Learning and Skills inspection report

Date published: 05 March 2014 Inspection Number: 429152

URN: 130793



Abingdon and Witney College

General further education college

Inspection dates	27-31 January 2014		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2	
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3	
Outcomes for learners	Good-2		
Quality of teaching, learning and as	Good-2		
Effectiveness of leadership and man	Outstanding-1		

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Outstanding leadership and management have led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the proportion of students and apprentices who successfully achieve their qualifications.
- The introduction of the 'Futures' curriculum, a college-designed initiative that offers students a wide range of learning experiences, provides a successful basis for the new 16 to 19 study programmes by helping students to develop their employability skills.
- Strong and well-established partnerships benefit students and the local community.
- Advice and guidance are robust, ensuring that students are placed on the right course and are able to make well-informed choices about their next steps.
- Students and apprentices receive very strong support that has contributed significantly to the improvements in students' success over the last three years.
- The college is a welcoming, friendly and inclusive environment where staff and students work together well.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Not enough teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding.
- Success rates and students' progress need to improve on a small minority of courses, including some GCSE English and mathematics courses.
- Not all teachers consistently provide sufficiently challenging activities to stretch their more-able students.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the internal evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment focuses more consistently on students' learning and helps to accelerate the progress from good to outstanding teaching and learning.
- Implement the well-considered college strategies to ensure that all students fully develop their English and mathematics skills and gain their GCSE qualifications in these subjects.
- Through a programme of staff development, ensure that teachers know how to plan and teach lessons that consistently enable their more capable students to develop higher level skills and gain their highest grades.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Outcomes for learners are good. The proportion of students who successfully complete their courses has risen well since the last inspection when this aspect of the college was judged to be satisfactory. Many courses now have success rates that are above or well above the national averages, although a small minority of courses scattered across the college have success rates that are low. Students' performance is also consistently better across subject areas than at the last inspection. The high levels of success of students aged 14 to 16 observed at the last inspection have been maintained.
- The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their qualifications within the planned time rose well in 2012 to above the national averages and these improvements have been sustained in 2013. Apprentices have well-developed skills linked to their employment. The contribution that their new skills make to their employers' businesses is valued highly by employers.
- Most students make good and sometimes excellent progress in lessons, although progress is slower in a minority of lessons. They are articulate and the vast majority make good contributions to class discussions. Students are set target grades and their progress towards these is closely monitored. For most courses over 90% of students are currently on target to meet their target grade. On a few courses, students do not achieve the grades their qualifications on entry would predict. Most students progress on to further study or employment.
- Most students have well-developed English and mathematics skills that enable them to succeed in, and achieve, their vocational qualification. A high proportion of them gain their functional skills qualifications. In the past, success rates on GCSE English and mathematics have been around, or sometimes slightly below, national averages.
- Students are well behaved, both in lessons and more generally around the college. They mix well in social areas and the wide range of students who have learning or physical disabilities or difficulties play a full part in college life. Attendance and punctuality have both improved well since the last inspection and are now good. Very few students arrive late for their lessons and inspectors saw no disruption to learning due to late arrivals.
- The college works with a range of community partners and this provision also has high success rates. Many of these students develop the confidence and skills to enable them to progress on to college courses and a high proportion of them do so.
- The college has successfully tackled gaps in performance that were evident at the last inspection. For example, the proportion of both male and female students successfully completing their courses has improved and 16- to 18-year-old male students are now as successful as their female peers. Students across all age ranges are more successful and the performance gap between younger and older students has been greatly diminished.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly and are now good. These improvements are the main reason that students are now more successful than they were at the last inspection.
- In the best lessons teachers skilfully help students to develop practical, entrepreneurial and employability skills. Lessons are well planned and students clearly enjoy their learning and make at least good progress. Teachers organise activities carefully to ensure that students can work well with their peers and also on their own. In an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, for example, more capable students helped others to develop and improve their computer formatting skills. Performing arts students confidently perform in public and critically reflect on their own and others' performance. Teachers set high standards for their students and use probing questions to ensure that they understand the topic under discussion.
- In the majority of lessons teachers use technology very effectively to enliven and enhance learning, and students learn enthusiastically and make good progress. Students use the college's virtual learning environment well in their own time and to develop and improve their research skills and their ability to organise their work.
- In the minority of lessons, where learning is less effective, teachers do not plan activities to suit the different abilities of students in their group. Often it is the more capable students in these lessons who are challenged the least by the planned activities and who are not pushed to their full potential. In a very small number of lessons, there were too many students to work comfortably in the room and they and their teacher struggled to work effectively together.
- All students benefit greatly from excellent pastoral and academic support that ensures they complete their courses and achieve their qualifications successfully. There are strong links with external specialist agencies to provide further support if it is needed. Students benefit from thorough initial assessment of their learning needs, but this detailed knowledge is not always used well by teachers to inform their teaching plans.
- Students gain additional qualifications and develop their personal, social and employability skills when they take part in a wide and well-chosen range of enrichment activities which are designed as part of their study programmes. For example, students in hair and beauty often gain awards when take they part in competitions, boosting their confidence and encouraging them to learn extra skills beyond the course requirements. For many students, highly relevant work experience reinforces what they learn in the classroom.
- Assessment is thorough; the vast majority of students receive clear and regular feedback on their progress and this expert advice helps them to improve. In a very few instances, teachers do not question technical errors or correct mistakes in spelling and grammar.
- Assessors give apprentices good, frequent, and flexible support in the workplace. Consequently, apprentices make very good progress through well-coordinated on- and off-the-job learning. The reviews they receive are thorough and take good account of workplace practices.
- Teaching, learning and assessment of English and mathematics are generally good and most students develop good skills in these subjects. Students develop very good skills in manipulating language and understanding the different uses of mathematics in everyday life, which prepares them well for their courses, employment, and higher education.
- Students benefit from a wide range of good-quality information, advice, and guidance that ensures they are able to make well-informed choices. The college makes good use of its links with employers to place students into appropriate jobs and promote apprenticeships.
- Most teachers promote equality and diversity well through their teaching. Students and teachers show mutual respect and value each other's contributions to discussions. In a few lessons, teachers missed some obvious opportunities to promote cultural diversity.

