

# St Helens College

## General further education college

<b>Inspection dates</b>		10–14 February 2014
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	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 learners

#### This college is good because:

- Outcomes have risen sharply over the last three years and are now above the rates for similar colleges.
- Students gain skills and knowledge rapidly, particularly those that will prepare them for work.
- All staff contribute to developing a culture of high ambition and achievement. Students exhibit exemplary standards of behaviour and mutual respect.
- The large majority of teaching is good.
- Teachers provide excellent care and support to all students.
- Students receive effective advice and guidance that enable them to make rapid progress in improving their work and to make informed choices when preparing for their futures.
- Managers maintain a strong focus on continuous improvement and on tackling underperformance.

#### This is not yet an outstanding college because:

- Too many apprentices do not complete their training successfully.
- Students' achievements of English and mathematics qualifications are no better than satisfactory and a minority of students do not make rapid enough progress.
- Only a very small proportion of teaching is outstanding.
- In weaker lessons teachers make insufficient use of information gained through initial assessment to plan for the differing needs of students.
- Lesson observation judgements are focused insufficiently on evaluating the quality of learning or the progress made by students.
- Course-level self-assessment is too descriptive with too little evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

## Full report

### What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that apprentices' on-site reviews have sufficient emphasis on the progress they are making and that assessors and employers provide the support that apprentices require to complete their training.
- Move students more rapidly towards achieving their English and mathematics GCSE qualifications by raising the aspirations of both teachers and students.
- Focus lesson observation judgements and feedback on the quality of learning. Ensure that subsequent staff training builds upon existing good practice.
- Develop all teachers' skills so that they use information about students to plan more effectively for their differing needs.
- Increase the impact of course-level self-assessment by ensuring that it is conducted with the same rigour and focus upon learning as it is at cross-college level.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- The proportion of students gaining their qualifications has risen sharply over each of the last three years and is now above the average for similar colleges. Some subject areas have particularly high achievement rates, for example science, mathematics and information and communication technology. The smaller number of apprentices achieve less well, with rates just below the national figures. At the time of inspection, the percentage of students and apprentices still attending their lessons or training was higher than at the same point in the previous year. Students achieve equally well, regardless of their age, gender or heritage. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve particularly well.
- Students make good progress in the large majority of lessons and demonstrate high levels of both theoretical and practical competence relevant to their vocational area. In the workplace, apprentices develop their skills rapidly. Relative to their prior attainment, students make better progress than would be expected. Students build upon their knowledge and skills over time and a large majority progress in a timely manner onto higher levels of study or training.
- Students' attendance rates at lessons or training are high in a majority of areas and are improving further. However, inspectors observed a correlation in a small minority of lessons between low attendance and the weaker aspects of teaching. Students arrive on time and are enthusiastic to learn.
- Students benefit from the new college building and the learning environment that it provides. They enjoy learning and value and respect the resources that are available to them. Students use the study areas around the college to develop their skills and knowledge. They demonstrate very high standards of behaviour and courtesy towards others both in their classes and as they move around the college.
- Students achieve qualifications in English and mathematics at similar rates to those nationally and this represents a substantial improvement upon previous years. However, a minority of students do not make rapid enough progress in developing these skills and move to higher levels. The numbers of students doing GCSE in English or mathematics are too small given the entry qualifications that students have. Of those who take the examinations, the proportion achieving A\* to C in GCSE mathematics is high and well above the national rate but the equivalent proportion in GCSE English is extremely low.
- Students benefit from an effective programme of tutorials and events that develops their broader skills. They use the career service and higher-education days to gain valuable guidance

in applying for jobs or university places. Work experience opportunities are varied and give students a worthwhile time to practise and enhance the skills that they have learned in their classes.

