

Sussex Downs College

General further education college

Inspection dates		28 April–2 May 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good; teachers and support staff have a strong determination to help learners to succeed.
- Most learners make good progress and produce work of a high standard.
- Many learners gain valuable work experience through their involvement with high quality community projects that significantly enhance their employability skills.
- Learners enjoy their courses and have positive attitudes to their studies. Attendance rates are high and learners are motivated to succeed.
- Highly effective partnerships with local authorities and other education providers have successfully encouraged vulnerable young people and adults back into learning.
- Leaders and managers have successfully rectified weaknesses identified at the last inspection and have rapidly improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the learner experience.
- Learners have a good understanding of issues related to equality and social diversity and take a lead in organising awareness raising events.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The proportion of outstanding lessons that enable learners to make exceptional progress is too low.
- Too few learners on level 3 courses and on courses in English and mathematics achieve high grade passes or exceed their expected attainment grade.
- The advice and guidance provided to inform learners about progression to higher level study or into employment is insufficiently detailed. Progression rates are low on several courses.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons. Maintain the strong focus on improving teachers' skills through the observation of lessons and subsequent staff training. Share best practice more widely between the three campuses so that all learners experience equally high standards of learning, including in the use of projects that give learners skills to prepare them for future jobs.
- Raise success rates on English and mathematics courses by linking the teaching of English and mathematics more closely with vocational subjects so learners understand the value of these skills and are more motivated to succeed. Provide detailed information to learners before they start their courses so they are clear about the functional skills or GCSE subjects they will take. Assess learners' readiness for taking examinations more thoroughly so that learners build confidence by achieving success.
- Increase the numbers of learners on level 3 courses who exceed the grades expected of them relative to their prior attainment. Set more challenging target grades for learners on level 3 courses and ensure that teachers and personal tutors work closely together to provide strong support for learners to achieve their targets.
- Increase the proportion of learners that progress to higher levels of study or into employment by providing more detailed advice and guidance about progression opportunities, especially to learners on A-level courses who are not going to university and for learners on level 1 and level 2 courses.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learners enjoy their courses and most make good progress. Of full-time learners aged 16 to 18, who form the majority of learners, the proportion who successfully completes vocational qualifications has improved and is around the national rate for similar colleges. The proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 completing GCE A levels successfully is high, and for GCE AS-level is broadly average. A high number of learners successfully complete short qualifications. Learners' attendance is good. ▪ Since the previous inspection the proportion of adult learners successfully completing long course qualifications has dropped slightly, mainly because a high number of adults on level 2 qualifications in ICT and administration who do not complete their studies. College managers have discontinued this poor provision and the proportion of adults in the current year who have remained on courses is high. ▪ The numbers of level 3 learners achieving or exceeding the grades expected of them in previous years varies across subjects on both vocational and academic courses, and requires further improvement. Managers have taken appropriate actions and current learners are making good progress on the majority of courses. ▪ Success rates for apprentices broadly match national rates. The proportion of apprentices completing their programmes in the planned time is above national rates. The performance of apprentices varies considerably across different subjects, with those on business and health and social care programmes performing well, while those on construction and teacher education programmes perform poorly. Success rates for provision delivered by subcontractors are good. ▪ Learners adequately develop English and mathematical skills as part of their study programmes. However, while the number of learners successfully completing functional skills qualifications has improved, success rates remain below the national rate for similar colleges, and the proportion of learners achieving high grades on GCSE English and mathematics courses is low. 	

