

Chelmsford College

General further education college

Inspection dates		19–23 May 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for students		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for students

This provider requires improvement because:

- The proportion of students who gain their qualifications, although increasing, is still below the national rate, and too few achieve high grades. Students' achievements vary too much between different subject areas. Too few apprentices achieve their framework within planned timescales.
- Too much teaching and learning requires improvement, resulting in too many students not making the progress of which they are capable. Teachers do not consistently develop and improve students' employability skills in all subject areas.
- Teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of students, and too many lessons focus on the completion of assignments, rather than developing underpinning knowledge.
- Not all teachers are effective at integrating English and mathematics into vocational sessions to help students improve their skills.
- Action plans arising from the self-assessment report lack sufficiently precise and measurable targets to accelerate improvement or to monitor progress adequately.
- Managers do not use assessment tracking data well enough to both monitor students' projected achievement and progress made towards college performance targets.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Outcomes for apprentices and pupils aged 14 to 16 are good.
- Good support and care for students, including the most vulnerable students.
- Students benefit from access to high-standard specialist facilities in art and media, engineering, construction, catering and at the hair and beauty academy.
- The very well-used 'assessment centre' which promotes independent learning, coupled with effective use of mobile digital technologies, successfully engages students.
- Productive partnerships which contribute to meeting local skills needs and support local schools and community groups.
- The college provides an inclusive and harmonious environment. Safeguarding is sound and vulnerable students are well supported and achieve well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- In order to increase success rates and students' progress:
 - ensure that students receive detailed and regular feedback on assessment that identifies what they have done well, what they need to do to improve, and how they might do this, particularly for those aged 16 to 18 on courses at level 2, and for adult students on courses at level 3
 - establish challenging and individualised targets for all apprentices to complete their course within the planned time, closely monitoring progress and taking prompt and effective actions to ensure improvements achieve increases in timely success rates.

- In order to improve teaching, learning and assessment:
 - ensure that teachers make better use of diagnostic information, group profiles and students' existing starting points to identify and meet individual needs
 - rapidly improve the progress students make in lessons by ensuring that teachers plan activities that are sufficiently ambitious, interesting and encourage all students to work towards their full potential
 - ensure that teachers actively promote and reinforce students' English and mathematical skills in all lessons at least up to level 2
 - assist all teachers to better promote equality and diversity in lessons
 - ensure that all teachers have high expectations of students including setting high standards for attendance and punctuality and seek to extend students' higher-level thinking skills.

- In order to improve leadership and management:
 - ensure that self-assessment is evaluative and link areas for improvement to specific actions in the quality improvement plan, particularly those that relate to better student outcomes and learning experiences
 - ensure more effective use of assessment tracking data to monitor individual student and college progress, to inform senior managers and governors as to how well students are achieving and the progress being made towards achieving ambitious targets.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Outcomes require improvement. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 increased in 2012/13 and although below the national rate, the gap is narrowing. However, the proportion of adult students achieving their qualifications has declined from being around the national rate to now being low.
- Apprentices make good progress and achieve well. Apprenticeship success rates are high at intermediate level and very high at advanced level. In contrast, the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualification within the planned timescale has declined from being high to now being around the national rates at all levels.
- The proportion of students who achieve the grades expected of them relative to their prior attainment is low, as is the proportion achieving high grades, particularly on A-level courses. On vocational courses, students achieve in line with expectations, although not all attain the high grades of which they are capable. Managers recognise these issues; from 2014/15 the college will no longer offer A-level provision and to improve vocational outcomes, managers have

established 'assessment centres' across two of the three campuses to better support and prepare students.