Animal care

16-19 study programmes19+ Learning programmes

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding, as reflected in the very high proportion of students who successfully complete their courses. Students develop excellent animal care skills that equip them very well for employment and further study. A high proportion of students go on to higher education to study related subjects.
- Theory and practical lessons are both interesting and fun for students. Lessons are meticulously planned and teachers set high expectations for their students. They frequently review progress to ensure students will achieve their target grades. A wide variety of teaching methods are used to ensure the needs of all students are met. Less-able students gain improved levels of confidence and progress quickly. When more-able students complete work early they are given additional tasks which help them achieve higher grades. Teachers ask challenging questions to check what has been learnt.
- Teachers use their extensive industry experience well to link theory to practice. In one session, for example, students made detailed preparations to organise their dog agility competition at the Blenheim Horse Trials. Employers value the standards achieved and this improves students' opportunities for successful employment. Discussions about a study trip to Holland, to compare accommodation standards at three different zoos, helped students to learn a lot about animal behaviour and welfare. Prior to the visit, students raised money by publishing an animal calendar for sale and organising a variety of industry-specific events to help fund the trip which also helped them to develop excellent entrepreneurial skills.
- Practical animal duties, provided in a realistic working environment at the college's farm site, allow advanced level students to develop good supervisory skills by mentoring and appraising their peers on intermediate level programmes. Students develop excellent animal husbandry skills while working at industry speeds.
- Well-designed practical skills assessment books ensure that students check their own progress and set themselves challenging targets to develop their competency when dealing with a large range of animals including farm animals, horses, dogs, small mammals and exotic species. Teachers' assessments are detailed and accurate. Written work is marked promptly and teachers' feedback is accurate and helps students to improve quickly.
- Students develop good English and mathematics skills as part of their courses. For example, students on the foundation course showed very good vocabulary and spelling skills when writing what they considered to be the important personal characteristics required for employment. They were able to explain to their peers why these were important, and then worked effectively in small groups to cascade this information across the group.
- Teachers provide frequent opportunities to raise students' understanding of equality and diversity. For example, advanced students were comparing value for money in Australian zoos and their discussions included good reference to differing cultural values, spending levels, and how this related to investment in facilities and captive animal welfare. Students on the intermediate course considered mobility issues when designing pet shop retail displays.
- Well-planned initial assessment and induction ensure that students are on the appropriate course. There are clear pathways in place to higher level courses or employment. Students appreciate the help and guidance they receive from their tutors and find the rewards systems used to be very motivational. For example, every month one student is awarded the 'Practical student of the month' certificate. This is highly prized by students.