- The standard of learners' work is good. Teachers make effective use of national and regional skills competitions and projects to motivate learners and support them to develop excellent practical skills, especially in beauty therapy, hairdressing, construction, media, and art and design.
- Managers play a lead role in a highly effective project across the south east of England for young people who are not in education, employment or training. They work closely with local authorities and continually adapt the provision to meet the changing needs of young people. Managers work successfully with Jobcentre Plus on two-week courses for the unemployed, which are successfully supporting adults into jobs.
- An increasing number of learners on vocational courses benefit from completing useful work experience placements. In motor vehicle and beauty therapy curriculum areas learners significantly enhance their employability skills through a well managed work experience programme. However, such opportunities are not yet available to all learners. Managers have established a successful scheme, in partnership with local employers, to increase the number of learners who take up apprenticeships.
- Learners benefit from innovative projects that provide them with the skills they will need in future jobs, most notably an outstanding large-scale community arts project in Lewes. Managers and teachers have yet to secure consistency in ensuring all learners are able to develop their skills to a similarly high level.
- Managers monitor the performance of different groups of learners well and the gap in performance between male and female learners has narrowed, as have the variations in performance between learners from different ethnic and cultural groups. However, learners aged 16 to 18 continue to perform better than adults, and learners who need specific additional support with their studies continue to perform less well than those who do not.
- Managers have improved the systems for recording the destinations of learners following the completion of their course. The proportion that moves to a higher level of study or into employment is satisfactory. A high proportion of level 3 learners progress to higher education, including to prestigious universities and to specialist institutions such as art, dance and drama schools.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. Teachers have responded well to training and development activities over the past year. They now confidently employ strategies that help learners become more independent in their studies, and more likely to achieve and exceed their target grades. Teachers have high expectations of their learners and work hard to help them achieve their qualifications.
- Teachers use an effective and appropriate range of teaching methods to maintain learners' focus and interest in lessons. In most lessons, teachers are well prepared to meet all learners' individual needs and ensure that they achieve well. Learning support assistants provide good support for learners who require additional help in lessons.
- In the best lessons, teachers work hard to ensure learners make productive use of their time at college. Teachers make effective use of information technology and the virtual learning environment (VLE). For example, teachers place challenging work on the VLE before lessons and learners are subsequently well prepared and able to make thoughtful contributions that demonstrate their understanding of topics taught. Learners develop good levels of independent learning and those on vocational courses have good practical skills.
- In the minority of less effective lessons, teachers are not yet sufficiently skilled at planning activities matched to the range of learners' abilities; in particular, they fail to challenge the most able learners sufficiently. The pace of these lessons is too slow and learners who complete tasks quickly lose interest. Continued problems with staffing of geography lessons at Eastbourne have resulted in a poor experience for learners in this subject.

- Tutors provide good individual pastoral support and carefully manage learners’ welfare needs. Tutors monitor learners’ performance closely against minimum target grades and help learners to overcome difficulties and stay up to date with their work. However, tutors’ and teachers’ ability to support level 3 learners to exceed their target grades varies across different subjects. Apprentices receive good guidance through frequent reviews and most are aware of the progress they are making.
- Tutors deliver a comprehensive programme of lessons covering personal and social development topics. However, they do not adapt the teaching resources sufficiently to take into account learners’ prior knowledge or experience, and do not relate the theory of these topics well enough to gaining new skills, for example in interviewing techniques.
- Teachers’ assessment of learners’ assignments and homework is good, although their assessment of learners’ understanding during lessons is occasionally poor. Most teachers provide feedback that helps learners understand how they can improve further. Assessment on apprenticeship programmes is good and assessors support apprentices well through frequent visits to employers.
- Excellent examples exist where teachers have developed good links with industry, for example in motor vehicle and public services, so that learners link their study to future career paths. However, staff have yet to implement this aspect of study programmes equally across all subjects.
- Arrangements to support learners with additional learning needs have improved since the previous inspection and are now effective. More learners now receive effective support and their progress in the current year is good.
- Most learners have the English and mathematics skills needed to complete their courses successfully, and teachers provide satisfactory support for these areas in class and through feedback on assignments. However, although teaching, learning and assessment have improved on functional skills and GCSE courses too few learners achieve English and mathematics qualifications.
- Learners do not receive enough information to prepare them to study English and mathematics, and teachers do not link the skills learned sufficiently with learners’ vocational or academic courses. Assessment practice is weak on a small minority of functional skills programmes, resulting in learners taking examinations for which they are not fully prepared.
- Staff provide good advice and guidance to learners about course options and this, combined with effective pre-course activities and assignments, ensures that learners are on the most appropriate course. Tutors provide good guidance for learners progressing to higher education, but guidance is less clear for those who wish to progress to the next level of study at the college or into employment.
- Learners develop good levels of respect for their peers and college staff. Learners’ behaviour is good and they gain a good understanding of what constitutes bullying and harassment and know how to raise concerns. They develop an appropriate level of awareness of the diverse aspects of their subject. However, a minority of teachers miss opportunities to encourage debate and extend learning further.

