

Northampton College

General further education college

Inspection dates		4–8 February 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for students

This college is good because:

- Long course success rates are high, particularly for adults and at foundation level. Success rates for the large majority of subjects are high.
- Teaching promotes students' good skills development and prepares them well for progression into employment or further education.
- The inclusive culture promotes a high level of recruitment of students from diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of abilities, many of whom are successful in gaining qualifications and progressing to higher levels of study.
- Resources and accommodation are almost all of a very high quality and are used very effectively; the learning environment is safe, very well-maintained and welcoming.
- Students contribute very well to college life and are mostly highly satisfied with their experience.
- Managers take very effective action to ensure strong and sustained improvement in most provision.
- Governors are very knowledgeable and provide well-informed and constructive challenge to managers in order to promote improvement.

This is not yet an outstanding college because:

- The quality of provision in a few work-based learning subjects, and in AS- and A-level provision is not yet good enough.
- Attendance is not consistently high.
- Not enough teaching and learning is outstanding and there is a small amount of inadequate teaching.
- The evaluation of the overall effectiveness of provision through self-assessment is over-complicated and lacks a sharp focus.

Full report

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance and punctuality by ensuring that all teachers monitor attendance rigorously, challenge lateness robustly and follow up on absence. Ensure that reasons for absence are explored fully so that barriers to students' full attendance are overcome.
- Improve the effectiveness of provision in business studies. Ensure that teachers plan effectively for the full range of students' abilities and use a wide range of activities that develop students' knowledge and understanding. Reduce the use of workshop-style lessons where students work independently on assignments with little or no new learning taking place.
- Develop effective strategies to improve teaching, particularly in AS- and A-level subjects, so that more lessons are outstanding. Increase teachers' use of initial assessment in planning learning. Ensure that work provides sufficient stretch and challenge for more able students. Share more fully the good practice that exists and ensure all teachers participate in peer and developmental observation processes.
- Develop the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons by providing appropriate staff training, including suitable opportunities for promotion in schemes of work and lesson plans, and monitoring promotion rigorously through checking documentation and lesson observations.
- Increase opportunities for students' English and mathematical skills to be developed through their subject lessons, for example by ensuring that teachers take responsibility for improving students' vocabulary and use suitable opportunities to consolidate and enhance students' mathematical skills.
- Improve target setting in classroom-based and work-based provision so that individual targets for students are specific to individuals, are clear and focused on precisely what needs to be done with short timescales applied. Ensure that these targets are followed up in a timely manner.
- Simplify self-assessment procedures and documentation and sharpen the focus of analysis and evaluation including ensuring that the identification of areas for development is precise leading to clearly defined actions to drive further improvements.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Students' achievement has improved markedly since the last inspection. Adults' success rates are high, as are success rates for younger students except for GCE A- and AS- level qualifications, where their success rates are below average. Students' achievement at foundation level for both age groups is particularly high.
- This improved achievement is because the number of students who complete their courses has risen steadily for younger students and strongly for adults. In addition, pass rates for both age groups have increased and are above average for adults. Younger students' success rates at intermediate and advanced level are just below average.
- Almost all groups of students achieve equally well except for a widening gap in achievement between students of a White and Black Caribbean heritage and their peers. Managers have identified this gap and improvement actions are in place. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve at a higher rate than their peers.
- Students' long course success rates are above average in the large majority of subjects. Rates are consistently high in a number including health and social care, hairdressing and beauty

therapy, travel and tourism, and performing arts and media. However, success rates are well below average in business and in A- and AS-level subjects including science, humanities and social sciences.

