

Tech City College

Free school

**Inspection dates**

1–3 March 2016

Overall effectiveness**Inadequate**

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

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Since the previous inspection, governors and leaders have not secured sufficient improvement in the quality of provision.
- High staff turnover and frequent staff absence disrupt learning and impede the ongoing progress of current learners.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that learners are benefiting from all aspects of their study programmes.
- In 2014/15, learners' achievements and progress remained unacceptably low.
- Teachers pay insufficient attention to the skills and knowledge that individual learners need to develop in order to fulfil their potential.
- Teachers do not provide learners with the feedback that they require to improve their work.
- Learners have too little opportunity to develop their learning, deepen their understanding and build interest in the subjects they are studying.
- Learners' attendance across all aspects of their learning is very poor.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders have developed strong partnerships with businesses that provide good opportunities for learners to develop their work-related skills.
- The college is a safe place for learners to study. Their behaviour is very good and they are respectful of each other and their differences.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Tech City College joined Aspirations Academies Trust in September 2015. At that time, the chief executive of the trust, along with a newly appointed Principal and governing body, took over the leadership of the college.
- Most learners are on level 3 study programmes in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- Levels of unemployment in the local area are slightly higher than the national rate and similar to the rate for London. Three quarters of the local population are qualified to level 2. About three quarters of the local population come from minority ethnic heritages and this is reflected in the make-up of the current student body.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Governors, the Principal and other leaders must ensure that the changes they have made, and are going to continue to make, result in rapid and sustainable improvement.
- Leaders should ensure that learners benefit from each aspect of their study programme. In particular, they must provide:
 - work experience aligned to learners' courses and aspirations
 - high-quality careers advice that supports learners in moving on to their next steps
 - a broad range of non-qualification and enrichment activities.
- Leaders must act swiftly to stabilise the staffing at the college and to provide continuity of at least good teaching, learning and assessment.
- With the aid of high-quality, targeted training, managers must ensure that teachers are able to:
 - plan and deliver learning that takes into account learners' starting points
 - give learners feedback and guidance that helps them to improve the standard of their work
 - assess accurately the progress that learners make and intervene swiftly with further support when required.
- Managers must ensure that teachers give learners challenging and interesting work to do outside of lessons. They should provide a broader range of stimulating resources that motivate learners to become curious and excited about their STEM subjects.
- Managers should analyse the reasons for the poor attendance of individuals and different groups of learners. They must then implement strategies that ensure learners' attendance improves rapidly, so that they can benefit from all aspects of their study programme.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is inadequate

- Since the previous inspection, the college joined a multi-academy trust and the governing body, Principal and senior management team have all been replaced. Governors and leaders have proven experience and expertise in bringing about improvement, but as yet their actions have had insufficient impact on improving the quality of provision. Teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners remain inadequate.
- Managers' evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of provision is mostly accurate. They have an agreed plan to rectify the weaknesses their own analysis has identified through self-evaluation of performance. The leadership team has very swiftly changed the philosophy and ethos of the college, recognising the transformation that is required. It is too soon to judge sufficient improvement.
- Most teachers present at the beginning of the academic year have left and this has had a negative impact on rates of improvement in the college. Management arrangements to ensure the smooth transition of learning, and effective alternative arrangements when teachers are absent, have been insufficient to ensure an acceptable standard of learning.
- Managers' actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not resulted in good or better learning. For example, too few teachers are sufficiently skilled at assessing how much learners are learning. While teachers have received detailed and well-considered training, many of these teachers have left and it is too soon to see measurable improvement in the quality of teaching for those remaining or new to the college.
- Managers' evaluations of learning concentrate too much on what teachers are doing rather than on the skills development of learners and the progress they make. Developmental feedback to teachers focuses overly on compliance with management policies, for example checking where learners sit, rather than on what steps teachers should take to improve their individual teaching practice to good or better.
- Leaders do not ensure that learners participate regularly in all aspects of their learning programme. They have not undertaken a sufficiently detailed analysis of the reasons for learners' poor attendance and consequently they do not have a systematic approach to improving it. Managers have recently introduced a targeted approach for individual learners that has resulted in improvements in attendance for these learners but, overall, attendance remains poor.
- Leaders and governors have worked closely and very productively with local employers to provide very good opportunities for learners to develop their problem-solving and research skills. For example, a group of learners are working on designing a floating waterside garden for the Dutch Embassy.
- Managers have not ensured that the requirements of the study programme are fully met. For example, too few learners on vocational programmes complete a work placement to develop and improve their skills for employment.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Despite the wealth of suitable expertise and knowledge the new governors bring to their roles, gained from a wide range of employment and education backgrounds, they have not yet had measurable impact on improving the quality of provision.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and a well-considered strategy to improve overall effectiveness. Managers provide the board with clear and comprehensive information about the performance of the college.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Managers work carefully to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are integrated effectively into the lives of staff and learners. Recruitment checks are thorough and records are suitably detailed and maintained well. The college is a safe place to study and work.
 - Managers ensure that the college complies with the 'Prevent' duty. Through good induction arrangements, they ensure that staff and learners are aware of the potential dangers of radicalisation and understand how to stay safe. They have yet to equip all teachers with the skills and confidence to promote the dangers of extremism and radicalisation in their day-to-day teaching.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is inadequate