Science

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, as reflected in the high proportion of learners successfully completing their qualifications. Learners make good progress and the proportion that achieves or exceeds the grades expected of them is in line with similar colleges. The number of learners who progress to science courses at university is satisfactory, as is the proportion of learners who achieve A* to C grades in GCSE science subjects.

- Learners participate enthusiastically in lessons, work well independently and enjoy their courses. On a vocational course, for example, learners very effectively carry out research, analysis and investigation into interesting topics, such as measuring the memory span of a goldfish and the effect of caffeine on the growth rate of cress.
- Teachers use a wide range of activities to make lessons interesting and to motivate learners. For example, learners participated successfully in a well-planned card matching exercise to recall the properties and associated equations of group two metals. In biology, learners challenge each other to define biological terms. Most teachers plan lessons well to meet learners’ individual needs; however, in a small minority of lessons teachers set the same tasks to all learners, with insufficient regard for their varied levels of ability.
- Teachers and learners adhere well to health and safety during practical sessions and learners develop good practical skills through many varied and interesting experiments. For example, a group of learners prepared, recrystallized and then checked the purity of a sample of paracetamol. However, whilst all learners follow instructions and complete experiments successfully, not all learners fully understand the concepts underlying these practical activities.
- Teachers organise a wealth of activities outside lessons that provide learners with an insight into the application of science in a range of employment contexts. These include programmes specifically designed for more able learners. Teachers raise learners’ enthusiasm for science through well-considered events, such as taking physics learners to a nuclear fusion laboratory. At the Lewes campus, teachers present a series of talks on a range of topics, including evolution and DNA, which broaden learners’ knowledge of, and passion for, science.
- Teachers prepare learners well for their studies by setting tasks before the start of the course that help learners know they are taking the right subjects. Teachers set homework frequently and mark and return it promptly. Their detailed and constructive comments help learners to improve their work. Learners make good use of self- and peer assessment. They evaluate their own performance against their target grades and identify actions to improve, which develops their independence and responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers and technicians provide good support to learners during and outside lessons. They organise numerous optional workshops in each subject, which are well attended. Teachers make good use of the VLE, which is organised effectively and contains good resources through which learners broaden their understanding of science.
- Teachers maintain comprehensive records of learners’ progress and closely monitor their attainment in relation to their target grades. They quickly identify learners who need extra help to achieve and implement effective strategies to keep them on track.
- During lessons teachers place a strong emphasis on the correct use of scientific terminology. They teach learners to interpret the language used in examination questions to improve their attainment. Teachers develop learners’ mathematical skills well, for example by getting them to calculate nutritional values of different foods or by practising data interpretation and manipulation.
- Learners are respectful and tolerant of others and their behaviour is good. Learners develop an understanding of matters related to social equality, for example through learning about women in science. The majority of teachers use highly effective strategies to meet learners’ individual needs, such as the careful management of working groups or providing additional challenging activities for the more able, but this is not evident in all lessons.

ICT practitioners and ICT for users	
16-19 study programmes	Good
19+ Learning programmes	

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and so the majority of learners achieve their qualifications. The standard of learners’ work is good, as is their preparation for employment

and higher education. Learners create coursework of a very high standard that relates well to the world of work, such as developing a pricing programme for logistics and developing a programme to generate flow charts for a local firm.