Motor vehicle engineering 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes Apprenticeships

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. The proportion of students on full-time courses and apprentices successfully completing their courses has improved over the last three years and is now high. On entry level and intermediate level full-time courses, all students successfully complete their courses.
- Teachers are well qualified and use their knowledge and understanding of the motor vehicle industry very well in lessons. They ensure that students' practical activities are reinforced by requiring the students to write reports using industry terminology after they have completed a task. The standard of students' practical work is good and often exceeds awarding body standards.
- In practical lessons, students are very attentive and they remain focused on their work through challenging and engaging activities. They make good progress and they clearly develop the required practical skills. For example, students were able to complete the intricate removal of struts and suspension parts in proper sequence and in a reasonable time.
- The teaching in theory lessons is generally less effective than that in practical lessons. Teachers do not plan closely enough to ensure that all the students work hard and are all challenged by the work. Some of the more capable students could do more and some become inattentive during theory lessons.
- Students ask relevant and thoughtful questions and are keen to learn from the expertise of teachers. They are guided well, for example when checking torque settings on relevant vehicles and the timings set by the manufacturer to complete minor services and pre-MOT checks. This mirrors very well what would be expected in a working garage.
- The standard of students' written work is generally good, but teachers do not correct students' English grammatical mistakes in written work consistently. Students develop good mathematics skills which are reinforced well as they are working. For example, students are required to check their work procedures using 'Auto data' before starting practical activities.
- Attendance and punctuality are good. Behaviour is very good and students are polite and respectful to peers, teachers and support staff. They are highly motivated and want to progress on to higher level programmes and apprenticeships. This is in part due to new accommodation and resources reflecting industry standards that greatly encourage them.
- Students on full-time courses do not develop practical employability skills quickly enough on their programmes of study, although some gain skills relating to running a small business, for example through their work on a valeting project for vehicles. They have limited opportunities for work experience, trips and visits or contact with employers; this limits their knowledge of how they can progress on to next level courses such as apprenticeships.
- Students and apprentices benefit from very good advice and guidance before they start their courses, and receive timely and highly effective support while they are studying. For example, they receive additional support in practical sessions and through workshop technicians who provide very helpful practical advice for students.
- Assessors and training coordinators visit apprentices regularly. They track and monitor apprentices' progress thoroughly. Thorough assessments are carried out in the workplace. Apprentices develop high standards of knowledge and skills. The frequency of assessors' visits, the good tracking and the help and support enable apprentices to complete their qualifications within their planned timescale.
- Apprentices have a detailed knowledge of their progress against targets; they are aware of when all planned reviews will take place for the year. Training coordinators provide excellent links between the college's assessment team and the workplace. Apprentices achieve functional

skills qualifications early in their programme due to good planning and help. Employers commend their progress and the help they receive from the college.

- Teachers do not promote understanding of equality and appreciation of diversity sufficiently well through their teaching and when they assess students. Some obvious opportunities to introduce discussions to help students to further their understanding were missed in some lessons.
- Health and safety and safeguarding are good. Students feel safe at college and follow workshop safety instructions by wearing the correct personal protective equipment and following the safety instructions when operating power tools and lifting equipment.

Foundation English 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which is reflected in the high proportion of students who successfully complete their functional skills qualifications in English. GCSE English has been less successful, due to a lack of continuity in staffing. This issue has been resolved and students currently studying GCSE English are making good progress.
- Teachers are well qualified and use their expertise well to develop clear and detailed schemes of work and learning activities. Students feel safe and enjoy respectful and supportive relationships with teachers and support staff which create a positive learning environment, building their confidence to succeed.
- Most lessons are lively and students enjoy their learning. For example, students from a health and care course built a technical glossary together to help all of them to understand better the new technical terms they have to deal with.
- Teachers give encouraging feedback to students in lessons, but sometimes they provide the answers to their own questions too readily and do not allow students enough time to reflect and work out the answer for themselves.
- Teachers use information and learning technology (ILT) effectively in most lessons to engage students and enhance learning through online games and video clips. In a few lessons, teachers' use of ILT is unimaginative and limited to the display of learning objectives, instructions and worksheets.
- The vast majority of students are enthusiastic and confident in contributing views and opinions during discussions. They work collaboratively on projects and tasks, developing their personal and social skills well. Students often make good progress in lessons and many work well above the standard expected. Many students produce good written work.
- Specialist English teachers and many of their vocational colleagues mark students' work accurately and provide constructive feedback on grammatical mistakes to aid students' understanding and progress. However, this is not consistently carried out on all courses. The college initiative 'SPAG' (Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar) promotes the importance of high standards of written work, but some teachers need further support to develop their confidence in correcting English and helping students to improve their writing skills.
- Information, advice and guidance and support are good and ensure students are placed on the correct level of courses. Pre-course activities are well structured and effective, enabling students to settle in quickly, make friends and gain a clear understanding of the expectations of the course.
- Thorough initial and diagnostic assessments produce comprehensive pen portraits for each student, recording how they like to learn and any special requirements they may need to support them. Not all teachers make the best use of this detailed information to help them to plan their teaching to meet the requirements of each student.