- Students produce high standards of practical work in most vocational areas. For example, they demonstrate high levels of creativity in arts subjects, acquire good culinary skills in the college kitchens, and develop their performance skills in dance and music very well. Students' attitudes to work are mostly good and they are often inspired by their teachers to develop a professional approach to their work. Occasionally, students make much less contribution to their learning, become passive or lose concentration.
- A high number of students develop their independent learning skills successfully by participating in a study skills programme based in the libraries. For many, this helps improve their employability skills, their confidence including in working independently, and their presentation skills.
- Students' rate of attendance is increasing but requires further improvement, particularly attendance at some functional skills classes. The rate of attendance varies by level and is highest at advanced level but lower at foundation level. Students' punctuality is mostly acceptable although a minority have a casual approach to timekeeping at the start of the day.
- Students' starting points are often low. At foundation and intermediate level, students make good progress and respond well to the challenges presented to them. Advanced students' progress compared to their prior attainment is less strong; they rarely exceed expectations except in a few subjects. In A- and AS- levels, students underperform in business, sciences and humanities.
- A high proportion of students move on to higher levels of study; progression from foundation to intermediate level is particularly high. A low proportion move from AS- to A-level; however, AS-level students often transfer successfully to a vocational route. The proportion of students moving into employment has increased well.
- Apprentices' achievement is below average. Although increasing overall, framework success rates are low in several subject areas and female apprentices underperform compared to males. Apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed less well than their peers; however, current apprentices in both these groups are making much better progress.
- A high number of students take GCSE qualifications in mathematics and English. For many tackling this qualification is challenging. Their success rates at grades A* to C are broadly average. A high number of students take functional skills qualifications at foundation level. While the success rate is increasing, their success rates on these qualifications are below average.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is consistently good in the large majority of subjects and students learn well as a result as shown in their mostly high success and progression rates. Teachers' expectations are high and they are particularly good at helping students from a wide ability range at foundation and intermediate level to make a strong start in preparing for their chosen careers.
- Teachers' subject expertise, such as in hairdressing, dancing and musical theatre, supported by high quality resources is used very well. Students often comment highly positively on how this motivates and inspires them; they demonstrate the impact, for example, in producing high quality theatrical performances. Teachers direct students to the virtual learning environment frequently to augment their study and help them learn to work independently, which works well to support formal lessons.
- Teaching in a very few subjects and across AS- and A-levels varies too much in effectiveness and a very small minority is inadequate. This less effective teaching is often because teachers over-direct lessons, talk too much, use uninteresting approaches and allow students to become

passive. Teachers' strategies, such as in using questions, are underdeveloped to ensure that students are involved in learning and not enough attention is paid to consolidating students' understanding.

- Although much teaching is good and a few lessons are outstanding, at advanced level in particular, students sometimes coast rather than make good progress. Teachers often set relatively challenging tasks across a whole group but less frequently make specifically high demands of individuals based on their knowledge of students' abilities. As a result, more able students do not always maximise their potential.
- Staff provide good support for students, in particular those with barriers to learning or those who lack confidence in their personal and social skills. An experienced support team provides valuable extra support and prompt intervention with health or welfare needs. The provision of additional learning support ensures students with identified needs learn at least as well and often better than their peers.
- Students make very good use of the library for research and independent study. They use study skills guidance and the wide range of learning materials productively. Library staff working closely with curriculum teams have succeeded in getting more than 600 students involved in the 'Six Book Challenge', which is having a positive impact on students' reading skills; the number of male students involved in this project has increased significantly over time.
- Staff undertake thorough initial assessment of students' literacy and mathematics skills providing very good information as a basis for helping them to learn. This information is used well to inform the provision of additional learning support and individual students' skills development needs. However, too often this information is not used well in planning learning, particularly in matching work demands to students' abilities.
- In a number of subjects including the arts and ESOL, teachers set clear learning objectives and comprehensive targets within lessons. However, some learning outcomes, targets and the tasks set in lessons lack challenge. In particular, written targets in students' individual learning plans are often imprecise and insufficiently sharply focused on improvement actions.
- Teachers use practical assessment very well, including some good use of peer and self-assessment. Students find teachers' progress reports and their feedback very helpful. In most subjects, marked work is returned promptly and feedback identifies how students can improve. Most teachers consistently correct students' spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- In work-based learning, apprentices receive good quality training, particularly in engineering. Information, advice and guidance have improved notably. Assessments are fair, accurate and supported by assessors' good verbal feedback. However, the linked progress reviews are often cursory and short term targets to promote skill development are insufficiently detailed.
- Teachers contextualise and reinforce English and mathematical skills well in the majority of subjects. For example, hairdressing students develop good subject-based essay writing and presentation skills. However, these strengths are not widespread across provision and teachers do not make enough use of opportunities, for example, to ensure students are confident in using technical language.
- Managers have undertaken a much-needed review of advice and guidance for AS- and A-level courses carefully and ensured that students are capable and aware of the demands of these courses. Staff provide very good guidance to support students' progression in almost all provision, although the guidance about progression for AS-level students has been unrealistic until the current year.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity themes well in a few subjects, such as in health and social care and in the workplace for apprentices. However, teachers' promotion in other subjects is insufficient.