- Learners acquire good computing skills using industry-standard hardware and software, for example using the Python interpreter for code checking. Learners work together effectively and develop useful skills for future employment, such as communication and working in teams.
- Teachers provide good support to learners during lessons and give effective guidance to individuals as they work in teams. They assess learners’ abilities accurately at the start of the course and provide effective support for those who need extra help.
- Personal tutors provide good and frequent one-to-one support and, as a consequence, learners make good progress. Teachers make good use of targets to help learners achieve.
- Teachers plan interesting lessons that provide suitable challenge to all learners. In revision lessons teachers focus effectively on examination techniques so that learners have a good understanding of what they need to do. Learners enjoy their studies and often contribute examples of their own experiences of computing, such as in the use of imaging software.
- Teachers have created a range of interesting resources, such as wall charts and flash cards that bring the subjects to life for learners. In most lessons, learners acquire a thorough knowledge of topics that they can directly apply to their practical work. However, in a minority of theory lessons, the pace is slow for more able learners, who finish tasks quickly and wait whilst others catch up.
- Through accurate assessment of learners’ previous experience of computing, teachers help them to make informed decisions about their choice of subjects. Teachers plan interesting activities before the start of the course and assess learners’ skills well in the first few weeks of term to ensure they have chosen appropriate programmes.
- Assessment practice is good. Teachers use questioning skilfully to check learners’ understanding of topics taught. Learners also assess each other’s work, which encourages them to reflect on their own work and develop independent learning skills. Assignments are well written and teachers’ marking is thorough. Teachers feedback is detailed, encouraging and constructive, and learners know what they have to do in order to improve.
- Learners’ use of English and mathematics in their coursework and assignments is good. Learners develop their English through the need to comment on their code and articulate strategies for problem solving. Teachers frequently include quizzes in English and mathematics on the VLE which learners find interesting and helpful.
- Learners receive timely advice and guidance about their options at the end of the course and this raises their aspirations about future jobs or training. A high proportion of advanced level learners progresses to higher education.
- Teachers are effective in helping learners to understand themes related to equality and diversity. Learners work in a trusting environment and they confidently discuss strategies to remove barriers to learning. Learners have a good understanding of social concerns related to race and gender and know how to stay safe online.

<p>Hospitality and catering</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good on college-based courses and for apprentices, as reflected in high success rates on most courses. Teachers have a strong focus on developing learners’ skills for future jobs and use their good links with employers effectively to motivate learners.

- Teachers have high expectations of learners and manage them well to work in mixed ability teams, for example when producing complex dishes to a high standard for catered events. Teachers challenge learners emphatically about their attendance; consequently, college-based learners' attendance and punctuality have improved and are now good.
- Teachers help learners to develop good knife skills quickly through tasks such as chopping and cutting fruit for complex desserts. They pay good attention to safe working and learners take pride in their work and in the workplace. Teachers plan the pace of learning well so that learners quickly gain, and have the time to practise, skills. For example, level 1 learners carry out the complex hand skill of turning vegetables accurately.
- Learning in the kitchen and restaurant food production and service areas is good. Teachers challenge learners to reach high industry standards. Learners demonstrate good practical skills and produce dishes that are over and above the level of their courses. For example, level 1 learners produced a complex three course menu as part of their preparation for study at the next level. Learners in the restaurant serve customers effectively and are courteous, polite and well presented. Feedback from customers is very good.
- Teachers provide constructive verbal feedback to learners during lessons to help them improve. In the better examples of written feedback, teachers are effective in explaining clearly to learners the theory they must apply to develop their practical skills. In a minority of cases, teachers do not give detailed enough advice to enable learners to improve their work.
- Learners participate in a wide range of good activities that prepare them for jobs, including visits to employers and participation in local and national skills events. Teachers organise trips abroad so learners can broaden their knowledge of different culinary styles. Teachers have a strong focus on enterprise skills and their links with local employers enable learners to complete valuable work experience and gain jobs.
- Apprentices receive frequent guidance in the workplace from assessors, and consequently acquire good skills and knowledge. Most apprentices receive good support and know what progress they are making, but this is not the case for all learners. Assessors do not always set challenging enough targets for the completion of assessed work and so a minority of apprentices take too long to complete their qualifications.
- Teachers provide good support to help learners develop their English and mathematical skills. For example, teachers use weekly displays in classrooms to remind learners of the correct spellings of technical terms. On apprenticeship programmes, assessors make sure that apprentices complete their functional skills assessments in good time, which motivates learners to achieve and progress.
- Learners receive very good advice prior to the start of their course and pre-course activities help them understand the requirements of the qualifications. Staff provide effective support and guidance to those who need extra help. Teachers' effective support helps learners progress successfully to prestigious work activities such as cooking in the kitchens at Windsor Castle and at an international cricket event.
- Learners develop good restaurant service skills that help them to understand the needs of different clients, for example in their dietary requirements. Learners demonstrate respect for each other and are confident in providing feedback on each other's performance.