■ Equality and diversity are promoted well in lessons. Teachers are good at planning stimulating discussions on these aspects. For example, in one lesson, the teacher raised students' awareness of language barriers experienced by the different group of people particularly well through an enjoyable and engaging game. In another lesson, students developed persuasive communication skills through role play and by selling to the class their Japanese-inspired art of Chindogu products in a competition to win the 'Chindogu of the Year' award.

Business management, accounting and finance 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the high proportion of students that achieve their qualifications. Success rates on the vast majority of courses are well above national average. On team leading and human resource courses all students pass their examinations. Students develop good employability skills.
- Teachers plan their lessons carefully and most students are challenged by the tasks they are set and work hard at them. Teachers in most lessons make good use of ILT, videos, case studies and research methods to ensure that students can effectively relate theory to practice in business. For example, in an accounts lesson, the teacher carefully explained how mathematical formulae were used as the basis for calculating costs to ensure students learnt the principles of costing and related them to accounting practices.
- In the majority of lessons most students gain confidence in understanding business concepts and are highly motivated. They work well with each other and are good at learning from other students in their group. This shows their enthusiasm when they undertake interesting projects such as event planning and visual merchandising. They often work to industry standards.
- In a few lessons, some more capable students could have been stretched further by their teachers. In these lessons they made only satisfactory progress and did not fully extend their skills in analysis to understand business concepts.
- Students are set challenging targets and teachers encourage them to aim for high grades. Personal tutors rigorously monitor these targets and provide effective revision workshops and additional teaching sessions. Most students are on track to achieve these grades this year. In the past, some students on advanced level business courses have not achieved the grades their qualifications on entry would predict they should achieve.
- Support for students is good. Business teachers help students with concerns in a timely manner and provide support that works well for students, in addition to the college support systems. Accurate profiles of students enable teachers to know how to support them and are used well by business teachers.
- Work placement opportunities and study programmes are good. Students gain well-developed employability skills through organised, planned activities. Students work with 'live briefs' and gain effective business skills in project management, team work, customer service and cultural awareness. They take part in a weekly work placement as part of their courses. Students gain highly relevant skills and knowledge from working with employers which help them to understand key business concepts. Students use business terminology accurately.
- Teachers provide good online feedback to students on assignments and practice examinations. Students understand what they need to do to improve and gain the higher grades and how to do this. Teachers regularly and accurately correct the spelling, punctuation and grammar of students.
- Students quickly improve their English and mathematics skills by presenting business reports and develop the written skills they will need when working. The presentations and informative feedback they receive from teachers and employers enable them to use formal English

accurately in discussions. They use formulae to calculate accounting principles accurately to work out costs used in organisations.

- Advice and guidance are good. Prospective students learn about the college through open events and team building activities and by hearing the views of current students about their courses. The college responds very well and quickly to employers. It provides appropriate courses tailored to their needs.
- Students behave well and show good respect for their peers and their teachers. They feel safe. Only in a few lessons did teachers sufficiently help students to develop their understanding of equality and diversity in the context of business practices.