- College teachers and managers are extremely proactive in the community at targeting successfully young people who are not participating in education or training. They use a range of programmes specifically designed to benefit and capture the interest of this group. Consequently, students rapidly develop the skills they will require to increase their employment prospects. A majority of these students gain sufficient confidence to apply successfully for full-time courses or training at the college.
- Managers track the destinations of students when they leave college in a systematic manner, which allows them to make sound judgements regarding the quality and breadth of the curriculum offer, and there are good examples of managers tailoring courses to the requirements of the local employment market. Around half of leavers progress directly into employment. The large majority of those who apply to higher education gain places, some on the college's own programmes.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, as reflected in the improvements in students' achievements and the good progress made by the majority of students. Since the last inspection, the Principal and senior managers, supported by enthusiastic staff, have focused rigorously on improving teaching and learning. Well-motivated teachers and support staff have high expectations for their students and provide exceptional levels of care and support.
- Teachers use their vocational experience and knowledge of industry well to bring the world of work into the classroom. Teachers create purposeful and lively lessons. For example, in one lesson for aircraft cabin crew, students took part in an airline mock assessment and interview procedure; they improved their understanding of the high expectations of employers and developed their confidence and communication skills.
- The large majority of students develop good levels of practical skills and work confidently in the college's realistic learning workplaces. For example, hair and beauty students work in the college's first-rate spa facilities and offer an excellent service to paying clients. Apprentices develop relevant skills and contribute well to their employer's business.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use their skills well. They question students effectively and adopt a wide range of approaches to make learning fun. Students work productively, collaborate and share ideas. For example, in one performing arts lesson, students took part in the performance of the scripts written by their peers; this activity helped to develop students' critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation skills.
- In the less effective lessons, teachers do not monitor students' progress and learning adequately or do not involve students, check their learning or challenge them to explore issues in depth. They direct their questions at the whole group rather than individuals and consequently do not probe students' knowledge and understanding sufficiently.
- Teachers make appropriate use of information gained through initial assessment about students' pre-existing skills and knowledge to gain a good understanding of their students' needs. They use this information to encourage their students to extend and develop learning both inside and outside of the classroom. However, too often, teachers do not make sufficient use of this information to plan lessons that meet the needs of all students and, as a result, a minority of students do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The majority of teachers make effective use of information and learning technology (ILT) and the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) to support learning. For example, one teacher used video clips and internet research effectively to link a lesson on encryption to the recent anniversary of the Bletchley Park deciphering of wartime codes. Teachers are gaining the confidence and skills to be more innovative in their use of technology in their teaching.

- Initial advice and guidance are good. Students and apprentices benefit from a 'Right Choice' early course review that ensures they are on the right course. Teachers and the college careers staff give appropriate independent advice on careers or further study and training.
- Teachers have developed strong links with employers that have resulted in most students taking part in highly beneficial work placements. External visits to the workplace and networking with external guest speakers from industry support the new study programmes effectively. For example, in public services, students took part in fitness training and a discussion on career opportunities with the Royal Marines.
- Assessment practices across the college and in the workplace are mostly good. The large majority of teachers' assessment and feedback on students' work is comprehensive and challenges students to improve further. However, a minority of teachers provide feedback on students' written work that is insufficiently detailed and fails to correct spelling and punctuation errors.
- The majority of teachers improve students' English and mathematics effectively through their vocational teaching and promote their importance for students' studies and future careers. Students study for an appropriate qualification in English and mathematics to enhance their future career prospects and increase their opportunities for further study.
- The tutorial programme is comprehensive. Students receive a wide range of support and guidance from college staff and external providers. For example, students received helpful information from a variety of agencies at the college's health fair and were able to request additional specialist workshops that then took place during tutorial time. The majority of group tutorials ensure that students develop a broad range of personal and social skills, prepare them for further study and for work, and monitor their progress. However, a small minority of tutorials are ineffective.
- Staff frequently review students' and apprentices' progress ensuring that they have a clear understanding of what they have achieved and the progress they are making. However, a minority of target setting lacks sufficient detail to help students take full responsibility for their own progress and learning.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well. They use their own experiences to raise students' awareness of how differences in culture, values and ways of life can have an impact upon how they interact with colleagues and work with clients.

