

Itchen Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		1–4 October 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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 learners

This college is good because:

- The proportion of students who achieve their qualifications has risen consistently over the last five years and is high.
- Teaching and learning are good and improving, and good staff training is contributing to a culture where teachers are increasingly effective, self-reflective practitioners.
- Students benefit from a wide range of high-quality resources, both in lessons and out of lessons, to help them learn.
- Support for students, both pastoral and academic, is of a high standard. Staff treat each student as an individual, and willingly give up their time to give extra help to students.
- College leaders are highly effective in prioritising teaching and learning, embedding a culture of learning for staff and students, and promoting an inclusive environment that is welcoming to all.

This is not yet an outstanding college because:

- The progress that students make in comparison with their starting points is not consistently good on all courses, and leaders and managers have not yet succeeded in fully understanding and resolving the reasons for this.
- Although teaching is mostly good, not enough lessons are outstanding. The college's own view of the high proportion of outstanding teaching was not supported by inspection evidence.
- Although aspirations for what students can achieve are rising, in a significant minority of instances students are given work, both in lessons and for homework that is not demanding enough. Teachers' feedback on students' work is too often brief and undeveloped, and does not give sufficient guidance to students on how to improve.
- Provision in English and mathematics is not consistently good.

Full report

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' progress further by:
 - making better use of value-added data to identify courses where students' progress is less than good, and reviewing all aspects of the teaching, learning and assessment in those courses to identify precisely what needs to be improved
 - ensuring that data, including challenging target grades for students, are used effectively by all teachers and managers throughout the year to monitor individual students' progress rigorously, and intervening swiftly where evidence of underperformance is found
 - increasing the proportion of outstanding lessons by ensuring that lesson observers identify the precise characteristics of the very best teaching and learning, and building upon current strategies to share best practice and raise teaching standards further
 - ensuring that on all courses students are given work that is sufficiently demanding, both in lessons and for independent study. Improving the consistency and quality of teachers' feedback on marked work, so that all students are clear about what they need to do to improve their work and achieve challenging targets.
- Develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to improve students' English and mathematics through the curriculum on all courses. Increase the proportion of students achieving grades A* to C at GCSE in these subjects by identifying and removing the barriers to improvement.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The college attracts students from a broad range of social, economic and academic backgrounds, although the average attainment of students on entry to the college is significantly lower than that typically seen in sixth-form colleges. Students' achievements have improved consistently over the last five years, and the proportion of students who completed their courses successfully in 2013 was around the high national average for sixth-form colleges.
- The overall picture of students' achievements disguises some significant variations by subject and course. Students' performance at AS level improved significantly in 2013, particularly in science and mathematics. However, the proportion of students achieving grades A* to C in GCSE mathematics was not high enough, and in GCSE English it was very poor as a result of significant staffing difficulties. Results on vocational courses are good, and students achieve particularly well in sports and public services.
- The college is increasingly successful in supporting students to complete their courses. Although most students achieve final grades that are broadly in line with their targets, this is not consistent across the college. A significant minority of students do not make as much progress as would be expected given their GCSE results on entry. In particular, the progress students make varies too much between different A/AS-level subjects, and leaders and managers have not yet focused sufficiently on tackling the inconsistencies in this measure of performance.
- A historic gap in achievement between males and females has been closed successfully in 2012/13, and there are no other significant achievement gaps by social group. Although teachers are conscious of the need to help students to improve their English and mathematics, not enough students achieve qualifications in these core subjects. Students who need extra help with their studies receive comprehensive support and achieve well.
- The standard of students' work seen during the inspection was good. In many vocational subjects, for example art, dance, sports, travel and tourism and information and communication

technology, students are developing very good practical skills. The vibrant displays of students' work in several areas of the college help to promote a culture of learning.