- Inconsistencies in the achievement of different groups of students have steadily reduced although a few still remain. Managers have taken effective action to narrow the differences in achievement between males and females. The large number of students aged 16 to 18 now achieve better than their adult counterparts. Success rates for pupils aged 14 to 16 are very high and increasing. Outcomes for students from minority ethnic groups are below those achieved by the rest of the student body. In-year college data for these students show retention is improving.
- Success rates for students identified as requiring extra help with their studies are consistently better than the rest of the college. Apprentices identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities perform less well than their peers do and the achievement gap is widening.
- Success rates for functional skills and GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics require improvement. Outcomes for functional skills are below the national rate and are particularly low at level 1. At GCSE level, the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades in English and mathematics is also low. Managers have established 'skills development centres' at all campuses to improve outcomes and in-year college data indicate a much improved performance. For example, success rates for apprentices taking functional skills tests for the first time are increasing.
- Students studying practical courses such as engineering, electrical installation, catering and hairdressing develop good practical and employability skills by training on a range of modern equipment that replicates resources found in the workplace.
- The increasing number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from working in the community and in a range of supported learning environments that support them well toward employment and or independence. However, the overall number of students aged 16 to 18 on work placements is too low.
- The proportion of students progressing through course levels, gaining employment or progressing on to apprenticeship and/or higher education is improving each year and it is now good.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Across the college, the proportion of good or better teaching is too low. In less effective lessons, the pace set by teachers does not challenge students to work hard enough and make secure progress. In these lessons, teachers do not have high expectations of their students, ask sufficient questions to check their understanding or plan interesting and challenging activities. In a minority of lessons, a few students become disinterested and engage in low-level disruption that not all staff effectively challenge.
- In the better lessons, teachers use their skills well to plan a range of activities that match carefully students' abilities, particularly those that promote higher-level independent thinking and learning skills.
- Teachers use the results from assessments of students' starting points effectively to place them onto courses at an appropriate level and to identify those students who need additional learning support. However, staff do not use detailed assessments to identify specific skill gaps in English and mathematics. Managers have recognised this and have detailed plans for September 2014 to resolve this issue.
- Attendance and punctuality are adequate. Overall retention and attendance have improved due to the implementation of an attendance procedure, but in a few lessons teachers did not challenge effectively students arriving late.

- Staff are well qualified and make good use of their knowledge and professional experience to skilfully plan and make learning relevant for students. For example, in one lesson on forensic science, students made particularly good use of prepared bacteria and blood cultures to explore how they would behave under a range of different temperature conditions and form hypotheses.
- Teachers’ plans for assessment and the quality of feedback to students require improvement. Teachers use a suitable range of methods to assess students’ work. They assess students’ practical skills well, but written feedback is often inconsistent with very brief and insufficiently detailed comments that identify what they have done well and what they need to do to improve and achieve high grades. Teachers’ verbal feedback is of a high standard and with the use of questions and answers, this provides effective checking and confirming of students’ progress. In work-based learning, the planning of assessments is inconsistent, particularly in administration and business management.
- Teachers mark to the criteria of the qualification, but spelling, grammatical and other errors remain unidentified. Although staff have had extensive training on embedding English and mathematics in vocational subjects this still remains an area for improvement across the college.
- Students benefit from good support. The newly introduced ‘assessment centres’ are very effective at supporting students to complete course work within agreed deadlines. Students are able to work independently, or with tutor support as required.
- Students have benefited from the recent adoption of mobile technology to improve their learning. In professional cookery, teachers encourage students to check how to complete practical activities from electronic posters that are located around the training kitchens. This technology supports students to develop autonomous learning of catering skills. In the majority of subject areas, the college’s virtual learning environment (VLE) is well developed and students can locate good materials to help them extend their knowledge and understanding. A recently developed college mobile phone application enables students to work on and update their individual learning plans both in and outside of the classroom.
- Work placement and work readiness activities require improvement. Too few students have access to organised work placements that would allow them to gain greater understanding and experience of their chosen careers.
- Information, advice and guidance to students are mostly good. A team of well-qualified staff assist students to make informed decisions on their next steps. Students receive good support that helps them to become ready for work and, where appropriate, apply for university.
- Teachers do not actively promote equality and diversity in all lessons. However, the college campus is an extremely inclusive environment and accessible to all students. Students with specific needs have good accommodation at the heart of the main campus.

Health, social care and early years

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching learning and assessment are too variable and require improvement. Success rates reflect the low outcomes that were below national rates in 2012/13. Retention was low on the majority of courses last year but has improved this year. However, attendance across a range of early years and playwork courses is still below the college’s own target.
- Students develop excellent independent learning skills and make good use of the ‘assessment centres’ to access their individual learning plans and complete their course work. Staff encourage and support students well which motivates them to make good progress. Most

teachers have good relevant industrial experience and use this expertise well to inspire students and to help them see how theory is links to practice.

