Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on the further education provision of

Grŵp NPTC Group
Dwr y Felin Road
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by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

About Grŵp NPTC Group

NPTC Group of Colleges was established in 2013 when Neath Port Talbot College merged with Coleg Powys. It provides a diverse range of further education courses at eight sites spread over a wide area of Powys, Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea. The four main college sites are at Afan, Brecon, Neath and Newtown. In the Neath Port Talbot area, there is tertiary provision and nearly all the secondary schools are 11-16.

In addition to its further education provision, NPTC Group of Colleges is part of a consortium delivering work-based learning and partnerships in adult learning in the community and higher education, as well as being a regulated higher education institution in its own right. Only the group's further education provision is in the scope of this inspection, and this is referred to in the rest of this report as 'the college'.

The college has approximately 7,250 further education learners of whom around 3,750 study full-time courses. Around 80% of the main qualifications learners study at the college are vocational, with 20% being A level. About 5% of learners have identified themselves as black, Asian or minority ethic. Approximately 6% of learners identify themselves as Welsh speakers or come from Welsh language schools. Sixteen per cent of enrolled learners have declared a disability.

The college serves a diverse area, ranging from some of the most sparsely populated areas of Wales, in Powys; to the more urban areas of Neath and Port Talbot. Twenty-three per cent of learners live in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Wales as defined by the first quintile of the Welsh index of multiple deprivation. Sixteen per cent of learners reside in the least deprived areas in Wales.

For further education, the college has an annual turnover of around £55m and employs 845 staff.

Summary

The college has a keen sense of responsibility towards the diverse communities it serves. It offers a wide range of provision, which meets the needs of its learners across a large and challenging geographical area.

Overall, learners produce a strong standard of work in their lessons and practical sessions. They build their knowledge and understanding and develop their vocational, academic and practical skills at an appropriate rate. In vocational programmes, many learners develop and apply sound practical and vocational competencies. Many A level learners develop helpful learning and revision strategies. In entry level courses, nearly all learners make useful progress in developing their basic vocational and independent skills.

Most learners feel safe in college and know where to access support if needed and many feel the college listens to them well. Most learners display positive attitudes to learning. The college's learning support team and wellbeing team provide a helpful range of support to help learners overcome barriers to learning.

Teachers are well qualified and experienced, with useful industrial, commercial and business experience which they apply well to their roles. Many develop positive working relationships with learners. The majority plan well-structured lessons and encourage learners to develop wider subject interests.

The college leadership team is well established and cohesive and there is a clear and ambitious direction to the work of the college. Senior leaders evaluate the performance of the college appropriately, although evaluation processes result in an overly positive picture of a few important aspects of the college's performance.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	**Good**
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	**Good**
Teaching and learning experiences	**Good**
Care, support and guidance	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**

Recommendations

R1 Improve outcomes for all learners, particularly in graded vocational qualifications

R2 Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, assessment and feedback to ensure that all learners know what they need to do to improve and are stretched and challenged to meet their potential

R3 Improve learners' attendance

R4 Improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners on GCSE English and mathematics courses

R5 Strengthen the use and rigour of quality assurance processes to inform planning for improvement

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Overall, learners produce a strong standard of work in their lessons and practical sessions. Many make sound progress. They build knowledge and understanding and develop their vocational, academic and practical skills at an appropriate rate.

On vocational programmes, many learners develop and apply useful practical and vocational competencies. The majority develop useful learning strategies that help them organise their thinking, recall prior learning and link theory to practice. For example, level 3 engineering learners working towards a hydraulics unit interpret complex diagrams and use information to construct hydraulic circuits to a high standard. They organise their work well and create useful revision and reference notes. Bricklaying learners develop practical hand and tool skills quickly, supplementing their college learning with useful site experience. A few tackle advanced tasks for their level, such as creating archways and spiral columns. In a few vocational areas, learners make less progress in developing their practical skills and competencies as often too many learners are passive during lessons, are not clear about what they need to do to improve, or over what timescale.

Many A level learners make sound progress in lessons. In many lessons, most learners concentrate well and listen carefully to their teachers and peers. Many learners develop helpful learning and revision strategies, including highlighting, redrafting and concept mapping. A few learners demonstrate particularly strong academic skills, and achieve strong outcomes, helped by their participation in the college's programme for more able A level learners.

Most A level learners produce high quality written work. Many gain the underpinning knowledge and apply the skills linked to their subject disciplines appropriately. For example, in economics, learners perform calculations accurately and confidently. In religious studies, learners give wide-ranging, thoughtful examples to a question posed on moral evil. Most A level learners know their target grades and receive regular feedback from their teachers on their progress towards meeting them.