- Many students on academic courses produce written work of a high standard. However, in too many instances they are given work, both in and out of lessons, that is insufficiently demanding. Students are set regular homework, but too often this is insubstantial. Attendance at, and punctuality to, lessons are very good. Students arrive ready to learn, and this prepares them well for their future lives.
- The proportion of students progressing to university, just over a third, has remained relatively constant over the last three years. The vast majority of those who apply are successful, with most taking courses at local higher-education institutions. The proportion of students going to the most prestigious universities is comparatively low, but is gradually improving. A third of students progress straight into employment. Most of the remainder progress into purposeful training or other worthwhile activities, with only a small number leaving the college unemployed.
- Students enjoy college, both in and out of lessons. The college has a strong community feel, with staff and students working purposefully together to build an ethos where students feel safe and valued. Students benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular provision, the highlight of which is a prestigious and highly successful sports academy.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching and learning are good and improving. Teachers plan lessons thoughtfully and use a variety of effective teaching strategies and high-quality resources to stimulate and maintain students' interest. Most lessons are good, being characterised by a positive work ethic and a firm focus on improving students' skills and knowledge and preparing them for examinations. These factors have contributed significantly to the improvement in the proportion of students who complete their courses successfully.
- Students work hard in lessons and make good progress in developing their subject knowledge and technical skills. Students often demonstrate high-level practical work, for example in carrying out airline safety demonstrations or developing their sporting prowess. A common lesson plan helps teachers to focus their attention on what, and how, students learn. In most lessons, teachers' planning ensures that good resources help students to learn and create interest. For example, mini-whiteboards, personalised notepads for students with learning needs, and 'traffic light' cups in English are all used effectively.
- Students develop good collaborative learning skills in many lessons. They respect each other's contributions and value each other's opinion. However, in a minority of lessons, students have insufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and teachers direct them through a series of activities too quickly, giving students too little time or freedom to explore concepts fully and learn from their mistakes.
- In a few lessons, checks to ensure that all students are ready to move on to the next stage of the lesson are ineffective. There are too few nominated questions, and less confident students often rely on those more vocal to respond. As a consequence, the teacher cannot be certain that all students have understood the topic.
- Assessment is too variable, and requires improvement overall. In several subjects, teachers mark students' work well with evaluative comments that help them to improve. However, in too many subjects, comments on marked work are cursory and do not help students to identify what they need to do to improve further. On AS-level courses, teachers sometimes award over-generous grades to students' work in order to encourage them, but this can lead to students having an unrealistic view of the quality of their work.
- Students benefit from high-quality resources. These include carefully compiled learning packs; subject-specific resources such as excellent art materials; a large darkroom for photography; extensive sports facilities and very attractive classrooms with visually stimulating displays.

- Although opportunities to help students to improve their literacy and numeracy are often taken up in lessons, this is not consistent. Too often, students are unsuccessful in gaining the necessary qualifications in English and mathematics to enable higher levels of study or career progression.
- Tutorials are effective in tracking and monitoring students' academic progress, and supporting their personal and social development. Review weeks provide a valuable opportunity to evaluate students' progress using a scoring system that is easy to understand. However, students' target grades on academic courses are often unambitious. Systems to support and monitor students' progress, such as the virtual learning environment, the electronic mark book and communications with parents and carers, are valued by users inside and outside the college.
- Initial advice and guidance are comprehensive and effective in matching courses to students' individual needs and long-term aims. Staff take care to support students in the first few weeks of college to build their confidence. Thereafter, students benefit from good academic and personal support from teachers and other staff. Many students commented favourably on teachers' willingness to give them extra help outside lessons.
- Students benefit from a strong focus on providing equality of opportunity across the college. However, the effectiveness of steps taken in lessons to promote students' understanding of diversity is inconsistent. Staff are well trained and the college ensures that diversity is embedded in schemes of work and lesson plans, but often teachers struggle to translate their understanding into practical measures to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of the diversity of modern Britain.

Science and mathematics

Requires improvement

16-19 study programmes

- Teaching, learning and assessment, although improving, are still not of a consistently good standard. The same observation may be made of students' achievements. Although the proportion of students who complete their courses successfully has improved significantly, it remains below average. On advanced-level courses, too many students do not make the progress of which they are capable, although this is also improving. In GCSE mathematics, too few students achieve grade A* to C.
- In a recent innovation, students on all but one of the AS-level courses benefit from a distinctive 'seventh period' which is planned specifically to develop their knowledge of fundamental techniques such as graph plotting or the mathematical skills required to achieve well in science courses. Success rates on all these courses have increased since this was put into place.
- In the better lessons, students take part in stimulating activities that develop their practical and communication skills as well as increase their scientific knowledge. In one lesson on homeostasis, students worked effectively in pairs to describe and draw a cross-section of human skin. Teachers are rigorous in ensuring that students are able to spell scientific terms correctly as well as understand fully their meaning. Biology laboratories have numerous posters and cards on display that describe and define key words.
- Students work hard in class and make good progress when they work in pairs and help each other with problems. In a physics practical lesson, students were successfully collaborating and learning how to collect data and set up equipment from written instructions.
- Students studying mathematics are encouraged to solve problems for themselves and to consider alternative ways to work out solutions, which broadens their mathematical skills and encourages experimentation. Abstract concepts, such as simultaneous equations, are linked clearly to their graphical form and teachers emphasise the advantages of using approximations and common sense to check answers, especially when using calculators.