- Teachers are very effective at supporting students, particularly those with additional needs at college and in the workplace. Students feel safe, enjoy their work and develop good attitudes to learning. In the better lessons, students demonstrate their improving knowledge of early years and playwork through very effective group work. Students also demonstrate good personal and social skills through participation in peer-led activities and are confident in answering questions in most lessons.
- In a minority of less effective lessons, the pace does not take sufficient account of the needs of all students, particularly the more able and opportunities for students to demonstrate their practical skills are limited. Most of these lessons concentrate on producing the evidence to complete assignments rather than developing vocational skills and understanding.
- Teachers mostly provide good feedback on assessed work which helps students to progress. In the best examples, feedback is clear and gives precise guidance to students on how to improve their written work, together with identifying errors in composition and punctuation. In less successful examples, feedback to students was too vague and not sufficiently explicit in identifying what they need to do to improve. In a few examples, teachers left punctuation and grammar errors uncorrected in marked assignments.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not consistently incorporate the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills into their vocational teaching. Teachers do not always use the information on students' starting points in English and mathematics to plan learning activities which meet individual abilities. In better lessons, teachers encourage students to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills with dictionaries that are present in all teaching rooms. However, students do not have sufficient opportunity to develop their mathematics skills to a similar level and as a routine part of their course.
- Early years and playwork students benefit from a good range of work experience placements rich with learning opportunities. However, few health and social care students have had an opportunity to undertake work experience last year. Managers have recognised this and have recently established a wider range of placements to assist students in improving their employability skills.
- Teachers promote equality and foster an understanding of diversity through insisting on an ethos of mutual respect. For example, one session explored a variety of activities that could include all children to develop and promote understanding and tolerance. In early years and playwork, students used the experience they had gained from work experience placement to think of ideas and they demonstrated good examples of personal and social skills they had used with children. However, although equality and diversity is in most lesson plans, themes such as social and cultural diversity are underdeveloped in a minority of lessons. Advice and guidance on progression opportunities are adequate.

Building and construction**16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes**

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, reflecting the outcomes for students that were around the national rate in 2012/13. Most students are making adequate progress. For most students, current in-year retention has improved, but it is too low for those studying electrical installation and construction craft courses at level 1.
- Teaching, learning and assessment vary too much in quality. Too many lessons lack sufficient challenge to maintain students' interest. Teachers plan too few opportunities for students to share and develop ideas, which slows the progress they make. For example, students in one building design lesson watched a presentation about technical standards, but had no opportunity to discuss what they had learnt. A minority of lessons start late contributing to students' poor punctuality and attendance.
- A minority of teachers plan good challenging activities that enable students to link their theory and practical knowledge well. In these lessons, students participate in productive tasks where they reinforce and improve their subject knowledge particularly well. For example, teachers challenge students in electrical installation to demonstrate their understanding of inspection regulations using wiring diagrams to illustrate key concepts.
- Students on courses at level 3 benefit from very effective sessions at the 'assessment centre' in which teachers use challenging targets to help them work independently and achieve higher grades. Students in electrical installation and wood trades enjoy learning in spacious practical workshops equipped to industry standard. Practical workshops for other trade areas meet the requirements of industry and awarding bodies.
- Teachers plan and provide too few personalised learning tasks to meet best the needs of each student. As a result, the most able students do not receive sufficient challenge. For example, a few students in one theory lesson on brickwork quickly completed a useful construction technology quiz, but the teacher did not give them anything to do until the rest of the group had caught up.
- Teachers and support tutors provide good one-to-one support in and out of lessons that helps students overcome personal issues and improve their learning. For example, a support tutor provided good support to painting and decorating students that enabled them to complete practical assessment tasks to a high standard.
- Initial assessment is thorough and teachers use it well to ensure students receive the support they need. Teachers of professional courses at level 3 set challenging personalised targets that help students strive towards achieving high grades. However, teachers set targets inconsistently for students on craft courses at level 1 and 2 with some students in wood trades having too few to help them make more rapid progress.
- Assessment is accurate, but teachers provide inconsistent written feedback to students. A few teachers provide very helpful guidance that assists students to understand what they can do to improve their work further. However, most feedback does not sufficiently prioritise what students need to do to make further progress.
- Teachers provide too little guidance in vocational lessons and assessment feedback to help students improve their English and mathematics skills. As a result, some students struggle to present their work to a high standard and use professional or technical language sufficiently well in their assignments. A few teachers embed mathematics well into practical and theory lessons, such as using scale in technical drawings in wood trades.

