

Francesco Group (Holdings) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

2–5 October 2018

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding	
Outcomes for learners	Good	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have driven forward improvements since the previous inspection; Francesco delivers a good programme through which apprentices develop outstanding work skills.
- Leaders and managers have high aspirations for their apprentices. The greatly enhanced apprenticeship programme enables them to develop a wide range of skills that support their future career plans well.
- Leaders and managers have devised a successful pre-apprenticeship programme that is inclusive and gives access to any learner that wants to pursue a hairdressing apprenticeship.
- Apprentices benefit from good vocational training which enables them to develop high-quality skills in hairdressing, and the large majority are making good progress.
- Apprentices benefit from high-quality workplaces and as a result apprentices make good technical progress.
- Most apprentices achieve their qualifications on time, remain in employment and gain promotions in their jobs.
- Apprentices develop exceptionally good work skills and personal and social behaviours which greatly enhance their potential careers and prospects.
- Apprentices develop English and mathematics skills from their starting points very well, and this increases their effectiveness as employees.
- Governance has been appropriately strengthened since the previous inspection, but it is too early to demonstrate its impact on the learners' experience.
- Managers' self-assessment does not evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in sufficient depth.
- Leaders and managers have improved their use of data to evaluate the provision, but they do not set sufficiently challenging targets to secure excellence of provision across all three academies.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Francesco Group (Holdings) Ltd is a franchisor and training provider. It is a family-owned hairdressing business based in Stafford since 1967. It has 39 franchised salons and one company-owned barbers located in eight counties across England.
- The apprenticeship programme operates from three training academies based in Stafford, Birmingham and Poole. Apprentices are employed in salons and receive training and assessment in their workplace. They attend one of the academies two days a month for their off-the-job training and assessment.
- Currently 198 apprentices are in training. Some 75% of these are working towards the hair professional standard, with the remaining apprentices studying on the NVQ level 3 framework. Currently, 38% of apprentices are employed by Francesco group independent franchisees, and the rest are employed by other independent salon owners. All employers are small and medium enterprises.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the role of those exercising governance of the learning provision to ensure that the challenge they pose leaders and the support they provide lead to the highest quality of learning and outcomes for learners.
- Improve the evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that leaders and managers have a more precise view of the strengths in these areas and the impact that they have on the learning experience, so that they may continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that leaders and governors have a more precise overview of the performance of key aspects of the provision and set challenging targets to secure further improvements across all three academies.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have responded particularly well to the improvement challenges set down in the report from the previous inspection. They are determined to provide an apprenticeship programme of high quality that meets the career aspirations of their learners and the business needs of their employers. Since the previous inspection, much coaching and training ensure that leaders, managers and board members continue to improve their effectiveness. Leaders have restructured the provision successfully and introduced new elements in response to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. As a consequence, apprentices develop outstanding vocational skills.
- Leaders and managers are now providing a programme that is inclusive, which opens up opportunities for those learners who achieved less well at school. They have made a significant financial investment in privately funding a successful pre-apprenticeship programme. This is for learners who need some support with the development of their skills before they can start an apprenticeship. All learners who have taken the programme have progressed well, including one of them going into a different industry sector.
- Leaders and managers have high aspirations for their learners, which have been translated into a greatly enhanced apprenticeship programme. They have added a substantial and well-structured business enterprise skills programme. This allows apprentices from different starting points to develop their English and mathematics skills within the setting of hairdressing. This initiative has improved the progress apprentices are making in English and mathematics. Apprentices also develop a useful range of business management skills that support their career aspirations. These are proving useful for those who want to own or manage their own salon.
- Leaders and managers have a well-thought-out vision for the future development of their programmes. They have used their knowledge of the sector well to identify the future needs of employers. For example, they have developed barbering qualifications to meet a growing need. They have also created learning pathways that allow apprentices and salon managers to continue their professional development and fulfil their potential.
- Leaders and managers have continued to build successful relationships with employers. They respond well to their training needs and support them with free training events. Apprentices benefit from high-quality workplaces. Their employers support them to embed the technical skills that they learn at the training academies.
- Performance management arrangements are effective. Trainers and assessors receive frequent appraisals of their performance. Managers have a strong focus on improving the teaching, learning and assessment practice of individual trainers. This ensures that trainers and assessors are effectively meeting key objectives such as the development of English and mathematics. Leaders have established a good link between performance management and staff development. Staff undertake regular vocational professional development.
- Leaders and managers have developed a robust initial advice and guidance strategy. This enables good support for apprentices in pursuing their chosen careers. Specialist trained staff assess thoroughly the behaviours and attitudes displayed by learners. They identify the areas where they will need additional support to increase their readiness for work.

Apprentices receive specialist advice and guidance throughout the programme. At the exit point, they get information about their available choices to fulfil their career aspirations.