The quality of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders, managers and governors have a clear and ambitious vision for their students and their drive has led to significant improvements since the last inspection. Their careful planning and their actions in developing highly relevant programmes of study equip students very well to progress on to further study or employment. They have successfully expanded college provision to include more apprenticeships, courses in hairdressing and construction, and higher education courses.
- Leaders and managers have demonstrated decisive leadership and excellent forward planning in designing a coherent and well-planned range of courses and programmes of study. They have ensured that success rates have continued to rise well. Students studying on the college designed 'Professional Futures programme' at advanced level and those on the 'Future Pathways' and 'Creating Futures' at foundation and intermediate levels develop good enterprise and study skills and quickly learn about work and employment.
- Recommendations made at the last inspection have been achieved with urgency and success; their successful implementation has helped to improve the experiences and success rates of students. Good examples include the improvements made to the observation of teaching, learning and assessment and the development of ILT resources and the training of teachers in their use.
- The introduction of the college's Teaching Skills Academy has greatly improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. It has already aided teachers to improve their professional skills, have confidence in being innovative and teach more effective and engaging lessons which students enjoy. It has proved its worth through enabling newly-recruited teachers with good, up-to-date vocational and industrial experience to gain and develop the right teaching skills and expertise, while being professionally supported by trained and skilled practitioners. For example, all teachers new to teaching must complete a 'Licence to Practise' in which they demonstrate they are competent and confident teachers.
- Managers have made changes in managing the performance of teachers sensitively and thoughtfully. The appraisal system and the process for observing teaching, learning and assessment are robust and have brought about improvements in teaching. Leaders and managers have dealt firmly with underperformance in teaching, which has resulted in good improvements in teaching for students. However, records of lesson observations still place too much emphasis on teaching and not enough on learning and assessment.
- The programme of staff development is closely linked to meeting the needs of teachers identified from observation of teaching, learning and assessment. Professional development takes place immediately, is well considered and helps teachers improve, even when they are judged to deliver outstanding lessons.
- Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have successfully introduced effective mechanisms for collecting and using the views of students in different ways. They use their views well to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Managers act on matters presented to them and give helpful and reasoned feedback to students on issues raised directly

by student representatives. For example, they introduced a 'late-card' system which has helped to improve student punctuality.

- Governors are very well informed about the college, are active in its life and know the college's strengths and areas for improvement very well. For example, they link with and support curriculum areas and encourage enterprise among students by giving motivational talks to them. Their active involvement in strategic planning and the self-assessment process demonstrates how they support and challenge leaders constructively and helpfully.
- Senior managers manage their work with partners closely and this has led to excellent outcomes for students. Partnerships with voluntary organisations, employers, schools and other providers are strong. They have an outstanding impact on giving students good opportunities to develop and broaden the knowledge and skills they will need when they leave college.
- The college meets the needs of the community very well. For example, it has responded very effectively by providing courses for students with challenging needs and those students who might otherwise not take part in education, employment or training through its Gateway programmes.
- Staff have received much appropriate and pertinent training on equality and diversity and been made very aware of their responsibilities. Although leaders and managers energetically encourage teachers to include appreciation of diversity in lesson planning, the results of this work are not consistently seen in lessons across the whole college.
- Leaders and managers have successfully tackled differences in achievement between different groups and regularly and keenly monitor performance between different groups of students. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive excellent care and support that typify the highly inclusive nature of the college.
- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Staff receive regular training, particularly on current local issues. The procedures for health and safety and risk assessment are thorough and robust. The college is safe and welcoming to all and students and staff respect each other.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Abingdon and Witney College

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	-	2	2	-	-
Outcomes for learners	2	1	2	2	-	2	2	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2	2	-	2	2	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	
Animal care	1
Motor vehicle	2
Foundation English	2
Business management	2
Accounting and finance	2

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college							
Age range of learners	16-18							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous	Full-time: 2050							
full contract year	Part-time: 5028							
Principal/CEO	Teresa Kelly OBE							
Date of previous inspection	February 2011							
Website address	www.a	bingdor	-witne	y.ac.uk				
Provider information at the time of	the ins	spectio	n					
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Le	vel 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	327	59	348	58	932	205	-	-
Part-time	165	1329	67	559	47	295	53	397
Number of traineeships	16-19 19+ Total							
Number of apprentices by	Intermediate		e	Adva	nced		Higher	
Apprenticeship level and age	16-18 19+			16-18 19+		16-	-18	19+
	67 75 8		8	40 - 4		4		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N1/A							
Full-time	·							
Part-time								
Number of community learners	13							
Number of employability learners								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	 The National Federation of Women's Institutes Trax Oxfordshire Football Association Pink Lizard MacIntyre 							

Contextual information

Abingdon and Witney College is a general further education college with three main sites in Abingdon, Witney and a rural skills centre at Common Leys near Witney. A centre at Milton Park, near Didcot, provides training for businesses and the college has a construction skills centre in Witney. The college's main focus is vocational education and training. The great majority of the 2,050 full-time students are aged 16 to 18 and study full time. There are 194 apprentices and a significant number of students study on higher education programmes. The college provides a broad range of opportunities for students with a wide range of learning difficulties.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Wilf Hudson HMI

Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the deputy principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' 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 learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector 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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