In a few A level subjects, learners are passive and are not challenged or stimulated by their teachers enough. A very few learners do not organise their work well enough and this inhibits their revision and later learning.

In entry level courses, most learners have useful individual learning plans to help them with their skills and personal development. Nearly all learners engage well with their courses and make sound progress in creative activities and in developing their basic vocational and independent skills, such as cooking.

Many learners set relevant targets to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and a majority regularly develop these skills using the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) study materials, for example during tutorials.

In general, many learners speak clearly and use subject specific vocabulary fluently. They listen well to their peers and teachers in class discussions. Many learners

produce sound written work and use spelling, punctuation and grammar, appropriate to their level. Many learners taking the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification demonstrate useful oral skills during discussions and redraft and refine extended written work effectively. However, in general, only a few learners revisit their work to correct inaccuracies. In a minority of vocational courses learners' literacy and numeracy skills limit their ability to progress at their full potential. In only a few vocational areas and A level subjects do learners have regular opportunities to practise and improve their numeracy skills.

The majority of learners use a range of digital tools confidently. In a minority of sessions, learners make valuable use of online resources to support learning.

Approximately 2,000 learners come to the college without having attained a GCSE grade A*-C in either English, Welsh or mathematics. Many of these learners enrol on GCSE resit classes to improve their prior attainment. In many of these sessions, learners make limited progress and only a few develop skills to the level where they attain an A*-C grade in their GCSE resit exams, or improve their grade from their previous attempt. Most learners taking Essential Skills Wales qualifications attain their qualification outcome.

Six per cent of the college's full time learners identify themselves as Welsh speakers or attended Welsh medium school. Only a very few of these learners practise or improve their Welsh language skills as part of their courses or in other activities around the college. Learners on a very few courses, such as childcare, develop useful Welsh language skills that help them with work roles. However, overall, very few learners develop Welsh language skills.

The post-16 consistent measures data for 2018-2019 indicates that, overall, learners on vocational and general education programmes (such as A levels and BTEC diplomas) complete qualifications over two years at a rate lower than the national averages, and with a lower overall proportion of higher grades. Learners continue from year 1 and year 2 of their studies at a lower rate than the national averages.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most learners display a positive attitude to learning. They engage enthusiastically in learning activities and sustain their concentration levels well. Most learners feel safe in college and know where to access support if needed. Many learners feel their needs and concerns are listened to by the college. A few learners, especially those who did not attend induction, are unsure how to access support on issues such as mental health and feel that they do not have enough access to one-to-one support from their personal tutor. A minority of learners do not attend lessons regularly enough and a very few do not arrive on time.

Most learners report that their learning experiences help them understand and respect people with different backgrounds and learning needs and that the college provides an inclusive environment. For example, an LGBTQ learner group meets weekly, allowing members to enjoy the opportunity to socialise in a safe and mutually supportive environment.

Overall, most learners are confident, self-motivated and keen to learn. Many feel that their learning programme is helping them improve their life skills, employment prospects and their understanding of keeping healthy and safe, including when online. Many learners feel that the college prepares them well for progression to higher level learning and for employment.

Many learners have realistic aspirations and are confident in discussing their progression plans. A minority of learners engage in worthwhile enrichment activities to improve their general health and wellbeing.

Nearly all learners participate in a well-designed student tutorial enrichment programme. Through this programme, most learners improve their awareness of key challenges affecting individuals and society, including global warming, radicalisation and other current health and wellbeing topics.

A minority of learners, especially those undertaking the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, make a valuable contribution to community-focussed activities such as fundraising for mental-health charities. Level 1 carpentry and joinery learners help local primary schools by building an outside kitchen for one school and making a 'hobbit house' for another. A few A level learners provide mathematics coaching to local school children. These activities help learners to gain useful employability skills as well as nurturing their personal development.

Over 200 learners across all college sites have been elected or identified as learner representatives. The majority of these participate in useful children's rights training to help them in their roles. Learner representatives attend an annual conference that celebrates student life. They also attend termly site-based Senedd events. These events allow learner representatives to question the college senior management team on matters affecting learners and their experiences, and to exert a valuable influence on college-wide decisions.

A very few learners benefit from worthwhile academic, vocational or elite sport bursaries gain sports or cultural scholarships or hold positions as student ambassadors. These learners contribute to the college's activities well, for example by taking part in the college's open events, interview evenings and promotional activities.