- Managers monitor the provision frequently to assess the quality of provision. Leaders and managers know the key weaknesses and strengths well. These are reflected in detailed action plans. They have rectified almost all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate. However, its evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment is insufficiently thorough to highlight the key strengths in this area.
- Leaders and managers have improved the gathering and analysis of data. They monitor information assiduously across the three academies and across an extensive set of measures. However, leaders do not have a simple overview of how certain aspects of the programme are performing. They do not set sufficiently challenging and well-informed targets to secure the highest-quality outcomes for apprentices.

The governance of the provider

- Leaders and managers have established and developed an appropriate governance structure. The Francesco group corporate governing body continues to secure the financial viability of the company and its learning programmes. In response to the previous inspection, leaders set up a dedicated education governing board in May 2018. Leaders chose members carefully to reflect the best practice in work-based learning provision, the hair industry and the local education authority.
- Education board members are clear about their role in supporting and challenging leaders to improve the provision. Despite the short time since its formation, those on the board are already posing a considerable amount of challenge to leaders. They have queried how managers capture and analyse data. They have also raised questions about the performance of particular aspects of the apprenticeship programme. The corporate board has welcomed the detailed scrutiny that the education board has begun providing. However, this has not been in place long enough to demonstrate an impact on the learning experience.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have strengthened safeguarding arrangements. They have set up a safeguarding panel with a broader membership. They also report to the board annually. The report identifies trends in concerns raised by staff or learners and what actions have been taken.
- Leaders have worked hard to develop staff's and apprentices' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty. As a result, learners and staff know how to identify the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. All staff have received safeguarding training, including topics that support the promotion of the learners' well-being such as mental health. Learners continue to feel safe.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures continue to be comprehensive. Managers with a responsibility for safeguarding maintain a risk assessment register of those apprentices who are in danger of not achieving due to their personal circumstances. Leaders and

managers monitor the agreed support actions closely. This results in few apprentices withdrawing from the programme.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Trainers and managers have very high expectations of their apprentices. They inspire and motivate apprentices and ensure that they have a good learning experience. Apprentices value highly the training and support they receive at Francesco Group.
- In the training academies, apprentices learn new skills and work with up-to-date equipment. They bring these new practices back into their place of work. For example, apprentices were using a USB 'dermatoscope' to carry out client consultations. This microscope, with high magnification, enables better identification of hair and scalp conditions.
- Trainers set high expectations in salons. This results in apprentices being very well prepared for a wide range of career aims. A high proportion of level 2 apprentices progress to level 3. A significant minority of apprentices plan to become salon owners. Trainers set aspirational distinction grades for most apprentices' end-point assessment. Most apprentices feel well prepared for this.
- All apprentices benefit from a thorough initial and diagnostic assessment. Trainers quickly identify additional support needs and put a support plan in place. They use additional learning support agreements to track concerns and monitor the progress of each apprentice over time. This results in high achievement for apprentices in receipt of support.
- Trainers and assessors are experienced and have very good current subject knowledge and commercial skills. They all continue to work in the hairdressing industry. They reflect good industry practice and ensure that apprentices make good progress in extending their technical skills. Employers are very satisfied with the apprenticeship programme. They value the strong communication they have with head office. This includes alerts if their employee is absent from the training academy.
- Apprentices receive clear, constructive and developmental verbal feedback on technical skills. This enables them to plan for specific targeted improvements. Trainers' frequent use of skilful questioning ensures that most apprentices extend their knowledge and understanding.
- Most apprentices are making good progress from their starting points. Employers frequently take part in the structured and detailed review process. Trainers and assessors use their reviews on the progress their apprentices are making to plan future learning well. Apprentices use the virtual learning environment, developing good independent learning skills, which prepares them well for their next steps in learning and employment.
- Trainers set individualised vocational targets well, which challenges and extends learning for both the less and more able apprentices. Apprentices routinely self-assess themselves against gold, silver and bronze standards in lessons. Trainers revisit apprentices' evaluations at the end of lessons to track their progress. This helps most apprentices make good progress in their learning.
- All learners who have attended the pre-apprenticeship programme have successfully progressed to the hairdressing apprenticeship or an alternative job. The vast majority are

making very good progress in developing their technical skills in shampooing, massage techniques and blow-drying on their level 2 programme.