- Students mostly receive good quality and timely information, advice and guidance to help them progress to further learning and employment. For example, teachers in technical construction helped students successfully apply for good quality professional jobs which had opportunities for higher-level study. However, students joining craft courses at level 1 receive too little guidance to ensure they join the most appropriate trade area to suit their skills and interests. Technical construction students benefit from valuable work placements that prepare them well for employment, but this opportunity is not available to those studying craft courses.
- In vocational lessons, teachers provide too few opportunities for students to explore and develop their understanding of equality and diversity. Students treat each other with respect and work well together in lessons. Teachers promote health and safety well in both theory and practical lessons and students routinely work safely.

<p>ICT practitioners and users</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p>	<p>Requires improvement</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Although success rates are increasing and broadly are around national rates, outcomes for students on AS and A2 programmes and adult students are low, as is the attainment of high grades.
- Students benefit from the high expectations of teachers. In the better lessons, students often work collaboratively and on joint learning activities enabling them to make good secure progress through peer evaluation of their work. Teachers use their extensive industrial experience to plan informative and technically demanding learning activities that support students' interest well. However, not enough teaching, learning and assessment is of a consistently good or better standard.
- In the minority of less effective lessons, teachers make too few checks on learning, make ineffective use of information and communication technology (ICT), have poor whiteboard technique and set insufficiently rigorous targets. As a result, students do not spend enough time acquiring new skills and knowledge. In addition, a minority of teachers concentrate too much on assignment completion and not enough on increasing students' understanding of technical principles.
- Students feel safe at college. However, health and safety aspects of working with ICT equipment are underdeveloped and not routinely incorporated into lessons. The majority of teachers do not make enough reference to safety when working with mains voltage equipment, workstation risk assessments or general office safety. This leaves students insufficiently prepared for work in a safety conscious industry.
- Students use ICT resources particularly well to manage their learning and teachers effectively link learning in lessons to out of classroom activity in the 'assessment centre'. For example, the majority of teachers track students' progress on a database in the classroom, which directly links to an individual learning plan that students can monitor via a mobile phone application thus enabling them to review their own progress in and outside the classroom. However, the monitoring of students' progress by a few teachers is weak.
- Academic and pastoral support for students is wide-ranging and students receive good advice and guidance support from their teachers. Teachers understand the barriers faced by a few students and respond quickly to make sure they receive the personal support they need throughout their programmes.
- Assessment of students' literacy and numeracy skills takes place at an early stage in their studies and accurately identifies their needs. However, teachers do not always use the results

from the assessments to plan different activities and assessments that meet the full range of students' needs and interests.

- Assessment of students' technical work is good. Marking is accurate, robust and work is at an appropriate level for the qualification. Students use detailed technical vocabulary in their graded assessments and can relate what they are learning to a variety of real life situations. For example, during an exercise related to the programming of a lift-control system, students related their ICT skills to a range of operational design conditions. Too few students have access to appropriate work experience to develop their employability skills outside of the classroom.
- In a large majority of lessons, teachers do not embed English and mathematics effectively which limits students' development of these skills. Teachers also return too much work to students with uncorrected spelling errors and a minority of teachers spell words incorrectly on whiteboards.
- Diverse groups of students work well with each other. Student behaviour is good and they behave appropriately at all times, but teachers do not embed equality and diversity themes sufficiently in the large majority of lessons.

Sport, leisure and recreation

16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement as reflected in the decline in success rates that were formerly very high to now being around the national rate in 2012/13. A low proportion of students achieved high grades.
- Learners develop good skills across a range of sporting activities and demonstrate sound knowledge, clearly linking theory to practice. In the better lessons, teachers use a wide range of vocationally relevant examples and activities to meet students' interests such as current issues within sports.
- In a minority of less effective lessons, teachers do not always capture students' interest by ensuring planned activities meet the full range of students' abilities. In addition, the pace of learning is sometimes too slow.
- Students make good progress in practical lessons and benefit from access to good quality and industry-standard sporting facilities such as those available through the football sports academy. Teachers are well qualified in sports subjects, and in teaching, and promote the high standards expected by the industry.
- Teachers assess students' starting points, which helps them prepare for their lessons and to meet individual students' needs. However, teachers do not routinely use all available information on students' abilities to challenge and extend the more able to achieve higher grades.
- The development of students' employability skills is adequate, with an increasing number progressing on to a higher-level study or employment within the sport and leisure sector. The majority of students benefit from good work experience placements that improve their teamwork and customer care skills. Teachers also improve students' skills of working with others, such as leading practical sports sessions at local partner schools. However, teachers do not promote other important employability skills, such as presentation and communication skills, during lessons sufficiently.
- Students receive good individual support and care as a result of the very effective relationships developed with teachers and other staff. Staff quickly identify students who require additional support in their programme of learning and they benefit from specialised individual help, tailored to their needs.