<p><b>Health and social care</b></p> <p><b>16-19 study programmes</b>  <b>19+ Learning programmes</b>  <b>Apprenticeships</b></p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Consequently, students' success rates have improved and are now well above the national average for similar colleges. The small number of apprentices do not achieve so well, being just below the national average for each of the last three years. However, recent initiatives aimed at improving support and assessment practices are now having a positive impact.
- Appropriately qualified and professionally experienced teachers have high expectations of students. They ensure that students participate in activity-based, vocationally relevant lessons. Teachers use their own experiences very well to bring the world of work into classrooms to motivate students and enhance their learning. The very good rapport between teaching staff and students, alongside teachers' strong use of praise, promotes progress and learning.
- In the majority of lessons, students respond well and make rapid progress. They work with interest and develop good personal, social and employability skills to help with their preparation for the workplace. Students work confidently on their own as well as in groups, contributing to

interesting class activities and discussions. Teachers respond knowledgeably to well-informed questions from students.

- In the weaker lessons, teachers do not plan sufficiently well to ensure that all students are able to make progress. They do not test students' understanding and ability to apply knowledge and they do not use probing questions to extend and deepen learning sufficiently well.
- Good linking of theory and practice, highly relevant workplace experiences and teachers who act as role models prepare students particularly well for working in the care sector. Assessors and employers work collaboratively to support apprentices in their training and to ensure that they have the necessary time to develop their skills. Teachers and assessors are increasingly embedding English and mathematics so that students are gaining the relevant skills that they require to support their learning or training.
- Teachers and students make extensive use of the electronic tracking and monitoring system to promote students' progress. Teachers set individual targets for students that contribute positively to helping them improve their work and achieve their goals. Recently, assessors have been setting targets that are more challenging for apprentices and that support them well to achieve in a timely way. Teachers monitor students' progress in well-planned reviews.
- Students benefit from a wide range of resources to progress their learning and skills development and consequently their work is of a high standard. Students utilise the VLE well to provide a detailed source of information and as an effective communication and assessment tool. Students develop their skills further with the aid of anatomical models and the well-equipped therapy suite. Students put their mobile phones to good use when researching topics on the internet. However, teachers do not make sufficient use of the innovative ILT resources and applications presently available in the college.
- Teachers provide good practical help and guidance that prepare students well for their course. Their information and advice are particularly effective in supporting students' progression to the next level of study in further or higher education or into employment or further training. Apprentices often secure promotion in their current training posts. Teachers use themed group tutorials to strengthen the students' knowledge base and enrich their learning.
- Teachers and assessors take advantage of every opportunity to discuss differences, values and culture with students. Consequently, students develop a clear understanding of the implications of equality and diversity in providing care.

## Early years and playwork

### 16-19 study programmes

### 19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the large majority of success rates being above the national averages for similar colleges. Students' achievements on the awards for care, health and education are particularly high. The smaller number of adults on part-time courses achieve less well.
- Students rapidly develop the skills that they will require for the workplace. They have highly structured work experience in a range of relevant settings which enables them to develop the range of skills required to work successfully with children.
- In the best lessons, students are able to reflect on their experience of work to consolidate their learning in their academic studies. Teachers encourage them to apply their developing subject knowledge to a range of demanding and enjoyable activities where their learning is checked and they know how much progress they are making. Students work together to share their experiences and to deepen their understanding. For example, students worked in pairs to review how they could apply relevant legislation to nursery settings. Teachers make use of well-prepared resource material, such as workbooks, which provide excellent support to enhance students' learning.