Science and mathematics**Learning programmes for 16-18
Learning programmes for 19+**

Requires improvement

- Teaching and assessment have improved in both science and mathematics but are not yet consistently good. Staff have made considerable changes to improve weaknesses in aspects of support and guidance and are monitoring students' progress closely, but some of these changes are recent and not yet well-established. The previous weaknesses are evident in the low success rates, particularly on science courses and the extent to which students have underachieved in recent years.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they have benefitted well from training and support from highly experienced teachers. The majority of lessons are good and include regular and good practical lessons for science students in well-equipped laboratories. Teachers of mathematics use models and teaching aids very well to teach important concepts that underpin students' understanding.
- Teachers use their knowledge of individual students' ability well to plan a stimulating range of activities. In the most effective lessons, teachers use more demanding exercises well to stretch more able students. However, in the fewer less effective lessons, teachers talk too much and allow students to be passive in their learning. Teachers do not pay enough attention to ensuring that scientific and mathematical drawing and presentation skills are well developed.
- Teachers use questions well to assess students' understanding. Assessment is undertaken regularly and initial assessment is thorough. Teachers make helpful and supportive comments on marked work and ensure that improvement points are clearly stated and followed up.
- Teachers provide extra help through subject-based workshops. Attendance at these is mandatory for students who are underperforming. Teachers, technicians, library and support staff work closely to support students, which they appreciate greatly. Students' attendance and punctuality is good and lessons start promptly, often with an interesting and engaging activity such as a quiz or puzzle.
- Staff monitor students' progress carefully and record this appropriately through individual learning plans. However, within these plans, teachers set ineffective, generic, long-term targets which do not always relate sufficiently to an individual student's ability and do not make good use of initial assessment information. Teachers do not always review targets in a timely way.
- Although most teachers correct spelling, grammar and punctuation on students' work, too little is done to develop their English and mathematical skills further. For example, in an AS-level physics lesson, a few students struggled with trigonometry skills and did not receive the extra support to aid their understanding and skill development.
- Staff have implemented successfully a number of changes to entry requirements and guidance for courses to ensure that students are fully capable of succeeding on the courses they are enrolled on. For example, physics students are also required to study mathematics. A recently introduced vocational science course successfully provides an appropriate alternative to AS- and A-level provision.
- Staff support students' progression to higher education well, particularly with their UCAS applications. A high proportion of successful A-level students progress to university. However, students have no opportunities to gain work experience and the links made between provision and industry practice are not yet established.
- Students and staff make good use of the virtual learning environment as a source of worksheets, hand-outs and examination papers for practice. However, its use within learning

activities is underdeveloped and teachers rarely make reference to it in lessons. Too little is done beyond establishing a basic understanding and awareness of the calendar of cultural events to promote equality and diversity in lessons.