- Students benefit from frequent one-to-one tutorials and most are aware of their long-term target grades. All have short-term targets, but these are often insufficiently specific to help them improve. Group tutorials are in need of improvement, as many students do not value these sessions, reflected in variable levels of attendance. Students have good access to appropriate information, advice and guidance which enables them to make the right choices for their educational and sporting career aspirations.
- Teachers plan assessments well and the marking of students’ work is often detailed. Most teachers identify and correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors as a way of developing literacy skills. Teachers provide good oral feedback during practical sessions, but students do not always get the chance to self-assess their own performance. The newly established ‘assessment centres’ motivate students to complete tasks and assignments within agreed timescales.
- Most teachers take advantage of opportunities to develop students’ English and mathematics in vocational lessons and ensure sporting language and terminology is correct. For example, in practical sporting lessons teachers encourage students to use coaching terms associated with rules and regulations of the sport. In other lessons, students practise their mathematical skills, for example when calculating heart rates during fitness training.
- Most teachers promote equality and diversity effectively during lessons. In the best examples, teachers plan carefully and use relevant subject topics to promote differences in order to develop students’ awareness. For example, in a theory lesson the teacher developed an activity that raised students’ awareness of different barriers to sports participation associated with age, gender and ethnicity. Teachers promote safe working practices in all that they do.

<p>Foundation English</p> <p>16-19 study programmes</p> <p>19+ Learning programmes</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Although outcomes for students at functional English at level 1 and 2, and the proportion who achieve higher grades in GCSE English, were below the national rate in 2012/13, leaders swiftly implemented an ambitious cross-college strategy to improve results.
- In-year data analysis shows an improvement trend of performance that is starting to have a positive impact in raising achievement; for example, most students are now making adequate or better progress. In addition, the proportion of apprentices now passing their functional skills examinations at the first attempt has increased.
- The very large majority of teaching is good or better. Teachers know their students well and carefully place students into small groups to support effective learning. For example, in GCSE English lessons students extend their knowledge, skills and understanding through good online resources with trained staff on hand to provide individual coaching and mentoring support. However, attendance in a few GCSE English lessons is poor. Students studying English at entry level are confident in taking part in a range of activities to learn about developing healthy lifestyles, using the range of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills they have learned as part of their course.
- Teachers do not use the results of assessments of students’ starting points consistently well enough across all subject areas and this requires improvement. Managers and staff do not systematically collate and analyse students’ school results in English at entry to the college, which reduces the opportunity for early GCSE resits.
- Teaching and support staff possess a good range of qualifications, experience and expertise which enables them to giving good support to students. The teams from the well-equipped ‘skills

development centres’ are making good progress in working with vocational teams and personal tutors to identify and provide appropriately targeted levels of support for vocational students.

- Students understand what they need to do to achieve their goals successfully. For example, in GCSE English final revision sessions, teachers gave very specific guidance to ensure students understood the marking criteria and how they could maximise their marks.
- Students make very good use of their individual learning plans and develop both English and ICT skills when posting electronic updates to their training records using a specially developed mobile phone application. The individual online tracking of completed assignments and interim examination results enable students to see clearly what assignments they have completed and what they need to do next.
- Written feedback to students requires improvement. Students do not receive precise enough feedback from vocational tutors on where they need to make improvements to resolve spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in their vocational assignments. In addition, not all teachers consistently use the marking guidance developed recently by the cross-college English team.
- Most students benefit from targeted support to improve their English in vocational classes, but some vocational teaching staff do not have sufficient confidence or training to enable them to provide this alongside the vocational content of their courses.
- Support for English language development for students whose first language is not English requires improvement. Teachers do not use a wide enough variety of resources to suit the varied abilities of such students and to support them successfully to achieve their qualification aim and improve confidence with English.
- Staff work well to foster good relations and understanding for students based on respect and swiftly challenge any inappropriate comments or behaviours. Students report the college is a safe and welcoming place. However, the focus on promoting understanding of equality and diversity is insufficient in a few lessons. Staff miss opportunities to recognise and celebrate the differences and range of experiences that students bring to the classroom.