- In the small number of less effective classes, teachers do not ask enough directed or sufficiently probing questions and consequently students do not participate fully or develop their knowledge and understanding. Teachers do not plan teaching and learning sufficiently well to meet the needs of different groups of students.
- Teachers assess students’ progress on full-time courses very well. Students know their targets and are well aware of the progress they are making against them. Regular individual tutorials and portfolio-building sessions provide students with very clear feedback. Teachers’ written feedback on work provides appropriate guidance on how students can improve their work further. On part-time adult programmes, the tracking systems for assessment are not so well developed and, as a result, students and course leaders do not have an overview of the progress students are making.
- Teachers use ILT well to support learning. Students regularly use the high-quality materials on the college’s VLE to enhance and develop their learning. Staff and students communicate effectively through a shared social media page.
- Students benefit from a supportive and caring ethos. Teachers provide a stimulating learning environment and well-planned support sessions that ensure students make rapid progress. Students receive good advice and guidance on working in the childcare sector. As a result the vast majority of students progress to further training or education, employment or higher education.
- Teachers have a clear focus on ensuring that students develop and use specialist vocabulary. They mark work consistently well, correcting students’ spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Students develop relevant mathematics skills well. For example, they reviewed the weight of babies in their first months of life against the national norms to identify if they were growing and developing adequately. Students regularly use appropriate mathematics and English activities with children within their work placements.
- Students develop a good understanding of equality issues and how they relate to childcare settings. Teachers enhance students’ awareness through a programme of trips and visiting speakers, including managers from social services and a local children’s centre, which develop students’ understanding of the needs of the children and families they will be working with.

<p><b>Engineering</b></p> <p><b>16-19 study programmes</b></p> <p><b>19+ Learning programmes</b></p> <p><b>Apprenticeships</b></p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and reflect students’ improving success rates that have increased steadily over the last three years and are now comparable to those in similar colleges. The number of apprentices completing their training successfully is below national rates, although improvement strategies are now in place and have resulted in a significant improvement to retention.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge and industrial experience effectively to develop students’ practical skills. They make appropriate links between theory and practice and cite examples from their own experiences in industry to increase students’ awareness.
- Students enjoy their practical lessons and work safely in the college’s well-resourced workshops. The large majority of students and apprentices produce high standards of work. They make good progress and develop appropriate occupational skills. In one lesson, students interpreted accurately the isometric, end and section views in an engineering drawing, selected brass and mild steel, used centre lathes to machine them to correct sizes and profiles and manufactured components of a vice to industry standards.
- In theory lessons, teachers use a good variety of techniques to enliven the lessons and to develop students’ underpinning knowledge of engineering principles. Teachers do not always



use students’ profiles and initial assessment to plan effectively the support needed for the less able students and to extend the knowledge of the more able.

- Students and teachers use learning technology well. Advanced-level students, in particular, use specialist computer software ably to support theory and practical tasks. In a lesson on two-dimensional computer-aided design, students developed a good understanding of the concept of layers in complex engineering drawings. Engineering resources on the college’s VLE are sufficient to develop students’ research skills and to help them with their assignments. However, not all teachers encourage students to benefit from this facility on a regular basis.
- Support for students is good. Workshop technicians work well with teachers to help and support students. Students benefit from individual and group tutorials. In one group tutorial, an invited guest speaker gave a presentation on decision making to prepare students for employment. Teachers use the electronic monitoring system to identify students at risk of leaving and intervene in a timely manner. However, teachers do not set targets for improvement that are specific enough to monitor students’ progress well. Assessors use on-site reviews that are sufficiently robust and incorporate specific and time-bound targets to improve apprentices’ performance.
- Assessment of students’ work is thorough. The standard of students’ written work, particularly at advanced level, is good. Verbal feedback, particularly on students’ practical work, is constructive and helps them to improve their work. Apprentices’ portfolios are good and contain photographic evidence with suitable narratives describing the work carried out. On-site assessments are timely and thorough. Teachers’ written feedback is of variable quality, ranging from detailed commentary to cursory.
- Students develop relevant mathematics skills well. They use precision engineering instruments to measure and record data, interpret engineering drawings and carry out basic calculations in conjunction with their tasks. In contrast, the development of their English skills requires further improvement. The majority of teachers do not correct students’ spelling and grammatical mistakes routinely.
- Teachers provide good quality information and guidance that ensure students study on appropriate courses and apprentices embark on suitable training. Students benefit from the advice they receive from their teachers on progression routes and career opportunities.
- Teachers embed equality and diversity in their lessons very well. For example, teachers make students aware of British Standards and Eurocodes. Students are attentive in lessons, behave very well and demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and their teachers. Teachers enforce safe working practices.

