

Paston Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

9–11 December 2015

Overall effectiveness**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Learners make very good progress in their lessons; as a result a high proportion of learners achieve their qualifications and their target grades.
- The proportion of learners who are successful in moving on to higher education or employment is high.
- Attendance is very high in most subject areas.
- All learners are well behaved, motivated and have a positive attitude to learning, in and outside of lessons.
- Learners have a good understanding of their next steps and benefit from good advice and guidance throughout their studies.
- The range of programmes offered is broad and meets learners' aspirations particularly well.
- Senior leaders and managers engage well with external stakeholders to ensure that local and regional priorities and needs are met.
- Good attention to quality assurance across all aspects of the college by leaders, managers and teachers continues to raise standards and improve the quality of provision.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Too few learners improve their GCSE mathematics grade while at the college.
- Not enough learners, particularly those on academic programmes, have sufficient access to work experience placements as part of their study programmes.
- Governors have not challenged leaders and managers sufficiently as to why they did not fully achieve all of the higher-level key performance targets set out in 2014/15.
- Not enough learners have a sufficiently broad understanding of life in diverse Britain.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Paston Sixth Form College is a small college with approximately 700 learners where the vast majority are on level 3 academic study programmes and a few take BTEC vocational qualifications at level 3. Almost all learners are under the age of 19.
- The college is situated in rural Norfolk and has a very large catchment area comprising areas of substantial rural deprivation. The population is dispersed and participation in higher education is significantly below the national average.
- The vast majority of learners have achieved A* to C grades in English and mathematics prior to starting their study programmes at the college.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and support for learners in GCSE mathematics so that they make better progress towards achieving their qualifications and personal career goals.
- Increase the range of external work experience by growing the number of employers engaged with the college so that a larger proportion of learners, including those on academic courses, gain a better understanding of the skills needed for employment.
- Engage learners fully in how they can recognise the threats from radicalisation and extremism, so they are better prepared for life in a diverse society.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders, the Principal and governors have a clear and ambitious vision for their learners. They work well together and have created a positive, supportive and open culture based on high expectations. Staff at all levels in the college work with enthusiasm and commitment, and strive to achieve the high, aspirational targets set by governors for the college and its learners.
- Curriculum management is well organised, leading to good outcomes for most learners. Relevant programmes of study have sustained the high standards of learner performance identified at the previous inspection. Virtually all learners progress on to university, further study or sustained employment successfully. Leaders have taken decisive action to address the declining performance on apprenticeship courses; the college no longer offers this provision.
- Senior leaders and governors have established a comprehensive set of aspirational key performance targets that align closely to the strategic priorities of the college. While they have sustained the high quality of the provision successfully, leaders have not met a minority of the very ambitious performance targets agreed with governors for 2014/15. Governors have not been sufficiently challenging to leaders as to why they did not meet these targets fully.
- Since the previous inspection, the high standard of teaching, learning and assessment across the college has been maintained and developed further. Targeted staff development has helped teachers to improve both their professional skills and the 'craft of teaching'. As a result, many teachers have the confidence to be innovative and deliver interesting lessons that learners enjoy.
- The findings from observations of teaching and learning provide managers with an accurate picture of the performance of individual teachers. Development plans which accompany each lesson observation provide very specific and useful prompts for improving teachers' practice. However, while the college has been successful in reducing the proportion of teaching that is less than good, not enough teaching is outstanding.
- Performance management of staff is firm but fair. The appraisal process is fit for purpose and records of discussions demonstrate that managers provide robust challenge and support to staff. They highlight well teachers' individual contributions towards agreed college performance indicators. However, a few staff have yet to have an appraisal.
- Senior leaders and managers have a well-informed understanding of the college's key strengths and areas for improvement. Self-assessment at course, faculty and whole-college levels are accurate and based on a wide range of evidence, including the views of learners. Reports are data-rich, evaluative and sensibly self-critical. Early identification by managers of underperforming courses leads to thorough investigation and, in most cases, rapid improvement. Managers have adopted recommendations for improvement made at the previous inspection with urgency and success; their implementation has helped to improve the experiences and success rates of learners.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the college environment is harmonious and that equality and diversity are celebrated well through a college-wide programme of events and themed activities held throughout the year. Managers also ensure that learners develop their understanding of core British values, such as tolerance, respect for the rule of law and the principles of democracy through the college induction and tutorial programme. Leaders and managers have narrowed differences in achievement between different groups through regular monitoring of performance data and taking appropriate action. However, a very few performance gaps between different groups of learners still remain.