History and philosophy

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection teaching, learning and assessment have improved, reflected in the proportion of learners achieving their qualifications. However, in both history and philosophy too many learners do not achieve the grades of which their prior attainment suggests they are capable.

- Teachers plan lessons well and take into account the needs of learners to provide the support and confidence-building they require. Learners enjoy their lessons, work with enthusiasm and the majority make good progress. However, teachers do not adequately encourage the most able learners to achieve the highest grades. Most teachers use questioning techniques well to check learners' understanding in lessons, but they do not always challenge learners to explore and evaluate topics in greater depth.
- Teachers encourage learners successfully to self-assess their work in order to understand the progress they have made and the further work they need to do. For example, learners identified the gaps in their knowledge of Russian political history, and then collaborated to support each other to improve. In philosophy, after planning and writing a brief essay, learners assessed each other's work using a marking guide. They valued highly the different perspectives on the subject matter they gained from this exercise.
- Learners make good use of the wealth of materials to support the study of history and philosophy available on the VLE. In lessons that focus on revision for examinations, teachers design useful resources that help learners to structure their work. However, in a few lessons, activities using these resources continue for too long and learners lose focus.
- Teachers frequently assess learners' work and most provide very detailed feedback on how they can further improve their work. In the best cases, learners are encouraged to reflect on the work they have produced and this leads to purposeful action planning, but not all teachers undertake this practice.
- Materials provided to learners at the start of their courses give an accurate and informative insight into what the study of history and philosophy involves and how the courses are taught and assessed. A pre-course writing assignment helps teachers identify, and later develop, learners' writing skills.
- Teachers enhance learners' understanding of printed resources and textbooks by frequent checks on their grasp of technical terms and specialist vocabulary. Most teachers also ensure that learners are aware of the correct spelling of the names and terms they are likely to use in examinations.
- Teachers know their learners well and use their experience and subject knowledge to provide good care and support. Personal tutors provide comprehensive support for their applications to university. However, tutors do not take adequate account of learners' prior knowledge when planning lessons on personal and social development.
- Lesson plans and schemes of work do not always identify opportunities to discuss humanity's diversity and the tensions in society that can result. However, during lessons, teachers promote an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. In group work, where learners peer-assess their work, they do so in a highly positive manner.

Geography, sociology and psychology

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved in social science subjects since the previous inspection, especially in sociology and psychology that make up the majority of the provision. The proportion of learners successfully achieving qualifications is around the national rate. Learners on most courses achieve the grades expected of them given their prior attainment. Teaching, learning and assessment are inadequate in geography at the Eastbourne campus, as continuing staffing problems have impeded learners' progress. Managers have put in place appropriate remedial actions; but, at the time of the inspection, learners continue to experience inadequate provision.
- In sociology and psychology, teachers have high expectations and focus on motivating learners to develop their analytical and evaluation skills. Through effective professional development,

teachers have gained the skills to develop learners’ capacity for independent study. In geography at the Eastbourne campus, teachers’ expectations of learners are still too low and this results in many learners making insufficient progress.