**Construction**

**16-19 study programmes**  
**19+ Learning programmes**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the improvements to the number of students achieving their qualifications, which is now high. However, the retention of the small number of younger students on foundation-level carpentry, bricklaying and plastering is low.
- Students enjoy their learning. They develop good personal, social and employability skills to improve their effectiveness in the workplace and to increase their employment opportunities. Teachers help students to understand the reasons for good punctuality and reliability, and to plan timely travel arrangements to construction sites. Construction company personnel provide presentations and mock interviews to help prepare students better for work. Students have purposeful work experience that is well supported by employers.
- Teachers and instructors are appropriately qualified. They use their own industrial experience to provide a stimulating range of activities to interest and motivate students. For example, in a

brickwork practical session, students demonstrated high levels of industrial brickwork skills in setting out, shaping and cutting bricks to form a complex building structure that incorporated acute and obtuse intersections and an arch.

- The majority of teachers inspire students through well-planned learning and have sufficiently high expectations to ensure that all students acquire new skills and knowledge rapidly. However, in a small minority of lessons the activities do not capture the interest of students sufficiently.
- Students make good progress on their courses and produce a high standard of work. A majority of teachers assess students’ work well and provide thorough feedback, which is constructive and helps the students to improve their performance. Teachers challenge the students that are not making sufficient progress in lessons by giving them additional one-to-one support that raises their aspirations successfully. However, the targets that teachers set within tutorial sessions are of variable quality and do not focus sufficiently on improving students’ attendance and punctuality.
- Students benefit from resources and work spaces in construction and the built environment that are very good. Facilities to support students include realistic working environments and technicians maintain these very well. Students have access to sufficient, well-organised tools and equipment. Teachers ensure students’ compliance in safe working practices. The majority of teachers do not use ILT to support and enhance learning.
- Teachers use their initial assessments of students well to identify any additional support needs and ensure students receive appropriate support in a timely manner. Students receive an interview within the first six weeks of starting, which is effective in ensuring that they remain on the course. A pastoral support mentor linked with the construction department provides helpful support and guidance for teachers on interventions to help students. Teachers provide appropriate information to students that allows them to make informed choices about progressing into further education or training, and guidance that helps those who are preparing for employment.
- Students develop good mathematical skills relevant to working in construction in both theoretical and practical sessions. For example, students calculated the areas of walls and then the number of rolls of wallpaper required. While students develop their English skills well in theory lessons, teachers are not so skilled at embedding these skills into practical sessions and they do not correct spelling and punctuation errors on students’ written work routinely.
- All staff provide students with a welcoming learning environment at the Technology Campus. Teachers promote positive student behaviour and conduct skilfully. They pay good attention to ensuring that students are respectful of the diverse range of clients that they will be working with.

**Hospitality and catering**

**16-19 study programmes**  
**19+ Learning programmes**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which is reflected in students’ high success rates. Students develop good skills working in the college kitchens and restaurants and while on work placement. Attendance and punctuality rates for the large majority of students are good.
- Students demonstrate good professional knowledge and prepare and cook high-quality dishes under commercial conditions. Advanced-level students are very creative and use their skills well to develop recipes and experiment with presentation styles to produce visually stimulating dishes. Students benefit from working in the college’s commercial restaurant in the evenings and at weekends. However, teachers do not develop students’ time management, independent learning and problem-solving skills fully in practical sessions.