A few learners develop higher level vocational skills and enhance their personal confidence through participation in skills competitions. Most vocational learners develop behaviours that support their career aspirations. For example, catering learners have high aspirations and understand that involvement in skills competitions provides a useful platform for improving skills and employability prospects. A few level 3 hairdressing and beauty therapy learners benefit from a well-established international work experience programme. These learners develop greater independence, experience different cultures, develop their language skills and explore employment opportunities.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Across the college, teachers are well qualified and experienced. They use their industrial, commercial and business experience effectively to relate their teaching to current workplace practice. Managers recruit and deploy suitable staff to deliver specialist modules and units of courses well.

Many teachers develop positive working relationships with learners that motivate them to develop new skills and knowledge and progress towards achieving their qualifications.

The majority of teachers plan usefully structured activities that build well on previous learning and enable learners to make sound progress. They have high expectations of their learners and challenge them to develop knowledge, produce practical work and complete theory tasks to a high standard. In A level classes, the majority of teachers deliver lively sessions that engage learners well. They help structure learners' understanding of concepts, and encourage them to develop wider subject interests. Many teachers use verbal praise well to motivate, encourage and build the confidence of learners.

In a majority of sessions, teachers use questioning appropriately to assess learners' knowledge, understanding and progress in teaching sessions. In a few examples, teachers use questioning particularly well to challenge learners to give higher level responses and solve problems. However, a few teachers do not use discussion and questioning effectively as a means of checking learners' knowledge or to deepen their understanding. In a minority of sessions, teachers' expectations of what learners can achieve are too low and the pace of learning is too slow. In these cases, teachers do not plan sessions well enough or stretch and challenge learners to meet their full potential.

In a majority of sessions, teachers give learners useful verbal and written feedback that helps them to improve their work. In these cases, they provide clear advice and guidance and monitor learners' responses carefully to ensure that they make improvements. However, a minority of teachers mark learners' work superficially and do not provide clear guidance on how learners can improve their performance.

The college provides more able and talented learners with beneficial opportunities to extend their learning experiences beyond their local areas, improve their self-esteem and aspire to achieve at higher levels. The college encourages learners across a wide range of vocational learning areas to demonstrate their practical skills at national skills competitions.

The college's curriculum planning processes are thorough and detailed. They take account of the regional skills partnership's priorities and the demand from employers and learners. The plan identifies clear progression routes to the next level, higher education and employment and training. As a result, the college delivers a wide range of vocational and A level courses across its sites, which are spread over a large and challenging geographical area.

The college has collaborated well with its local authorities and schools to bridge gaps in provision and extend the choices available for learners. The college has developed particularly beneficial collaboration arrangements in the Neath Port Talbot region. This 14-19 provision enables pupils from schools to access and study a worthwhile range of subjects, including valuable provision for pupils at risk of disengagement in learning.

The college has a suitable programme for learners who have not attained a GCSE grade C or above in mathematics or English to develop their skills and resit their

GCSE exams. However, a minority of teachers on GCSE resit programmes do not plan their teaching well enough to sustain a minority of learners' engagement throughout the lesson.

In a few areas, such as hairdressing, engineering and construction, teachers integrate literacy, numeracy and digital skills development into their lessons effectively. Overall, the integration of skills into courses and the quality of skills teaching is too variable across the provision.

The college has developed a useful strategy for developing its Welsh language and bilingual provision, although only a very few classes are currently taught bilingually or though the medium of Welsh. In childcare courses, Welsh speaking learners attend beneficial work placements in Welsh medium schools and nurseries. The college invests in developing the bilingual skills of its staff, including a helpful range of training sessions and Welsh language courses.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The college has sound tracking and monitoring systems, including a dashboard to display and monitor a range of relevant management information. When preparing for learners to enter the college from school, college staff visit most partner schools to identify learners' needs before they start courses, enabling the preparation of any specialist support required. The college's learning support and wellbeing teams provide a helpful range of support to help learners overcome barriers to learning.

The college has effective relationships with Careers Wales, participating in careers fairs and schools' events to improve learners' awareness of the options available to them at the age of 16.

The college has identified an increase in learners with mental health needs, with the number of learners accessing counselling services more than doubling during the last four years. It has remodelled its counselling provision to include arrangements for learners to access services provided by supporting agencies. These services help learners accessing them to succeed in college at broadly similar rates to other learners.

The college provides gender neutral toilets for learners. However, there are not yet appropriate changing facilities for gender transitioning learners.

There is a well-established programme, linked to the Seren network, for more able A level learners, and a more recently developed programme for vocational learners. The college has developed helpful programmes to support learners from the armed forces and veterans.