Engineering, transportation operations and maintenance

Apprenticeships

Other work based learning

Good

- The quality of training and assessment on both apprenticeships and other work-place courses has improved markedly and is good. This good provision is not yet reflected in apprentices' success rates which are average, but is more evident in the above average success rates for other work-based students. In particular, improved assessment and monitoring of electrical installation apprentices' work is contributing to their increased staying-on rates and levels of motivation.
- Off-the-job teaching and learning challenges apprentices to develop and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding well. The standard of apprentices' work is very high, for example, in designing and building a remote controlled sensor to change suspension settings automatically on a car. Because they mostly learn well, employers give apprentices high levels of responsibility, for example in undertaking full vehicle services and installing commercial three phase wiring circuits.
- Teachers plan learning well, including making good use of the high quality resources, to meet individual apprentices' needs. Staff encourage apprentices to develop their independent learning skills both on- and off-the-job including through very good use of materials available on the virtual learning environment. However, in mechanical engineering practical workshop sessions a few apprentices wait too long to receive guidance from teachers.
- Assessment is fair and supported by comprehensive and flexible assessment plans for apprentices. Apprentices often initiate opportunities for assessment, which helps them take ownership of their learning and progress. Assessors' verbal feedback is helpful; however, written feedback on assessments is limited to compliance comments and often does not include improvement points.
- Staff ensure that apprentices and employers have a good understanding of their progress. However, in some work-place reviews staff pay insufficient attention to detailing improvement points. Where targets are used to promote progress, these are too focused on completing tasks rather than specifying the skill development needed.
- Staff provide good support for apprentices. In particular, staff found work placements for the high proportion of apprentices made redundant in 2011/12. Students studying college-based electrical installation courses are well supported to progress into apprenticeships and make rapid progress through their studies. The health, safety and welfare of all work-based students are well monitored in the workplace.
- Apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive adequate support; however, the staying-on rate of these apprentices is lower than their peers. Apprentices mostly make good progress in developing their functional skills both on- and off-the-job. Learning of mathematical skills is often reinforced well, for example, by undertaking numerical tasks such as calculating resistance in circuits for electrical apprentices.
- Staff have improved initial advice and guidance significantly and this is now good. As a result, the retention rate of apprentices has increased markedly. However, advice about progression for

apprentices moving to advanced apprenticeships in engineering does not always ensure that all apprentices are adequately prepared.

- Teachers promote equality and diversity very well. For example, apprentices have well-informed discussions about how to encourage applications for courses from female students based on their workplace experiences. Teachers' schemes of work show relevant development of equality and diversity themes, for example in consideration of access issues in electrical installation building regulations, and often develop such themes well.

Information and communication technology

Learning programmes for 16-18

Learning programmes for 19+

Good

- Good teaching and learning and well-planned and thorough assessment correlate closely with the students' good outcomes. Students enjoy learning in a safe environment. Teachers and support staff provide good guidance and motivate students well to succeed.
- Teachers plan their lessons very effectively, and deliver them at the appropriate pace to match different groups' needs and students' ability levels. Teachers use a variety of interesting activities based on a wide range of software, such 'Photoshop', which engage students well.
- Teachers encourage students to participate actively in most lessons, students respond willingly to often demanding questions and show confidence in asking for help when needed. For example, during a video about wireless technologies, the teacher stopped play frequently to pose challenging questions to ensure students' full concentration.
- Students develop good independent learning skills and are often creative, for example in computer animation design. However, teachers miss opportunities to use information and communication technology systems imaginatively to promote learning strongly. For example, technology is rarely used by students or staff to share work to support peer review activities.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are mostly good. However, the attendance of advanced level students on the second year of their courses tends to be lower than for other courses and requires improvement.
- Teachers plan assessments well and ensure that students have appropriate evidence to meet the assessment requirements. Students are clear about what they are required to do and by when. They are challenged to aim for higher grades, which they need and mostly achieve, to secure progression onto the next level of study.
- Students, directed by teachers, make good use of the well-populated virtual learning environment to gain information about all aspects of their courses, including their course targets, progress records and other related information. Students are fully aware of targets and these are monitored regularly in tutorials. Staff support the large proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve very well.
- All students receive accurate and thorough initial assessment in English and mathematics. This information is used well to support their skill development and support their work towards accreditation in either GCSE or functional skills as appropriate. Subject staff deliver foundation level functional skills and contextualise these well to students' subject interests to help engage them and promote achievement.
- Students receive accurate and helpful course information through open days and the prospectus. Staff use interviews for all applicants and taster days well to make sure students know the demands of courses and are suitable applicants. The range of pathways within the

information and communication technology curriculum is comprehensive and students value the choice of courses to fit their needs and interests.

- Staff promote equality and diversity well, making good use of the gender balance and wide mix of backgrounds within student groups. In particular, teachers take care to ensure that the smaller number of female students does not encounter any barriers to their learning. Students work respectfully and well together.
- Teachers place too little emphasis on linking learning to employment. Links with employers are few and students get limited opportunities to go on relevant visits, take part in work experience or to hear from industry experts. However, actions are in place to redress this issue and staff are currently developing new links with local technology businesses and informing students regularly about job opportunities.