- In psychology and sociology, teachers support learners well and this is reflected in good levels of progress. Learners are highly motivated and teachers use a wide range of learning activities to stimulate interest in the subjects. For example, in psychology, learners understood how rewards can affect people’s behaviour by designing a reward system for young offenders. In geography at the Eastbourne campus, teachers have not provided enough support for learners; this has adversely affected their progress, and resulted in a minority of learners losing their motivation.
- Psychology and sociology teachers plan lessons well and have a strong focus on completing assignment work. Teachers understand learners’ abilities very well and plan lessons to meet their needs. Teachers use questions well to check learners’ progress in lessons. They set target grades for learners’ achievement and develop effective learning plans, which detail how each learner can improve their performance. In geography, target setting and progress monitoring require improvement.
- Learners receive frequent and detailed feedback on how to improve in psychology and sociology. In geography too few learners have completed assignments, and although feedback on how to improve is detailed, it has not been timely enough, limiting learners’ progress. In geography, teachers do not provide additional challenging tasks to enable the most able learners to achieve high grades.
- Teachers make effective and imaginative use of ILT in psychology and sociology. For example, in sociology, teachers create excellent online resources, such as on gender and global development, that learners analyse before lessons and which they then evaluate further in class. Teachers make good use of blogs to provide learners with course material outside the classroom.
- Teachers of psychology and sociology develop learners’ English and mathematics skills well. Learners have the skills necessary to write with confidence and, where necessary, apply mathematical skills.
- In psychology and sociology, teachers explore topics such as sexuality, ethnicity and inequality well, not only to meet the demands of the qualifications but also to help learners understand the world. In sociology, learners examine statistical data on global inequalities in wealth, based on gender, and evaluate comparisons between developed and developing countries.

<p>Independent living and leisure skills</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p> <p>Community learning</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Consequently, the number of learners who achieves qualifications at entry level, level 1, and on community learning courses, is high. Many learners progress to other courses or into employment following the successful completion of their studies.
- Most teachers plan creative lessons that successfully meet individual needs. For example, learners explore healthy eating options during cookery lessons and are involved in deciding what to cook. They learn about safety and food hygiene, as well as improving their communication skills. Learners in community settings develop confidence in presenting themselves and in working as a team through preparing a musical theatre performance.
- Teachers arrange interesting course-related and enterprise activities that motivate learners. For example, they organised a visit to a local hospice to learn about the care services offered. This

inspired learners to organise a sponsored walk, through which they gained skills in research, discussion, teamwork, planning and risk assessment.

- Learners complete imaginative tasks that develop their independent learning skills. For example, they learned how to keep individual sleep records as part of a healthy living assignment. Specialist teachers provide good support to learners so that they gain skills to travel on their own and learners are proud of their increasing independence.
- Staff involve parents, previous schools and other relevant agencies well to help prospective learners gain confidence to start a college course, and to identify an appropriate entry point for their studies.
- Staff give good, positive feedback to individuals that acknowledges the learning achieved, as well as the attainment of personal and social goals. However, their written feedback on assignment work is sometimes difficult to read and not always presented clearly.
- Learners receive an outstanding level of assistance and support from the learner support tutors, who provide excellent guidance to help resolve personal or behavioural difficulties. Learners participate well in additional activities, including volunteering and enterprise projects.
- Staff maintain an excellent emphasis on developing learners’ communication and mathematical skills. Reading, spelling and writing are the focus at the start of most lessons to ensure that learners understand new words and terminology, which they subsequently use confidently.
- Teachers and learning assistants use technology very well in many classes, for example using internet searches to check the accuracy of statements or queries raised during lessons. However, teachers do not always make enough use of assistive and communication technologies.
- More able learners are confident in understanding how they can get support and they feel safe in college. Staff ensure that less able learners are easily able to raise any concerns they have. Learning plans are well used so that learners can see the progress they are making. Staff use a successful and flexible approach to providing all learners with good guidance on their next steps. They coach learners successfully to find work placements and volunteering opportunities.
- Adults and young people who have learning difficulties, disabilities or mental health support needs, as well as those who face discrimination, successfully participate in learning through extensive and innovative community-based programmes of study. Young parents are very well supported by an excellent programme enabling them to learn about childbirth and parenting skills, and through which they receive support to continue into further study.
- Staff support learners to challenge any discrimination and reinforce their respect for others by fully involving them in cross-college campaigns. For example, one learner won the college-wide competition to design a poster to raise awareness of bullying, and the poster is now used as part of an anti-bullying campaign.