- In the majority of lessons, very experienced and well-qualified teachers use their industrial experience well to motivate students and to relate learning to industry standards. Teachers have high expectations of their students and help them to fulfil their ambitions.
- Teachers use a range of high-quality resources to support learning well. Contemporary kitchens and food service areas are particularly well resourced and reflect current industry standards. However, teachers make insufficient use of technology, for example, electronic point of sale systems. Teachers ensure that students maintain equipment to high standards. Students use premium ingredients such as sea bream, wild salmon and partridge.
- Students are able to link very well their experiences from work to learning in college. Advanced-level students extend their knowledge and understanding of portion control, food safety and standardisation. Teachers plan work experience well and students gain valuable additional skills from working in a wide range of establishments catering for large-scale conferences.
- Teachers plan the majority of lessons well and build on students’ knowledge and skills, providing appropriate assessment opportunities. Students understand assessment methods and the progress they are making. Teachers’ assessment decisions on practical skills and written assignments are accurate and fair. Teachers provide good verbal feedback, motivating students to do well.
- However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not check students’ knowledge and understanding sufficiently well. Their written feedback lacks detail and does not help students to identify how they can achieve higher grades. Frequently teachers do not give students the opportunity to consider their responses to questions or to elaborate before they provide the answers. Teachers do not plan activities sufficiently well to encourage students to participate.
- Teachers correct students’ spelling errors in their written work but in lessons they do not routinely encourage students to use dictionaries or ILT to help them improve their English. In practical sessions, teachers frequently miss opportunities to develop students’ mathematics skills by, for example, calculating wastage or gross profit percentages.
- Students benefit from good support, advice and guidance. Pre-course information is good and gives students clear information about progression opportunities at college and work. Teachers identify additional learning needs when students start their courses. Specialist support staff plan well the support they provide to students and teachers have clear, detailed written guidance to help them support students further in lessons.
- Posters displayed in the kitchens promote equality and diversity well. Students are aware of cultural influences on food choices but teachers do not check or extend their understanding of broader issues.

**Foundation English**

**16-19 study programmes**  
**19+ Learning programmes**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the significant improvement in students’ success rates. Achievement at all levels has improved over each of the last three years and is now just above the national averages for similar colleges. However, although the number of students taking GCSE English is small, the proportion of them who achieve an A\* to C grade is very low.
- In the majority of lessons, students work at the appropriate level given their current skills and knowledge. Teachers check the progress of all students effectively. Students are enthusiastic and confident in contributing views and opinions during discussions. They make good progress in lessons, particularly when the teacher provides an appropriate context, and they develop their speaking, listening and writing skills rapidly.
- Teachers mark students’ work clearly and accurately and pay appropriate attention to the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, teachers do not always provide

sufficiently detailed feedback on students' written work to allow them to improve their work for the next assessment. Both teachers and students find it difficult to measure the progress that students are making over time for the small minority of students that are not encouraged to collate their work in files.

- Teachers provide consistently good care, guidance and support. In the college's learning zone staff use the results of initial assessment to ensure that students referred for English support are following appropriate programmes. For example, in a one-to-one session on spelling the teacher developed learning based on the student's interests and together they set new targets, which were relevant to the student's main career goal.
- Teachers are appropriately qualified. A detailed staff-development programme supports them in embedding the acquisition of appropriate English skills in all curriculum areas. Teachers use the accommodation and other resources well to enhance learning. The majority of teachers use the VLE well to direct students to a range of stimulating activities and resources that they use outside the classroom. As a result students learn to work independently and they gain in confidence.
- Teachers make appropriate use of information gained through initial assessment about students' pre-existing skills and knowledge to gain a good understanding of their students' needs. However, not all teachers use this information sufficiently well to plan learning and, as a result, a minority of students are not being challenged sufficiently and do not make swift enough progress in moving to higher levels of study.
- Initial advice and guidance are thorough. All students receive a detailed induction process that prepares them well for their studies. Adult students returning to college have a good quality extended induction that builds their confidence, provides them with the ambition to succeed and extends their skills in English prior to progressing into the classroom.
- Teachers promote issues of equality and diversity well within lessons. They use a good range of learning materials that encourage students to have a deeper understanding of different cultures and values as well as a respect for others. The majority of students who speak English as an additional language achieve their English qualifications and progress to higher levels of study in preparation for GCSE. This prepares them very well for their future career paths.