- Partnership working is good. Leaders work successfully with a broad range of organisations including employers, higher education institutions, the local authority and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure that provision is very responsive to local and regional priorities. Collaborative partnership working with local schools is very effective, resulting in pupils receiving good-quality initial advice and guidance on academic and vocational choices. Leaders' careful planning of relevant programmes of study has resulted in learners benefiting from a wide offer of AS- and A-level subjects and an increased vocational offer that meet their needs and career aspirations well.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governors know the college, its strengths and areas for improvement well. Learners are represented well on the governing body and their views are sought regularly. Attendance at meetings is good.
 - Governors bring a wide range of business skills and professional expertise to the board and they use their considerable expertise and networks to support the strategic development and educational mission of the college. Governors support managers well in their drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning by linking up with curriculum areas and asking astute and searching questions.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective
 - Leaders have created a safe environment for all learners, who state that they feel safe and that there is always someone to talk to if they have any problems. Learners have a clear understanding and know how to stay safe, including while online, through a well-designed tutorial programme. Teachers manage and reinforce health and safety effectively in teaching and learning.
 - The college meets its statutory and other government requirements to safeguard learners and to prevent radicalisation and extremism. The college has an effective safer recruitment policy that managers enforce well. The central register that details the status of disclosure and barring service checks undertaken for staff, governors and volunteers is detailed and up to date.
 - All staff and governors have received appropriate training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' agenda. Academic and specialist support tutors are proactive and alert to identifying learners who may be at risk and refer them appropriately. The designated safeguarding officer investigates safeguarding incidents appropriately, including those related to bullying or harassment, and accurate records are in place.
 - Close working with external agencies, including the multi-agency safeguarding hub, ensures that vulnerable or 'at risk' learners have access to a wide range of activities and services to help them stay safe and healthy.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Learners enjoy their lessons and develop very good attitudes towards learning and independent study. They treat each other and their teachers with respect, and value greatly the high levels of support and guidance provided by their teachers.
- Study programmes provide a broad range of course choices with appropriate opportunities to develop and accredit English and mathematics skills, and to further develop personal and social skills. In addition, vocational level 3 qualifications in health and social care, sport, creative media and art provide an alternative route into higher education.
- Specialist tutors provide learners with very effective personal support and guidance for progression to university. They help learners identify realistic and suitable higher education choices, to complete their applications and to write comprehensive and well-structured personal statements. Learners value the prompt feedback they receive on their draft statements. However, support for progression to employment is less well developed for those learners on academic courses. Leaders and managers are working on a range of strategies to increase opportunities for learners to engage with employers, including working with Beacon East, an education business partnership initiative.
- Specialist tutors meet regularly with learners and help them to reflect on their learning. They monitor the progress learners make against their targets very effectively, and help learners to identify key actions to ensure that they achieve their career aims.
- Parents are well informed of the progress learners make through termly reports and parents' evenings. Teachers reward high performance with letters of commendation, which are copied to parents; learners value these and are motivated by them.
- Learners requiring additional support have their support arranged promptly. Specialist staff provide highly effective support and there is good communication between these staff and teachers. This enables learners with specific needs to achieve more successfully than other learners.
- Learners benefit from good-quality impartial advice and guidance when they apply to the college. This includes the opportunity to attend college events before joining. These steps help them to make well-informed choices with regard to their study programme content.
- Teachers know the starting points of their learners and their predicted grades, and most use this information to plan lessons carefully in order to meet the needs of their learners. They ensure learning activities are interesting and use imaginative resources which enable their students to achieve appropriate, challenging learning objectives. Teachers make effective use of learner contributions in lessons. Learners improve their levels of active listening, critical thinking and reflective skills well.
- Teachers ensure that there is good development of specialist technical language, and support learners in developing the mathematical skills needed in their subjects. They use a variety of techniques to check the understanding of their students, such as directed questions, quizzes and the use of mini whiteboards by learners to show their understanding. Many lessons have good pace, with timed tasks and activities that maintain learners' interest. For example, learners in a government and politics lessons benefited from good discussion around current political events in the United States of America.
- Learners benefit from teachers' high levels of specialist skills and the passion they have for their subjects. As a result, a high proportion of learners are inspired to continue their studies in higher education. The quality of learners' work is high and at times outstanding. For example, an art student recently won a national competition and now has a piece of work on display in the House of Commons.
- Classrooms are attractive and the library and study centre provide positive environments for independent

study. Learners respect the quiet environment in the library, which enables them to focus on their studies, and work productively in groups in the study centre.