<p>Administration and business management</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good as reflected in the good progress learners make on most courses. The proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications is high, with most completing their programme in the planned time. Success rates dropped in 2012/13 because of poor performance on courses delivered by a partner provider. Managers have rightly ended this arrangement and the progress of learners on courses taught by the college is now good. Learners’ attendance is satisfactory, as is the progression of learners to further study, higher education and employment.

- The majority of learners are keen, enthusiastic and enjoy their studies, working hard in lessons. Learners respond well to the challenge of supporting each other and this helps in developing their communication skills. Teachers plan a variety of team-building activities with the support of local businesses through which learners develop good entrepreneurial skills. Apprentices improve their skills and confidence in dealing with customers and in supporting business activities, and their contribution is valued highly by their employers.
- Teachers provide good care and support to learners. They coach them well so that they develop good independent learning skills, and train them to make effective use of the high quality online resources available. Teachers provide extra workshops outside timetabled lessons that help learners keep up with their work.
- Teachers use a range of teaching methods and challenging learning activities so that learners acquire a strong understanding of business administration and management. Learners are able to apply theoretical insight to practical situations; for example, they made improvements to the corporate plan of a high street fast food chain by analysing the threats and opportunities for its operation.
- Teachers use initial assessments effectively to identify those who need extra support. Teachers assess learners’ understanding frequently during lessons. For example, they use questions skilfully to challenge learners’ understanding of concepts and to manage debates among learners. Assessors are skilled in helping apprentices set, review and achieve challenging targets.
- Learners receive helpful written and verbal feedback on their work, which enables them to increase their skills, especially those of analysis and evaluation. Teachers’ feedback is particularly good on learners’ presentations, where this includes focused evaluations from peers.
- Teachers successfully develop learners’ written English. Level 2 administration learners undertake frequent spelling tests and learn the correct use of apostrophes. Careful correction of errors in marked work helps GCE A-level learners develop good essay-writing skills. Teachers reinforce mathematical concepts well through activities such as creating cash flow forecasts and using spreadsheets.
- Learners receive good pre-course guidance, and activities during the first weeks of term help confirm their choice of subject. Personal tutors provide good advice and guidance about further and higher education options, which learners value. However, attendance at lessons covering personal and social development is low.
- Teachers plan interesting projects to raise learners’ awareness of social concerns. Level 2 business learners organised a successful college-wide football competition to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions around homophobia in sport. Apprentices work safely and demonstrate their understanding of dealing with people fairly through review discussions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Strategic planning is good. Since the previous inspection, the Principal and governors have revised the strategic plan so it now aligns closely to the needs of learners and the local community.
- Governors are ambitious for the college and use their expertise well to challenge the senior leadership team to raise standards quickly. Following the previous inspection, governors now focus more closely on teaching, learning and assessment and on learners’ progress. Under the direction of the new chair of corporation, governors set more demanding targets for the performance of staff and the success of learners. Governors now receive more frequent and detailed briefings that help them to carry out their roles effectively. They are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the college’s academic and operational performance.
- Managers have strengthened performance management arrangements to set out clearly corporate expectations and, where necessary, challenge underperformance. An improved system of lesson observations with subsequent support for staff has led to more effective

teaching, learning and assessment. Observers now correctly focus on the impact of learning activities and what learners can do as a result of teaching, coaching or mentoring.