- The less effective lessons are not planned carefully to meet the needs of individual students or to promote rapid learning. Teachers can be too keen to keep all the students at the same stage, which means that progress is only at the rate of the slower students and the more able are not stretched. Checks on students' learning and progress during lessons can sometimes be too vague and occasionally not enough is done to explain to less-able students where they are going wrong and what they need to do to improve. A small minority of lessons are dull and have very little student participation.
- Teachers do not use enough information and learning technology in lessons, including the resources on the internet, to enhance a topic or to provide different methods of presenting difficult concepts. Students have access to a virtual learning environment that contains a variety of useful and interesting learning and revision resources, such as Cells Alive!, but it is not sufficiently well used by students except around examination time.
- Students' progress on topic tests and homework is carefully monitored by teachers. Students who are considered to be falling behind are given extra help and guidance outside of normal lesson time, either informally or during the timetabled support periods.
- Homework is marked and returned promptly and teachers give detailed feedback on what students need to do to improve, especially in science subjects. Spelling mistakes are corrected, but clumsy sentences and the use of colloquial English are often left without comment.
- Diversity is not often promoted in lessons and there is little indication in the lesson plans and schemes of work of how teachers might promote it by, for example, planning activities that might lead to a class discussion of the issues raised.

Social sciences and psychology

Good

16-19 study programmes

- Students' achievements, both in respect of the proportion who complete their courses successfully and the progress that they make, are good, despite a slight decline in success rates in 2013. These outcomes reflect good teaching, learning and assessment. Achievement rates are high at A level, particularly for psychology and sociology, but are less consistent at AS level, with weaker performance in 2012/13 in economics and geography, which have fewer students. Students attend well, are punctual to lessons and always have a very good attitude to their studies.
- In the best lessons, students are encouraged to apply their developing subject skills to a range of demanding and enjoyable activities where their learning is checked and they are clear on their progress. For example, world development students worked collaboratively on a well-structured case study evaluating a dam project in Ethiopia; in a psychology lesson, the creative use of cartoon characters was effective in strengthening students' understanding of Milgram's agency theory.
- In the majority of lessons, good questioning enables teachers to assess students' learning and provide challenge for students to consider previous responses and develop further the topic of study. For example, psychology students built a critical understanding of competing approaches to anger management through probing questions. However, in a minority of lessons the range of methods used to check learning is too narrow and over-reliant on simple questions by the teacher. In a small minority of lessons, not all students participate, the pace of the lesson is slower and less-able students make little progress.
- Students complete regular written homework in all subjects. This is often of a high standard at A level but, on occasion, at AS level the work is not sufficiently demanding. In the majority of subjects, at both AS and A level, insufficient feedback is given to students and they are not clear what progress they are making or how to improve their work. Some good practice exists in A-level psychology, where detailed comments are provided to students, including advice on how to make their work more evaluative and thereby improve their grades.