Hospitality and catering

Learning programmes for 16-18 Learning programmes for 19+

Good

- Good teaching, learning and assessment contribute well to students' high success rates in hospitality and catering qualifications. Students develop good practical skills such as in food presentation, and good social skills including in verbal communication. They consistently demonstrate safe working practices and have high standards of personal presentation.
- Students' progression to higher level qualifications is good, particularly from foundation level. Teachers motivate and inspire students who work hard to complete tasks set. Students' behaviour, attendance and punctuality are all very good.
- Teachers are well qualified and use their extensive industry experience very effectively to extend students' skills and professionalism. Teachers expect high standards and often set challenging and complex tasks to help familiarise students with the demands of professional kitchens, for example, students butcher complex and challenging cuts of meat in larder sessions. Students work very effectively with their peers and teachers to achieve these tasks.
- Most teaching is good and a small minority of lessons are outstanding. Teachers' good planning ensures students' enjoyment and makes very good use of the high quality resources, particularly the range of practical kitchens and food service outlets. Teachers frequently and rigorously check that learning is taking place and encourage good learning from peers by using mixed groups across levels of study.
- A few lessons are less effective, particularly when teachers do not challenge more able students sufficiently. Occasionally in lessons, students complete set work and are not given sufficient additional learning activities. Sometimes, a few students are not sufficiently involved in whole group discussions.
- Teachers and students make good use of the virtual learning environment. It provides a comprehensive range of resources and is well used by students outside of timetabled lessons. Students value the opportunity to revise lesson content or catch up on missed work.
- Assessment is rigorous and accurate. Students are clear about assessment requirements and deadlines. Students organise on-line or paper-based portfolios well and include a good range of high quality evidence. Teachers' feedback is thorough and mostly identifies clearly what students need to do to improve. However, learning plans and associated targets for a few students are too general and targets often refer merely to the completion of coursework.
- Teachers' approach to helping students to develop their English, mathematical and functional skills requires improvement. Most teachers correct students' spelling and grammatical errors but

do not do enough to develop written English and mathematical skills in a vocational context. As a result, students sometimes struggle with these skills, for example, when calculating the quantities of ingredients needed accurately when adapting a standard recipe.

- Students receive good information, advice and guidance in course selection. Staff offer very effective support, following accurate initial assessment, for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, sometimes teachers do not always direct learning support assistants to full effect in lessons.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well. Staff and students respect and are sensitive to each other's differences. Tutorials help students to celebrate diversity within the department and across the college. However, teachers do not always exploit opportunities to consider equality and diversity themes fully.

Sport, travel and tourism

Learning programmes for 16-18

Learning programmes for 19+

Good

- Students enjoy lessons and learn well because of good teaching and strongly supportive relationships with staff. The impact of this good provision is evident in students' well above average success rates on travel and tourism courses and the improvements in success rates to above average for students on sports courses in 2011/12. In particular, students' staying on rates are increasing because of further improvements to the guidance and support they receive.
- The large majority of learning activities are of a good quality. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they use their specialisms, for example in responsible tourism, well. Teachers structure their lessons carefully, maintain a brisk pace and contextualise learning well. Teachers promote skill development linked to employability, for example, sports students develop a good understanding of cool-down techniques relevant to fitness classes in gyms.
- Teachers make sure students are thoroughly engaged in lessons. For example, in a task based on organising a sporting event, each student took responsibility for a specific role following self-evaluation of their skills and interests. Teachers use the high standard resources, for example in sport, very well to support learning.
- In the minority of less effective lessons, teachers focus too much on whole group activities which do not match well with the range of ability in most lessons. Occasionally, teachers do not prevent a few students' poor behaviour from disrupting and slowing the pace of learning for others.
- Teachers provide very good pastoral care and support for students. This supports students' development of personal and employment skills. Teachers have improved initial advice and guidance, and induction activities well so that these procedures are more effective at ensuring students are placed on the right course.
- Assessment is timely, consistent in maintaining standards and fair. Teachers provide detailed feedback to support students. Teachers use a wide range of assessment methods well which helps students to develop skills including in self- and peer assessment. Teachers use the results of assessment productively to keep students informed about progress towards meeting their learning goals.
- Teachers use information and learning technology well and sometimes imaginatively to support teaching and learning. Students use the resources based within the virtual learning environment widely to support their assignment work as well as to keep track of their own progress through their e-learning plans. However, targets set by teachers in these plans are not consistently specific or measurable.