- In a small minority of lessons, learners do not make the progress expected of them, because activities are insufficiently challenging, not well matched to the abilities of the learners or because lessons lack pace and insufficient checks on learning.
- Learners complete and submit homework regularly and promptly. Teachers provide good and very helpful feedback which motivates learners to improve further. However, in a minority of lessons learners do not benefit from teachers' checking and correcting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Recorded and/or written feedback does not always capture the specific improvement actions discussed in oral feedback.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Learners have a good attitude to learning, behave very well and make good progress with their qualifications. They take pride in their work and are able to discuss their subject with confidence. Almost all are aware of the grades they intend to achieve by the end of their study programme.
- Almost all learners improve their self-confidence and raise their expectations in their personal lives and future aspirations. As a result, they are prepared well for their next steps into higher education or employment where that is the preferred option. Attendance is high, all learners arrive on time for their lessons and they are ready to learn.
- Learners benefit from a good range of events designed to improve their employability skills in the form of clubs, societies and work-related activities relevant to their next steps. However, too few take part in formal work placements with employers. This is particularly important for those learners on academic programmes who intend to find employment, as work-related activities do not form an integral part of their study programme.
- Learners produce high standards of work. They use technical language appropriately and are able to relate theory to relevant industrial concepts well. The proportion of learners who improve their GCSE English grades at the college is high. However, too few improve their mathematics grades at the first attempt.
- A majority of teachers encourage learners to enter debate around their subject area in lessons, and a few are confident to open discussions which allow learners to explore and debate topics related to British values. However, this is not routine across all subject areas. Not all learners have a broad enough understanding about life in modern Britain and the impact of the threat of extremism or radicalisation.
- Learners demonstrate a high level of mutual respect for each other and their teachers. They feel safe in the college and their behaviour is exemplary.

Outcomes for learners are good

- A very large majority of learners complete their qualifications and achieve their intended outcomes. The proportion of learners who achieve at AS level is high. A large majority reach their aspirational targets and gain high grades. The proportion of A-level learners who achieve their qualifications has improved since 2013/14 and is now in line with similar providers nationally.
- Learners working towards vocational level 3 qualifications, for example in sport, creative media and art and design, achieve very well. A good proportion achieve high grades and progress to higher education or employment via this route.
- Success rates are high in the large majority of subject areas; however, in a few subject areas, such as information communication technology (ICT), government and politics, and physical education, AS-level achievement requires improvement.
- Many learners make good progress in lessons and make at least the expected progress with their qualifications in relation to their starting points. Internal progression from AS to A level is high in the majority of subject areas, however not so good in a few; for example economics, ICT and law. Where AS-level learners do not do so well they transfer to vocational programmes which better meet their needs and aspirations. A small minority of students do not achieve the higher grades predicted at A level, given their achievement at GCSE.
- Almost all learners have a positive destination on leaving the college. A high proportion secure places in higher education, including at Russell Group universities, or gain employment when this is their intention. Only a small minority of learner destinations are unknown.
- A small number of learners start study programmes at the college and do not have both English and mathematics GCSEs at grade C or above. The proportion of learners who resit their GCSEs and achieve a grade C or above in English is high. However, the number who achieve a grade C or above in mathematics is too low.

- Senior leaders and managers have taken effective action to close any performance gaps between different groups of learners. The achievement gap between male and female learners has narrowed slightly and interventions and support to address the identified retention gap between those learners from low-income families and their peers have yet to demonstrate the intended impact.

Provider details

Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	724
Principal	Mr Kevin Grieve
Website address	www.paston.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+
	0	0	0	0	687	1	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

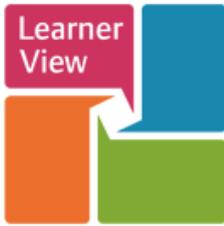
Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Stephen Hunsley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Victor Reid	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Sherwin	Ofsted Inspector
Teresa Kiely	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Winchcombe	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the vice-principal, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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