Administration and Business Management

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. This is reflected in the outcomes for both administration and team leader apprenticeship programmes that, whilst showing some early indications of improvement, are not yet consistently good.
- The majority of apprentices benefit from the high expectations set by staff and employers to develop their administration and business skills. Very committed employers from a wide range of industrial and business sectors provide high-standard work placements that allow apprentices to develop good vocational skills.
- Apprentices make secure and steady progress towards completion of their qualifications. The good support provided by assessors and employers results in apprentices developing good employability skills, such as self-reliance, the ability to solve problems and being able to work effectively as a team member. For example, one apprentice now routinely accompanies a company director to provide administrative support when visiting key corporate clients. A majority of apprentices gain secure permanent employment and/or take on additional responsibilities at work after completing their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices benefit from the extensive vocational experience of assessors, who use their commercial skills particularly well to plan informative learning and coaching sessions that develop and extend the apprentices’ understanding of business related topics. For example,

reflecting how individual performance objectives at work contribute towards team goals and wider business objectives such as improved levels of customer satisfaction.

- Insufficient resources are available for apprentices to extend their learning between assessor visits. The limited use of, and reference to technology to support learning means that apprentices do not fully explore how advances in technology impact on a range of business functions within the workplace.
- Most assessors use a narrow range of assessment methods that do not allow for adequate exploration of apprentices’ understanding or learning in a variety of business-related contexts. Too often assessors rely on questions and answers to check learning that do not always fully capture apprentices’ progress or skills development.
- Apprentices develop good personal, social and employability skills in the workplace. However, too few employers are sufficiently involved in the planning of learning. Although a majority of employers regularly contribute to apprentice progress reviews, assessors do not always give them clear information on what work practices could contribute to helping their employees complete their qualification in a more timely manner.
- Assessors make limited use of the information collected through assessment of apprentices’ starting points, particularly in English, mathematics and ICT, in order to plan appropriately challenging learning that meets apprentices’ individual needs. This stops the more able apprentices, or those with prior experience, to progress more quickly in some areas of their apprenticeship programme.
- Assessors’ feedback to apprentices requires improvement. Apprentices value the detailed and helpful verbal feedback from assessors to improve their practice. However, written feedback is far too brief and does not always identify what improvements an apprentice needs to make.
- The development of apprentices’ English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Too few apprentices receive structured support to help them develop their functional skills. Assessors have not received sufficient training or do not have enough experience to undertake this work effectively. Plans to improve functional skills support for apprentices are well underway with the recent appointment of specialist functional skills staff. However, it is too soon to judge the full impact of these changes.
- Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Prospective apprentices receive detailed guidance that is effective in helping them to choose the right course and level. They receive informative and regular advice on how to progress in their careers and relevant next steps in education and training. Apprentices have an adequate knowledge of equality and diversity in their workplaces.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
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- Following the sharp decline in success rates in 2011/12, leaders acted swiftly to implement a range of improvement strategies to reverse this decline. While their actions secured some improvements, these were not consistent across all areas of the college, and students’ achievements in the majority of subject areas remained below those seen in similar colleges.
- Senior, middle managers and governors share a clear ambition to improve teaching, learning and assessment and to raise standards. Managers are building on and strengthening many of the initiatives introduced last year, and further in-year improvements are evident, particularly in an increase in overall retention rates, and higher success rates on the subsidiary diploma courses already completed. In a few areas, retention rates have not increased or have declined. Attendance rates have increased overall, but this masks variations between different groups of students and particular courses.