- Teachers help students to develop their functional skills well. However, some lessons in the discrete delivery of English and mathematics are much less effective and students do not always make enough progress in these subjects.
- Students' support needs are assessed thoroughly at the start of their courses. Detailed group profiles are produced as a result; teachers use these well in planning to meet individual students' needs in lessons. When additional support is needed, it is provided well and helps students to achieve well.
- The promotion of equality and diversity varies too much. Schemes of work refer to awareness and themes but teachers miss opportunities to promote and reinforce equality and diversity in lessons too often. For example, in a practical fitness lesson, an opportunity for students to consider warm-up activities for disabled people was not developed.

Business studies

Learning programmes for 16-18 Learning programmes for 19+

Inadequate

- Teaching, learning and assessment are not effective in ensuring students make adequate progress or achieve their full potential. This position is reflected in students' success rates which, although increasing steadily, are below average, particularly for AS- and A- level business and accounting courses. Too few students progress from intermediate level to further study or employment.
- Teachers create a supportive learning environment but they do not provide adequate challenge to ensure that students learn sufficiently well. Teachers' planning focuses too much on uninspiring whole class activities and they do not develop students' wider skills in applying their knowledge to a business work context. Students are passive and spend too much time completing coursework during lessons rather than deepening and broadening their business knowledge.
- In the few more effective lessons, teachers use a wide range of questions to engage students. They often overcome challenging behaviour and low motivation by providing stimulating and focused activities, such as small group work focused on solving business problems. Teachers are often quick to respond to individual students' needs but sometimes help them too much.
- The development of students' employability skills requires improvement. Students have limited opportunities to gain work experience; very few external speakers come to talk about their experiences of industry. However, students benefit from some wider enrichment activities such as visiting Aston Villa football club.
- Teachers' setting of specific, short-term targets is not fully effective. In some cases targets in written records are out-of-date or do not state clearly what students need to do to achieve them. Teachers rarely set individual targets for students to achieve in lessons. However, the verbal feedback given to students during one-to-one coaching in lessons is often effective in helping them to improve the quality of their coursework.
- The quality of written feedback on students' work is too varied. In the minority of good feedback, teachers indicate clearly what students need to do to modify coursework to achieve higher grades. However, too often, feedback comprises ticks or crosses and only notes a pass or fail. Students make good use of the virtual learning environment to access learning materials to support their coursework.

- Teachers support foundation and intermediate level students well to develop their functional skills. However, advanced level students have too few opportunities to develop their English and mathematics skills.
- Students benefit from good and timely advice and guidance prior to enrolment. Additional learning support is effective in helping students to achieve. Teachers are using recently-implemented effective monitoring systems for AS-level students; however, these systems have not been adopted across A-level provision.
- Teachers do not take full advantage of the frequent opportunities that arise in lessons to promote equality and diversity themes with students. For example, opportunities to explore cultural and language differences arising from topics such as international business are not developed. Students from different ethnic and gender groups are not encouraged to mix during learning activities, which limits their opportunities to develop a better understanding of cultural difference.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior managers, well supported by governors, set a clear mission, have high expectations and focus strategic priorities strongly on encouraging participation from students who are disadvantaged or from under-represented groups in education. Managers have made good progress in improving students' experiences and increasing their success, including during the major new building project on the Northampton campus. Most of the challenging performance targets set by managers have been met.
- Managers' focus on improving college-based students' achievement has resulted in a significant improvement in outcomes in the large majority of college-based courses since the last inspection. However, apprentices' success rates, as well as success rates for AS- and A-level provision, while increasing, remain below average. Current students' progress in these areas is much improved, particularly in apprenticeships and in science.
- Governors are well-qualified and experienced, and monitor the curriculum and students' performance carefully and well. Their well-informed scrutiny and constructive challenge to managers has supported the good rate of improvement and increased the rigour in quality assurance. Governors take a mature, self-critical stance in evaluating their own performance.
- Curriculum management is good in most areas as shown by the marked increases in success rates in nearly all areas. Senior managers identify underperforming courses, for example in sciences, and work constructively and successfully with curriculum managers to improve most of these. However, in one or two subjects, improvement actions have not been followed up sufficiently promptly and the quality of provision is weak.
- Managers work successfully with all staff to drive improvement in the quality of teaching and assessment. Teachers benefit from regular well-resourced professional development which supports them well in improving their practice. Experienced teachers coach and mentor less-experienced colleagues very effectively. Managers are using a clear focus on teachers' practice within performance management increasingly well to support improvement in quality.
- The lesson observation process is now more rigorous following a major manager-led review. Observers' evaluations are realistic and take proper account of learning as the measure of effective teaching. However, the subsequent focus on teachers' specific training needs is imprecise with too much focus on developing less effective teachers rather than promoting improvement in all. Short visits to classrooms with good developmental feedback to teachers have recently been instigated.
- The curriculum meets a wide range of students' needs and is based on sound collaborative work including with local schools, councils and colleges. The work-based curriculum meets local

