

# City of Portsmouth College

Monitoring visit report

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

In August 2021, Highbury College and Portsmouth College merged to form City of Portsmouth College. Highbury College was inspected in April 2018, when it was judged as 'requires improvement'. A subsequent monitoring visit in January 2019 judged that reasonable progress had been made in improving the quality of education. Portsmouth College was confirmed to be a good provider at a short inspection in March 2017.

The monitoring visit took place to review and evaluate the progress governors and senior leaders have made in strengthening the leadership and management of the merged college and the improvements made in the quality of provision since the previous inspection of Highbury College. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were approximately 3,166 students aged 16 to 19, 516 apprentices and 2,530 adult students. In addition, there were 214 students in receipt of high needs funding. City of Portsmouth College currently works with one subcontractor, Portsmouth in the Community, offering a small provision for approximately 50 students aged 16 to 18 studying sport.

There are now four campuses across the city of Portsmouth: Arundel campus, Highbury campus, North Harbour campus and the sixth-form campus.

### Themes

**What progress have governors and senior leaders made in strengthening the leadership and management of the merged college ensuring effective governance and oversight is in place to hold managers to account for improvements to the quality of education for students and apprentices?**

**Significant progress**

Senior leaders and governors have very successfully transformed the culture at the college. Managers and staff across all campuses refer to an open and transparent culture. Staff speak of 'one college' and 'one team' and they have trust in the senior team. They appreciate the frequent, effective communication and visibility of the senior team. Almost all staff embrace the challenges and are proud of their role within the post-merger improvement journey.

Senior leaders and governors recognised the importance of investing in their management and staff team. After implementing a new management structure, they have devised and rolled out a very well considered, highly relevant and valued

management training programme. Managers explain how they have used this training to enhance their performance. They draw on their increasingly confident management skills to support and develop their staff teams. Managers at all levels now understand the importance of ensuring that their teachers understand their strengths and their areas for improvement, which many now do. They use relevant college data and a range of evidence to evaluate and improve the quality of education successfully. Students and apprentices benefit from this refreshed focus on the quality of the learning experience across campuses.

Leaders and governors know the strengths of the provision and their priorities for further actions well. They carefully monitor the resultant whole college quality improvement plan and review progress carefully. The principal and her senior team have introduced a series of well-understood processes to focus on the quality of the learning experience across campuses. They have established a strong sense of ownership and accountability. Managers take seriously their responsibility to continue to improve the quality of provision for students and apprentices.

Leaders and managers recognise that they need to ensure the very small number of curriculum managers who are not yet fully conversant with their new responsibilities develop their knowledge and skills at pace.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the quality of education at the former Highbury College site in response to the key weaknesses identified at the previous inspection?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have implemented a range of sensible and targeted interventions to improve the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers benefit from a strong focus on developing their pedagogical skills. They are now confident to take risks, to experiment and to share their skills and ideas in 'learning communities'. For example, teachers shared experiences of learning from each other about supporting students with dyslexia and using initial assessments to inform their planning. This is leading to improved support for students and apprentices.

Most teachers plan and teach their lessons effectively and in a logical order so that students and apprentices build on basic knowledge before moving to more complex and difficult topics. Most students and apprentices benefit from a coherent curriculum with frequent and effective links between topics which help them to learn. For example, students on health courses develop the practical skills to support patients while also understanding the importance of compassionate care, including maintaining patients' dignity.

Curriculum managers have ensured that teachers understand the importance of monitoring the attendance, behaviour and progress of their students and

apprentices. They use a well-understood tracking system so that teaching teams can ensure that students and apprentices are making progress. They put in place appropriate additional learning or study support promptly. Most teachers are ambitious for their students and apprentices. They identify relevant and stretching targets for all, including those students or apprentices who are already achieving high grades.

Leaders and managers recognise the need to accelerate the pace of improvement in a few areas. For example, although attendance has improved overall, this is not consistent in all areas. In addition, there were a few instances where the quality of learning was poorer for students or apprentices. For example, students and apprentices found the work too easy and became distracted with some poor behaviours which the teacher did not challenge.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring teachers and assessors help students and apprentices develop and apply their skills in English and mathematics?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers recognise the importance of students and apprentices developing their English and mathematics skills. They have rightly identified the key areas for improvement, communicated these clearly and ensure they effectively monitor the impact of their actions to ensure progress.

Managers and teachers use initial assessments well. They identify students' and apprentices' starting points and use these to plan learning. They track progress effectively at regular points and use the outcome of these reviews to set helpful targets for students and apprentices. Leaders' improvements to date have had a partial impact in improving attendance to English and mathematics lessons and some small improvements to the numbers achieving their English or mathematics qualifications. However, leaders and managers recognise that there is more to do so that more students and apprentices attend their English and/or mathematics lessons and achieve their qualifications. The pace of improvement is slower in entry level English and in mathematics.

Leaders and managers have made considerable progress in ensuring teachers help students and apprentices develop and apply their English and mathematical skills within subject specialisms. Teaching staff across curriculum areas understand their responsibility to develop these essential skills within their subjects. Most teachers confidently and competently plan how they can promote skills within their lessons. For example, teachers at the North Harbour and Highbury campuses ensure their students become more proficient in using different measurements such as volume, understanding data trends or calculating equations accurately. At the sixth-form campus, science and psychology teachers use well-planned starter activities to reinforce mathematical skills their students will need to interrogate data or calculate results for experiments. Adult students at the Arundel campus benefit from a

consistent focus on spelling and pronunciation so that they develop accuracy in their English skills.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that teachers plan and teach the curriculum in their subject, taking into account the starting point of their students and apprentices?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have ensured that teachers use information about students' and apprentices' starting points effectively to plan learning. Teachers use a range of strategies to ensure they gather appropriate and detailed information. For example, at the sixth-form campus, students complete useful 'flying start' tasks at the start of their courses. These help teachers identify students' prior subject knowledge and help students to understand the demands of the subject. Teachers use students' responses to these tasks effectively to assess any gaps in knowledge and plan carefully to fill these gaps in subsequent lessons.

Most teachers plan and sequence learning carefully and structure their lessons effectively. This enables students and apprentices to build their learning in a coherent and logical way. For example, at North Harbour, staff order the curriculum appropriately so that apprentices begin their learning with an introduction to health and safety and key legislation. They then develop their knowledge of tool identification and safe use before working with different tools to create, test and fix equipment. In A-level biology, first year students can confidently explain the difference between isotonic, hypotonic and hypertonic solutions and can give sensible hypotheses for how different substances would react if immersed in one of these solutions.

Many staff continue to assess students' and apprentices' prior skills through the initial weeks of their courses. They identify gaps in knowledge or skills and take steps to help students address these gaps promptly. However, a minority of staff do not use information about students' starting points effectively. These teachers do not plan learning so that students and apprentices are able to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, a small number of students repeat the same work they did at school or on previous lower-level courses.

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