- Trainers ensure that apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills in both practical and theory sessions. For example, most apprentices demonstrate very good speaking and listening skills in customer consultations. Apprentices develop mathematics skills in most practical salon sessions through working out percentage profits, VAT and bonuses linked to the technical services they are working on. Trainers routinely correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, although in a few instances apprentices keep making the same mistakes.
- Apprentices make good use of information technology (IT) in their theory lessons. They produce bar charts and use Excel spreadsheets well. They also make good use of the virtual learning environment to enhance their learning. However, although planned for, apprentices are not yet developing sufficient new IT skills.
- Most level 3 apprentices attend a finishing school which is taught by highly skilled practitioners who specialise in advanced cutting and colour techniques. The topics include classic and contemporary cutting and fashion colouring, including bronze ambition and colour correction. It is an intense programme which is responsive to the current needs of the industry. This results in apprentices developing very high levels of skill. Employers appreciate the benefit this brings to their business.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Apprentices value highly their learning programmes and are extremely motivated to learn. They have a very positive attitude to learning, take great pride in their work and are exceptionally well presented. Apprentices are conscientious and well prepared. They have good attendance and punctuality for learning sessions and for work. They speak enthusiastically about the strides they have made in their personal development since starting their apprenticeship. They understand the relevance of improving their knowledge and skills to higher levels.
- Apprentices develop exceptionally good personal and social skills, which enhances their career potential. Their attitudes, traits and personal skills are closely assessed and monitored from the start of their programmes. They demonstrate very positive behaviours soon after commencing their apprenticeship. This is significant in their good and rapid progress. They gain high levels of confidence and raised self-esteem. They demonstrate resilience, initiative and maturity.
- Apprentices gain outstanding work skills and practices as they learn about hairdressing. The standard of their practical skills is particularly high. They hold high, but realistic, aspirations about their future careers as a result of the support and encouragement from their assessors. Employers act as mentors and are excellent role models for their apprentices. This contributes to apprentices' excellent progress as hairdressers.
- Apprentices develop very rapidly English and mathematics skills. They follow a bespoke learning programme designed to support the development of their English and mathematics skills from their starting points. As a result, the vast majority of apprentices rapidly improve these skills and become more efficient in the salon, for example when selling products in the salon and calculating ratios for colour mixes. Soon after starting

their programmes, apprentices develop particularly good verbal communication skills, enabling them to interact with salon clients and use sector vocabulary, including tricky words and technical terms such as 'balayage'.

- Apprentices receive high-quality careers guidance to help them make informed choices about courses that best suit their needs. As a result, they are following programmes that are very closely matched to their interests and career aspirations. This contributes significantly to the motivation they have to succeed.
- Those who attend the pre-apprenticeship programme carry out work duties within a salon, so that they better understand the expectations and demands of hairdressing. This provides a positive start for their apprenticeship. The vast majority of apprentices are keen to progress to higher-level programmes and further training in hairdressing; they gain permanent employment within their salons.
- Apprentices have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe. They have a thorough understanding of staying safe in the workplace and in their personal lives. These aspects are reinforced through discussions in all learning reviews and sessions; the vast majority of apprentices fully understand how to raise concerns if they occur.
- Most apprentices participate in a range of enrichment activities which broaden their knowledge and experiences in hairdressing and the wider society. Many organise charity fundraising events and lead or contribute to business-related projects at their salon. Most receive employer-led training for bespoke business software for making client appointments, costs and payment. They attend exhibitions and trade fairs and new product events, such as manufacturers delivering learning sessions on the science of hairdressing. Many level 3 apprentices attend a specialist finishing school which provides an intense additional training on specific high-level hairdressing techniques.
- Apprentices have a strong understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens today. In off-the-job training sessions, they explore personal, social and ethical issues which broaden their knowledge and understanding about life in wider society and in Britain today.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Over the last year, the proportion of apprentices who successfully completed their programme within the planned time has remained high. In 2017/18, level 3 apprentices had exceptionally high staying-on rates, with the vast majority completing their framework within the planned time.
- The vast majority of apprentices are making good progress from their starting points in their vocational skills, English and mathematics, and personal behaviours. The standard of apprentices' work remains extremely high. Apprentices quickly acquire the hairdressing techniques to operate at industry standards.
- Leaders and managers have taken effective actions to close historic achievement gaps between different groups of learners. The previous achievement gap between males and females has been closed. Male apprentices now achieve slightly better than female apprentices. Learners who declare a disability or learning difficulty are now achieving slightly better than other learners.

- The proportion of learners who pass mathematics functional skills at the first attempt at both level 1 and level 2 has improved in the last year and is high.
- Most level 2 apprentices remain employed, with over half progressing to level 3 apprenticeships. All learners who have undertaken the pre-apprenticeship programme have progressed to an apprenticeship and are making good progress. Most level 3 apprentices remain in employment and contribute substantially to their salon as a result of their course.
- Many apprentices undertake additional units and certificates, such as in hair relaxing, colour correction and hair extensions, which enhances their skills and their career prospects. Nearly all apprentices have been promoted in their jobs since they completed their programme.
- Apprentices' achievements at the Poole academy are not quite at the same high level as those of apprentices at the other two academies.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51895
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	151
Principal/CEO	Ben Dellicompagni
Telephone number	01785 247175
Website	www.francescogroup.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	133	15	34	16	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							

Information about this inspection

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

Inspection team

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Maria Navarro	Her Majesty's Inspector

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