- Managers review performance data regularly at course and departmental level. Governors receive regular reports on students' performance and the quality of teaching, and pose relevant, challenging questions to senior managers. Systems to track students' progress have much improved, but managers do not use the data well to inform whether the college is on track to achieve its performance targets.
- Managers have strengthened the management of staff performance. Where teachers do not make and sustain required improvements, the college invokes formal capability procedures. The combination of support and challenge has brought about some improvements in teachers' performance, but it is not yet having sufficient impact in all areas.
- Comprehensive quality assurance arrangements cover all academic and support functions, including the small amount of subcontracted provision. Self-assessment reports for subject areas are largely accurate. However, action plans rarely have precise or measurable targets to evaluate the effectiveness of improvement actions.
- The overall college self-assessment report for 2012/13 accurately identified key areas of underperformance, but managers placed too much emphasis on the relatively modest and inconsistent improvements made from a low base in the previous year. Managers and staff in the current year have not tackled effectively all areas for improvement identified in last year's self-assessment reports for subject areas.
- Not all judgements in internal lesson observations focus clearly enough on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress. Observers' evaluation of the effective development of English and mathematical skills and students' understanding and application of equality and diversity principles in lessons is inconsistent.
- Managers and staff are responsive to the diverse range of needs in the locality, working with local community, educational and business partners for the benefit of students and employers. For example, effective working with the county council supports its priorities for growth, meeting identified skills shortages, and increasing the numbers of apprenticeships. The increase in provision for students with profound and multiple learning needs has enabled the county council to reduce significantly the number of these vulnerable students placed outside the county.
- The performance management of subcontractors is good. Appropriate service-level agreements are in place for each subcontractor setting out relevant performance standards that includes targets for success rates and recruitment. Managers closely monitor subcontractors through all stages of the students' programme.
- Managers have responded positively to meet the requirements of study programmes for students aged 16 to 18, particularly in supporting large numbers of students to work towards and gain qualifications in GCSE English and mathematics. However, managers acknowledge that inconsistent attendance in English and mathematics lessons is still a concern. In-year retention has improved, but it is too early to fully determine whether the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades in these subjects will improve significantly on the relatively low achievement seen last year. Employer links and opportunities for work experience are underdeveloped across the college.
- The college offers a safe and harmonious environment where students from different parts of the local community work very well together. Managers and staff have successfully narrowed the gap in the performance between male and female students. In-year retention has improved for almost all students from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, identified as underperforming last year. However, teachers do not always develop students' awareness of equality and diversity themes relevant to their vocational context.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Comprehensive arrangements safeguard all students, with very strong support for the most vulnerable. Managers have identified an increase in the numbers of young students in, or leaving care, or who are young carers themselves, and work very closely with external agencies to provide strong support for these individuals. As a result, the proportion of young people in, or leaving care successfully completing their courses has increased over the last three years. The college recently gained a national charitable award for this work.

- Since the last inspection, managers have invested significantly in improving specialist accommodation and equipment, with excellent facilities in arts and media, engineering and in the hair and beauty academy. Substantial plans are in place to refurbish the remaining areas for the start of the next academic year.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Chelmsford College

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and Social Care	3
Early Years and Playwork	3
Building and Construction	3
ICT for practitioners	3
ICT for Users	3
Sport, Leisure and Recreation	3
Foundation English	2
Administration	3
Business Management	3

Provider details

Type of provider

General further education college

Age range of students	14+							
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	4,234							
Principal/CEO	Mr David Law							
Date of previous inspection	June 2009							
Website address	www.chelmsford.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 students (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	441	735	713	322	1,227	299	2	50
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	152	46	86	72	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of students aged 14-16	131							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	131							
Number of community students	N/A							
Number of employability students	375							
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"> ▪ Profile Development and Training Limited ▪ Phoenix Holistic, Beauty and Nail Training Limited. 							

Contextual information

Chelmsford College is a medium-sized general further education college that attracts students from across Essex, including Braintree in the north and Basildon and Brentwood in the south of the county. The population of Essex from minority ethnic groups is 9.2%. The proportion of pupils in Essex schools attaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is above the East of England average and in line with the England average. The proportion of residents in Essex qualified at levels 1 and 2 are higher than both the regional and national averages whilst at level 3 it is in line with the national rate. Levels of deprivation and unemployment in Chelmsford are below those found nationally. The college attracts a high proportion of students from local authority wards characterised by relatively high levels of socio-economic deprivation. The college has invested heavily to provide high-standard teaching and learning accommodation for students particularly in vocational and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Victor Reid HMI

Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the deputy principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on students' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all 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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