The college encourages learners' participation in competitions at local, national and international levels, enterprise activities and extra-curricular activities. For example, motor vehicle learners have valuable work experience in a car factory in Germany. Agricultural learners visit local farms and agricultural shows, enhancing their awareness of employment opportunities. However, opportunities for enrichment activities at some of the college's smaller sites are limited.

Nearly all learners participate in useful tutorials where they broaden their awareness of radicalisation, diversity and Welsh culture. In these sessions, personal tutors agree and review learning targets with learners. Tutors give learners helpful support on progression planning. Many learners progressing to higher education are well informed about their options and are well supported in the application process. However, learners' awareness of their progression routes into apprenticeships, especially at the Newtown site, is limited.

Staff monitor college entrants at the start of each day to ensure they wear identity lanyards and most learners feel safe at college. A busy public road runs through the Neath site, which is a potential risk to learner safety. The college has involved learners in focus groups with the local authority to plan ongoing work to secure improvements to road safety at this location.

The college has good links with police and support services. For example, a local police community support officer attends Newtown site regularly, supporting teachers well through involvement in taught sessions relating to issues such as firearms, knife crime and county lines.

The college's induction and tutorial programme are effective in raising learners' awareness of safeguarding, radicalisation and terrorism in an appropriate way. Nearly all learners know who to talk to if they have safeguarding concerns. Many learners understand the risks of radicalisation and terrorism and know about the Run-Hide-Tell strategy.

The college's arrangements for safeguarding learners, including its duty to protect young people from radicalisation and extremism, meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The chief executive officer is supported well by an established, cohesive senior leadership team that works closely with the corporation board of the NPTC Group. A recently-revised strategic plan gives clear and ambitious direction to the work of the college. The plan highlights the college's increased focus on innovative teaching and on corporate and community responsibility, alongside its established aims of success, support and employability for learners. Leaders have successfully communicated this strategy to the college's stakeholders across the different social, economic and geographical areas within which it operates.

The college has a keen sense of responsibility towards the diverse communities it serves. Leaders work skilfully to identify and take advantage of opportunities to integrate the college's work with community activities and to support local facilities. For example, the college recently took responsibility for a community swimming pool, enabling this facility to remain open, in order to support the health and wellbeing of people in the area.

The college's business development team works well to engage with employers across the college's geographical range, to help shape the college's provision to meet local need. The college's targeted employer forums bring together relevant stakeholders to tackle key economic and social development needs. For example,

the recent forums for the care sector allowed employers to learn about development and funding opportunities, training needs and regulatory requirements, as well as share good practice.

Leaders at all levels evaluate the performance of the college appropriately and identify many of the areas for development suitably. However, in a few instances, leaders' self-evaluation processes result in an overly positive picture of a few aspects of the college's performance. These include learners' grade attainment on level 3 vocational courses and attendance in lessons. As a result, staff across the college are not fully aware of the degree of improvement needed, and the effectiveness of the college's work to improve these aspects is inconsistent.

Senior leaders' improvement and operational plans are thorough and address many of the college's development needs well. These include appropriate actions and targets, which leaders monitor suitably.

Leaders are developing teachers' ability to evaluate their own practice through a useful self-evaluation model. This provides clear structure and guidance to enable staff to reflect upon, and evaluate, the effectiveness of their work against the teaching and learning standards. This is beginning to have an impact on how teachers improve their own practice.

The college supports the professional learning of tutors and leaders at all levels well, including an aspiring leaders programme. Teaching and learning development mentors support teachers to develop their skills and improve their practice well. Vocational teachers benefit from masterclasses led by industry experts and visits to industrial facilities.

Leaders identify good practice and help staff to learn and benefit from it. For example, sports teachers from different sites regularly support each other to develop their skills. However, leaders do not provide consistent opportunities for teachers in more remote sites to observe and collaborate with colleagues across the group. The group has recently begun to work with neighbouring colleges to develop a hub of shared resources to further strengthen teaching, learning and assessment across the region.

The college's financial and resource management processes link well to its strategic plan and short term improvement priorities. Leaders helpfully review the cost-effectiveness of the college's activities at key stages during the year. Leaders support provision and facilities at the group's smaller sites in order to maintain the learner experience and the breadth of provision available.

The college responds suitably to renovation and refurbishment needs across its wide ranging estate. For example, they have recently invested in a new motor vehicle workshop at the Pontardawe site that enables learners to practise skills such as vehicle body repair and painting, using industry standard facilities.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and employer questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, trainers and assessors and the governing body where appropriate through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal/chief executive, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle managers and individual teachers , trainers and assessors to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions, including on and off-the-job sessions where appropriate
- observe and speak to learners at lunch and break times
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- consider the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on learners' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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