particularly helpful feedback to improve their work. In ESOL and functional skills English, teachers use marking codes to indicate where learners have made mistakes in their spelling, punctuation and grammar. This helps learners to quickly correct their mistakes and produce work of a high standard. However, in electrical installation and plumbing apprenticeships, teachers do not provide apprentices with sufficiently helpful feedback on how to improve their work to achieve well. Consequently, these apprentices do not achieve as highly as they could.

Leaders set high expectations of learners' attendance and punctuality, which are high in most lessons. Teachers consistently reinforce these expectations and provide rigorous challenge when they are not met. Consequently, learners and apprentices understand well the importance of attendance and punctuality as essential employability skills for their futures.

Learners and apprentices experience a comprehensive curriculum that extends considerably beyond the main subjects they study. They gain sound knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics, such as fundamental British values, through a well-structured tutorial programme. For example, on uniformed services courses at Havering Sixth Form campus, young learners explore democracy and the reasonable use of police power in detail. Learners and apprentices understand well the importance of different values in their lives and work.

Leaders are highly committed to and passionate about the mental health and well-being of their learners and apprentices. Staff provide extensive support to learners and apprentices to support their mental and physical well-being. For example, business administration apprentices receive training in mental health awareness and managing anxiety before examinations to enable them to cope with stress. Young learners receive appropriate tutorials on consent, coercive control and benefit from teaching about toxic relationships.

Learners and apprentices take part in a broad range of exceptional enrichment activities. Across the group, they participate in activities from sports to chess, with a specialised medics group for those aiming to study medicine. In community outreach centres, adult learners join exercise classes and do gardening. Learners frequently attend talks from guest speakers on topics related to their course, which they find inspirational. For example, young learners on sports courses enjoy listening to professional coaches from Premier League football clubs. They broaden their experiences, widen their talents and interests and develop high aspirations for themselves.

Staff provide high-quality careers information, advice and guidance to learners and apprentices throughout their time at the college. They give extensive support for learners to create CVs, complete university applications and prepare for job interviews. Learners attend career fairs and presentations on different progression routes, such as apprenticeships and supported internships. They benefit greatly from careers talks from industry experts, such as drama school and musical theatre professionals, and higher education providers. A high proportion of learners and apprentices progress successfully to higher-level courses or university or gain employment.

Governance arrangements are highly effective. Governors are extremely committed to providing an outstanding education and learning experience for all learners and apprentices. They are highly involved in different activities across the college and have a thorough oversight of the strengths and areas of improvement of their provision. Governors provide rigorous challenge and support to leaders to take prompt action where necessary and hold them to account for achieving their targets.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130418
Address	Poplar High Street Poplar London E14 0AF
Contact number	02075107510
Website	www.ncclondon.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Gerry McDonald CBE
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	30 November to 3 December 2021
Main subcontractors	Beer Miriam Seminary Get Set Girls (Beth Jacob Teachers' Seminary) JTAG Ltd. (Jewish Training Academy for Girls) St Johns RC Special School Vista Education and Training Ltd.

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal of Havering GFE and Sixth Form campuses, 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.

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