employers' needs and they value the skills their employees gain. In the smaller Daventry centre, careful curriculum development has ensured that a sufficiently wide range of courses meets local needs.

- Managers recognise that the curriculum for English and mathematics does not meet the full range of intermediate and advanced students' abilities. Sensible changes in the current year make much better use of initial assessment to place students on appropriate qualifications. Managers are placing a focus on embedding and reinforcing of these skills in curriculum areas, but this is only successful in a minority.
- Self-assessment is self-critical and the grades are largely accurate; however, some evaluation lacks a sharp focus and the over-complicated summary format means that some key improvement points are not clearly identified. In contrast, course level reviews are mostly accurate and thorough, and lead to effective actions for improvement. Managers use data well in the self-assessment process, although the analysis against equality and diversity criteria and of value-added data is underdeveloped.
- Good promotion of equality and diversity across the college is based on a strong focus on mutual respect and celebrating diversity. This has led to a substantial increase in the proportion of students of ethnic minority heritage to almost twice that in the local communities. Managers' actions to close achievement gaps are mostly successful. However, reinforcing equality and diversity through teaching is not yet sufficiently effective.
- Managers and governors have ensured that statutory responsibilities for safeguarding students are met. Security checks on staff are complete and they receive comprehensive and regular training. Good procedures ensure that safe working practices are maintained in the college and at the premises of employers and partners.
- Senior managers place high emphasis on good two-way communications with students, as shown by their frequent presence in communal areas. Students have a strong voice within the college, for example, trained student observers complete lesson observations and provide helpful and insightful feedback. Student ambassadors contribute very well in a wide range of ways including representing the college at events.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Northampton College									
Inspection grades are based on a college's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 Learning programmes	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Other work- based learning	Employability	Foundation Learning	Community learning
Outcomes for learners	2		2	2	3	3			
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2		2	2	3	3			
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2		2	2	2	2			

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Mathematics and statistics	3
Science	3
Engineering	2
Transportation operations and maintenance	2
ICT for practitioners	2
ICT for users	2
Hospitality and catering	2
Sport	2
Travel and tourism	2

Business Studies

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College details

Northampton College	
Type of college	General further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 3,771
	Part-time: 3,078
Principal/CEO	Len Closs
Date of previous inspection	April 2009
Website address	www.northamptoncollege.ac.uk

College 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)								
Full-time	508	160	786	259	1,667	540	N/A	N/A
Part-time	139	1,120	148	520	29	209	2	49
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	166	69	80	101	2	2		
Number of learners aged 14-16	115							
Number of community learners	310							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the college contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N/A 							

Additional socio-economic information

Northampton is a large college based on a large main site close to the town centre, a small site in the town centre and a second site in Daventry, some 20 miles away. In September 2012, a major new building project was completed at the main site and the staged transfer of all provision to the new accommodation was finished. Almost all students come from Northamptonshire. The large majority of students are aged 16 to 18. The proportion of male and female students is broadly similar. The proportion of students from an ethnic minority heritage is considerably larger than in the local population. The percentage of pupils leaving school in Northamptonshire with more than five GCSEs at A* to C grades is below the national and regional average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Philippa Francis HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the deputy principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on students' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. Inspectors observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the college. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the provision and graded the subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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