- The learning environment is good, with dynamic visual displays in classrooms and corridors; these are subject rich and demonstrate a good balance between curriculum content and skills development. For example, the psychology rooms are brought to life by stimulating displays of key theories, studies and concepts such as Bandura’s social learning theories. The contemporary relevance of geography is well illustrated by a ‘geography in the news’ display where good and varied examples illustrating geography topics are showcased prominently; for example, at the time of inspection displays around migrant labour in Qatar and the recent earthquake in Pakistan had been produced.
- Students benefit from a supportive and caring ethos where staff provide a stimulating learning environment and numerous revision and support sessions are provided to ensure students make good progress. The college’s virtual learning environment is good and on the better subject pages there are opportunities for students to assess their learning and to access higher-level resources. For example, world development students were encouraged to read a useful academic paper on structural adjustment programmes in Guyana.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. For example, a particularly effective sociology lesson focused on feminist theories and patriarchal structures, allowing students to explore different cultural and religious interpretations of appropriate gender roles, drawing on their own experiences.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good. Staff have succeeded in improving standards over time while maintaining the college’s supportive and inclusive ethos. Governors and managers, at all levels, have a shared and coherent vision of the college’s strategic direction and its role in serving the local community, and this vision is embraced by all staff.
- Governors are effective in challenging college managers and holding them to account. Governors ensure they receive comprehensive and detailed reports on students’ outcomes and evaluations of teaching and learning. They receive presentations directly from middle managers in areas of concern they have identified. The corporation benefits from a useful mix of skills, experience and expertise. For example, a local chief inspector of police has used her experience in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) police group to advise the college on equality practices. Average attendance at governors’ meetings is, however, low.
- Action plans arising from self-critical and detailed self-evaluation have been used well to bring about improvements. For example, in science and mathematics the addition of an extra timetabled period and the use of a local partnership to support staff have resulted in significantly increased success rates. However, curriculum self-assessment reports are too long and some, consequently, lack a sufficiently sharp focus on how to improve students’ progress.
- Managers have developed a collective culture of placing teaching, learning and assessment and their continuous improvement at the centre of the college’s work. Staff at all levels, and at all stages in their careers, participate enthusiastically in a variety of good-quality development activities that have a structured focus and lead to observable improvements in the standard of teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors observed a positive impact as a result of the college’s recent focus on active learning.
- Annual performance management reviews draw upon extensive performance data, including the views of learners, and set appropriate targets for staff. Where concerns over ineffective teaching have arisen, college managers have worked successfully with staff to improve their teaching or, in some cases, to redeploy teachers to other roles.
- Managers have a slightly inflated view of the quality of teaching and learning from lesson observations carried out at the college. Inspectors found a significantly lower proportion of outstanding lessons than that found by college observers, and a lower proportion of good lessons. Some teachers that managers judge to be good practitioners are not receiving the targeted support and guidance that they require in order to develop their practice further.

Although the focus of staff development is upon the continuous improvement of classroom practice, there is still too much attention paid in lesson observations to what the teacher does and not enough on how rapidly students are learning.

- Managers use success rate data well in the analysis of performance to inform improvement planning. College leaders compare students' performance against national sixth-form college averages despite students' lower entry qualifications. However, value-added data are not used systematically or with consistent priority as a key performance indicator. Target minimum grades used with students are not sufficiently aspirational to promote good progress.
- Quality assurance processes are effective and inform improvement strategies. Risk-based internal quality reviews draw heavily upon students' views and these are supplemented by external reviews led by colleagues from other Hampshire colleges, the recommendations from which are often useful and insightful. Mid-year reviews with senior managers ensure that curriculum managers are held to account effectively for the progress of quality improvement plans.
- The college is compliant with all statutory safeguarding and health and safety requirements. Appropriate training for staff and risk assessment procedures are in place. The college is proud of its supportive, inclusive ethos and it ensures it meets the needs of all its vulnerable learners. For example, it has recently invested in the services of a part-time mental health nurse to complement its counselling and other welfare services.
- The college has a good record in promoting equality and diversity. It takes its duties under equality legislation very seriously at all levels, led by a proactive governors' committee. There is a strong record of staff training, for example in dealing with inappropriate language. A long-standing student LGBT group supports individuals and spreads an ethos of acceptance and tolerance. Students describe the college as friendly, welcoming and safe. An identified gender achievement gap at advanced level has been closed.
- The curriculum meets the needs of young people in the local community well. A broad range of academic and vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels is provided, with good retention and internal progression opportunities. Partnerships with local universities provide opportunities for significant numbers to progress to higher education, often with reduced entry criteria. The college is committed to maintaining and increasing its small pre-entry level curriculum for students with high levels of special needs.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Itchen Sixth Form College

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	16-19 study programmes	19+ Learning programmes
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	3
Mathematics and statistics	3
Social sciences	2
Psychology	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Sixth form college							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1,249							
	Part-time: 504							
Principal/CEO	Mr Barry Hicks							
Date of previous inspection	May 2008							
Website address	www.itchen.ac.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 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	8	2	149	0	1,096	77	0	0
Part-time	2	54	52	149	71	23	0	0
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Contextual information

Itchen Sixth Form College, on the east side of Southampton, is one of two sixth-form colleges in the city. The college faces significant competition from other colleges and schools both within the city and in south Hampshire. Although improving, young people leaving school in Southampton achieve GCSE results that are below the national average. The college attracts students both from the local area and from further afield. The college has a comprehensive intake of students in respect of both socio-economic background and prior educational attainment; although the average attainment on entry of its advanced-level students is significantly lower than is typical in sixth-form colleges.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Alan Hinchliffe HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Assistant 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, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They 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 all of 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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