## Business

### 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which has resulted in the vast majority of students completing their courses successfully. Success rates on accountancy courses are high and on business management courses are in line with national averages for similar colleges. However, attendance and retention rates for the small number of younger students are low.
- Students make good progress from their starting points. On successful completion of their course, the majority of students gain full-time employment, or progress to further study or higher education. Students improve their communication and customer service skills while on work placement. For example, an employer coached a student so that his telephone skills improved and he was able to contact clients confidently to find out relevant sales information.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use effectively to interest students and bring the subject to life. In an accountancy lesson, students not only developed knowledge of manufacturing accounts but an understanding of the manufacturing process. Teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to check learning and assess the progress of each student. However, in a minority of lessons, questions do not stretch or probe sufficiently and only the more confident students answer.

- In the very few less-effective lessons teachers do not take into account the needs and abilities of their students to provide sufficient challenge for the more able students and to develop their skills effectively.
- Accommodation and resources for learning are very good. Students benefit from the high-quality learning materials on the college's VLE, using them for revision and independent learning. Teachers use quizzes to assess learning and video clips to illustrate business issues, for example, Belbin's team roles. However, a minority of teachers use ILT predominantly for presentations, which leads to students losing interest.
- Teachers' assessment of students' work and progress is good. They set homework regularly and mark it promptly. Teachers provide detailed and constructive feedback, which ensures that students are clear about what they need to do to improve. Teachers mark work accurately, identifying errors in students' spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Teachers monitor students' progress and attendance closely. They identify promptly students at risk of not achieving and take appropriate action swiftly. Teachers review students' targets regularly but these targets are not sufficiently detailed and precise to indicate to students how to reach or exceed their goals.
- Teachers provide very good support for students. Students are enrolled on an appropriate course as a result of rigorous initial advice and guidance. Teachers provide valuable extra support out of lesson time so that students make further good progress. They identify early those students who need additional help and then ensure that they benefit from the effective in-class support.
- The quality of students' written work is good. In vocational lessons teachers focus on the students' accurate use of apostrophes, homophones and subject-specific terminology. However, teachers do not match activities sufficiently to the students' abilities and this slows the pace of learning for the younger students in their English and mathematics lessons.
- Teachers develop good resources and assignments to raise awareness of, and promote discussions on, equality and diversity. Marketing students explored age, gender and dietary needs when deciding whether an American diner would be a good business proposition. As part of an event-management module students organised a Fair Trade event and raised funds so that they could pay for a Malawian child's education for a year. Students work in a safe, friendly, inclusive environment and their behaviour is very good.

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>
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- The Principal's strong and decisive leadership has ensured that the priority of all staff has been to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and, as a result, students' outcomes are now good. Managers at all levels have high expectations of teachers and support them very well. The mission and strategic aims are ambitious, but realistic, with a focus on providing excellent education and training. Although the college has made significant progress over the past three years, there remains potential to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching.
- Governance is very good. Governors are well informed and challenging. Detailed reports give them a good understanding of the standard of teaching and of students' achievements. Close scrutiny of college activities, for example, through governors linked to curriculum areas, shadowing lesson observations and involvement in self-assessment, enables them to play an effective role in driving up standards.
- Managers have taken the positive step of introducing unannounced graded lesson observations. However, lesson observation judgements do not take sufficient account of the quality of learning and the progress made by students. Consequently, grading is over-generous. Action plans focus mostly on eliminating weak aspects of teaching and do not provide sufficient pointers to help teachers build on existing good practice.
- Good appraisal of teachers is based upon an evaluation of appropriate competences. Senior managers follow clear policies for teachers who do not meet the required standards.

Development for individual staff is compulsory if managers judge that specific skills need to be improved. Managers identify underperforming courses quickly and take appropriate action. Professional development is very good with all staff regularly updating their skills.