- Managers make thorough use of the outcomes of lesson observations within an improved appraisal and professional development framework. They have improved arrangements to share good or better teaching practices, although some areas for improvement still exist across the campuses. Underperforming teachers receive intensive and timely support to improve.
- Managers have established an effective programme of staff development and support activities that deals with the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, extensive training has been undertaken, and new monitoring systems put in place, so that teachers and tutors can support learners to achieve higher grades. In most subject areas, teachers have improved their skills in this regard, but managers acknowledge that there is work to do in a number of subject areas.
- The quality of accommodation is adequate and specialist workshops and laboratories are of a suitable standard to prepare learners for employment.
- Staff at all levels of the organisation evaluate the quality of provision well and take good account of learners' views. Staff accurately identify the college's strengths and areas for improvement and actions to address weaknesses are mostly effective. However, managers have been too slow in implementing a small minority of actions and recognise that these now need urgent attention. Managers' actions to improve the teaching of geography at Eastbourne have been inadequate.
- Quality assurance arrangements are improved and now good. Managers undertake thorough reviews of performance in all subject areas and types of provision, including apprenticeships and community learning. Managers at all levels use data well to monitor performance and identify where further actions are needed. A new system now provides clear, accurate and accessible performance data to staff.
- Management of sub-contracted provision is good. Last year's success rates dropped because of the poor performance of one partner providing training by distance learning, and managers have terminated this contract.
- The curriculum is well designed to meet the needs of the community and employers. Managers have made appropriate adjustments to meet the requirements of study programmes. Staff are increasingly working productively with employers in the design of new courses and to widen work experience opportunities.
- The college provides an inclusive, vibrant environment and staff successfully promote respect for all learners whatever their background and lifestyle. Incidents and complaints are closely monitored and bullying is not tolerated.
- Staff and learners celebrate diversity through a detailed calendar of workshops and events that increase learners' respect for individual differences. For example, to promote tolerance and understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues, the college established a successful learner-led project called 'Football 4 Peace', which resulted in a heightened level of understanding of LGBT values across the college.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners and has appropriate links with relevant referral agencies. All staff who work directly with learners receive training to recognise and report potential safeguarding incidents. There is a positive and high profile approach to promoting learners' safety across the college. Staff promote and model safe working practices well and learners feel safe.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)


Sussex Downs 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
Outcomes for learners	3	-	-	3	-	3	3	-	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	-	-	2	-	2	2	-	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	-	-	2	-	2	2	-	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	2
ICT for practitioners	2
ICT for users	2
Hospitality and catering	2
History	3
Philosophy	3
Social sciences	3
Independent living and leisure skills	2
Community learning	2
Administration	2
Business management	2

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 5261							
	Part-time: 11897							
Principal/CEO	Mrs Melanie Hunt							
Date of previous inspection	November 2012							
Website address	www.sussexdowns.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	333	125	543	87	2904	470	10	55
Part-time	291	1960	259	1784	386	675	1	110
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	178	193	64	283	22	178		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	11							
Part-time	82							
Number of community learners	1681							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Albion in the Community ■ Complete Assessment and Training Solutions Ltd ■ East Sussex County Council ■ Furniture Now ■ Go Train ■ Hastings Furniture Service ■ Hill McManus ■ Premier Training ■ ProActive ■ Quality Transport Training ■ Romney Resource 							

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- Runway Training
 - Smarter Training
 - South Coast Roof Training
 - Sussex County Football Association
 - Youthforce

Contextual information

Sussex Downs College is a large general further education college in the south east of England. The college has three main sites and serves the communities of Eastbourne, Lewes, Newhaven and Wealden. The number of pupils in East Sussex schools attaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is approximately the same as for the south east of England. The unemployment rate in East Sussex is below regional and national rates. The main employment in the area is in care, leisure and other service operations and in professional occupations.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Rieks Drijver HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and nine additional inspectors, assisted by the Deputy Principal Curriculum & Skills 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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