- Teachers' expectations of what learners can achieve are too low and too much teaching, learning and assessment is poor, resulting in learners making slow progress. Teachers do not challenge sufficiently learners' absenteeism, poor punctuality, or their lack of preparation for learning. As a result, most learners make inadequate progress and have little confidence in their ability to achieve their potential.
- Too much teaching is dull and uninspiring. Teachers do not plan activities that motivate or interest learners. They do not focus enough on developing learners' understanding and enjoyment of the subject. Teachers are not sufficiently skilled in supporting learners to develop higher-order skills such as analysis and evaluation.
- Teachers do not take sufficient account of learners' starting points when planning learning. Most teachers, especially new appointments or supply teachers, do not use information available to them about learners' abilities when developing classroom activities or setting homework and assessment tasks. As a result, too much work that learners complete is far too easy or not relevant to the skills that they need to develop. A small minority of supply teachers do not have the depth of subject knowledge to be able to teach learners effectively.
- Teachers do not routinely provide sufficient informative feedback to help learners improve. Although most learners know their target grades, teachers do not give them enough guidance on how to achieve them. In many cases, teachers' comments on assessments or when providing verbal feedback are brief and not sufficiently focused on the specific actions that learners need to take in order to make better progress.
- A minority of teachers, for example in economics and computing, use a good range of well-planned activities that ensure learners are interested, participate well and make good progress. These teachers provide timely and helpful feedback that supports learners to improve. They monitor learners' progress in making these improvements carefully and learners attend their lessons and are keen to learn.
- Teachers do not develop learners' English and mathematics skills well enough. For example, they do not stress the importance of the correct spelling when using technical terms or of improving learners' mathematical skills to enhance their future prospects in STEM careers or higher education courses.
- Learners have too little opportunity to extend their learning or to develop their ability to work on their own. Teachers too often set homework tasks that are not challenging. The resources available to learners, for example in the learning resource centre or on the virtual learning environment, are insufficiently numerous, interesting or relevant.
- Teachers do not promote equality and diversity well. When they are planning learning, they do not consider how they could raise learners' awareness of issues related to equality or how they could take opportunities to celebrate diversity.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is inadequate

- The ongoing lack of continuity in teaching means that too many learners, particularly those in their second year, lack confidence in their ability to achieve their potential and progress successfully to their next steps.
- Teachers do not support learners sufficiently well to develop appropriate attitudes to their learning. Learners' attendance rates at all aspects of their study programmes continues to be far too low. Learners too often arrive late or without the pens and paper that they need to participate properly.
- Too few learners benefit from work experience. This is of particular concern for the learners on vocational courses. Staff do not provide sufficient support to those learners who try to find their own work experience in order to enhance their future career or university choices.
- Currently, most learners get little value from the time they spend in tutorials, often because of the absence of the teacher. They do not develop the personal, social and study skills scheduled for these sessions and miss valuable opportunities for one-to-one time with their personal tutor. Frequently, when they do attend, their time is unproductive. The proportion of learners benefiting from the small range of enrichment activities is low.
- Learners have good opportunities to develop their work-related skills by working with high-profile businesses and employers. For example, one group of learners researched and presented their findings on the role of social media in minimising the impact of disruption caused by the resurfacing of Tower Bridge. However, attendance at these activities remains poor.
- Learners receive useful advice and guidance to support them in their applications to university. The large majority of current learners have successfully secured a conditional place.
- Learners do not receive sufficient advice about employment opportunities. Teachers are not inspiring learners about the exciting careers open to them in the science and technology fields.
- Learners who already have a high grade in GCSE English and mathematics do not benefit from any further development of their skills alongside their main qualifications.

- Learners feel safe at the college. A good range of activities and events ensures that all learners know how to keep safe, both online and from the risks of radicalisation. Learners understand the importance of British values in modern society and demonstrate high levels of respect for each other. Their behaviour in the communal areas of the college is very good.

Outcomes for learners

are inadequate

- Most learners are on level 3 study programmes, taking qualifications in STEM subjects and English literature. A very small proportion are on level 2 courses, including GCSE English and mathematics, with the intention of progressing to level 3.
- Although the proportion of learners who successfully completed qualifications improved in 2014/15, it is still far too low and the improvement was not rapid enough. Not enough learners progressed from the first to the second year of study. In 2015/16, the proportion of learners remaining on their courses has risen sharply but it still requires further improvement.
- Learners' progress from their starting points was too slow in 2014/15. Their progress was particularly poor, for example, in A-level English literature and psychology. Learners starting level 3 courses had high levels of prior attainment at GCSE, but the large majority who completed A-level courses did not achieve high grades.
- The majority of learners on level 3 vocational courses in 2014/15 had the completion of their qualification delayed because teachers, no longer working at the college, inaccurately recorded assessment details. Learners are either having to complete units they thought they had already done, or have not achieved as highly as they believed. The small number of learners who completed the extended diploma in information technology achieved well and made very good progress.
- Too few of the small number of learners taking GCSE English and/or mathematics achieve a grade C or better.
- The progress of current learners is poor because of frequent teacher absences and changes in staffing. Too often teachers do not know what learners have already done or what they still need to complete in order to achieve their qualifications.
- The achievement rates of male learners continue to be well below those of female learners. The achievement gap between those learners that managers identify as having barriers to learning and other learners has narrowed and is now very small.
- Of the learners who applied to university in 2014/15, the proportion who went on to secure a place is low. Managers are unable to provide details of the destinations for the learners who were not successful in their applications. Overall, the proportion of leavers for whom their destination is unknown is too high.

Provider details

Type of provider	Free school
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	237
Principal	Nasrin Farahani
Website address	www.techcity-aspirations.org

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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
			6		207			
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Stewart Jackson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Julie Steele	Her Majesty's Inspector
Fadia Clarke	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Stittle	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Hucker	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the Principal as nominee. 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 learners 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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