- Management of resources during a period of reduced funding has been good. Specialist facilities, for example in construction, engineering and health care, are used effectively to promote learning. The spacious buildings, classrooms and practical facilities provide an excellent environment for students and staff.
- Managers at course level have had a positive impact on teaching and students' outcomes. They are mindful of performance against targets and of their departments' strengths and areas for improvement. Senior managers monitor improvement plans well, holding course leaders accountable for the standard of teaching and students' achievements. The majority of curriculum areas have strong links with employers.
- The management of workplace learning has improved significantly, with clear accountability among staff and managers, appropriate procedures and challenging quality standards. Managers monitor the progress of workplace students closely and provide those not progressing at the expected rate with intensive support. These arrangements are improving retention and having a positive impact on the quality of learning and assessment in the workplace, which is now good.
- The detailed strategic plan includes analysis of regional job trends by curriculum area, linked to actions for college departments. Significant curriculum change, for example to foundation-level provision, has resulted from effective planning by managers. Managers have developed study programmes which include appropriate employability provision. Staff work increasingly well with employers to provide work-experience placements, work-based learning and commercial courses. However, managers have been less successful in ensuring that students make rapid enough progress with English and mathematics.
- A self-critical approach to self-assessment has produced good-quality improvement plans at cross-college level that include detailed evaluations of outcomes and sound actions to improve teaching and learning. Self-assessment grades in the college report are accurate. However, course-level self-assessment reports are descriptive and do not link areas for improvement to evidence and action plans adequately. In a minority of curriculum areas, the reports do not focus adequately on the quality of learning and its impact on students' progress. Quality assurance managers check carefully that subcontractors maintain high standards.
- Students' views are collected effectively through whole-college surveys, the student council, and the 'you said we did' process. College managers respond appropriately to issues raised by students. Staff and students also value the 'What's on your mind?' opportunity to feed suggestions directly to senior managers. Managers respond promptly and improvements have resulted.
- The college is inclusive and the promotion of equality and diversity is very good. There is an active committee, supported by thematic groups, for example, for faith, race and culture, and sexuality. The college has a detailed action plan, appropriate policies and adequate training. Managers identified that a small number of vulnerable young people, such as young carers and parents, were underperforming. Individual help was organised and a peer-support group has been set up. There have been many worthwhile activities to promote diversity.
- Safeguarding is very good. The college is a safe and welcoming environment. It meets its legal duties. The link governor for safeguarding has received appropriate training for the role. All staff are trained to recognise and respond to incidents of bullying or harassment. Partnership training with the local authority has been effective on domestic violence, drugs awareness and sexual exploitation. The college is proactive in dealing with online safeguarding.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### St Helens College

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	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	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	3	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Health and social care</b>	2
<b>Early years and playwork</b>	2
<b>Engineering</b>	2
<b>Building and construction</b>	2
<b>Hospitality and catering</b>	2
<b>Foundation English</b>	2
<b>Accounting and finance</b>	2
<b>Business management</b>	2

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	General further education college								
<b>Age range of learners</b>	14+								
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: 2,384								
	Part-time: 7,235								
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Dr Jette Burford								
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	February 2011								
<b>Website address</b>	www.sthelens.ac.uk								
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>									
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>		
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
<b>Full-time</b>	512	80	449	171	772	351	69	743	
<b>Part-time</b>	219	991	139	789	99	505	10	315	
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		N/A		N/A				
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	231	85	263	325	N/A	N/A			
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>									
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A								
<b>Part-time</b>	111								
<b>Number of community learners</b>	761								
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	29								
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Waterside Training Limited</li> <li>■ K J Training Solutions Limited</li> <li>■ Lemon and McCarthy &amp; Associates Limited</li> <li>■ Sue Dawe (Heirs and Graces Childcare Training Solutions)</li> <li>■ Vauxhall Neighbourhood Council Limited</li> <li>■ Universal Learning Streams Limited</li> </ul>								



## Contextual information

St Helens College is a large general further education college situated on Merseyside in the North West region of England. St Helens borough has a population of 175,000 residents. Unemployment is at the same levels as the North West region as a whole and this is two percentage points higher than that in Great Britain. The number of residents of working age employed in professional occupations is six percentage points lower than the national rate; conversely, the number employed in elementary occupations is three percentage points higher than the national figure. The main employment in the borough is in the service industries. Some 50% of the population are educated to at least advanced level compared with 55% nationally. The number of school leavers achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is four percentage points below the national figure.

## Information about this inspection

**Lead inspector**

Stewart Jackson HMI

Three 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 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 college. 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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