

Ashton Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

15–18 March 2016

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

- Governors, leaders and staff have high expectations and ambitions for learners, and successfully raise learners' aspirations. Most learners achieve well, including those with low prior attainment.
- Leaders and managers work closely and effectively with a wide range of partners, including local schools, to share good practice and ensure that learners make a smooth transition from school to the college.
- Rigorous performance management ensures that managers evaluate teachers' performance accurately and act quickly where necessary to improve practice, including through targeted training and development.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very effective in ensuring that learners are safe from all risks including those of radicalisation and extremism.
- Learners make good progress in acquiring the personal, social and work-related skills that they will need for their future careers.
- Careers guidance is particularly effective in enabling learners to make fully informed decisions about their next steps. After completing their course, the great majority of learners progress successfully to higher education, employment or an apprenticeship.
- Teachers prepare learners well for life and work in a complex and diverse society.
- Learners benefit from exceptionally good pastoral support and additional learning support that help them to overcome barriers to their learning and achieve their aspirations.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Actions that leaders and managers take to improve outcomes for learners have had insufficient impact in a few subject areas.
- Teachers do not always challenge learners sufficiently to make rapid progress. A minority of the most-able learners do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable.
- Learners do not always develop their independent learning skills sufficiently well. As a result, a minority of learners lack the skills and confidence to extend their learning both during lessons and outside the classroom.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Ashton Sixth Form College is located in Ashton-under-Lyne in the borough of Tameside. The college provides a broad range of 16 to 19 study programmes including A levels and vocational programmes. It also provides a programme of part-time courses for adult learners. At the time of the inspection, 2,281 learners were studying at the college; of these, 2,041 were on 16 to 19 study programmes, and 233 were on adult learning programmes. The college has ceased recruiting to its apprenticeship programme; seven apprentices remain on the programme.
- Tameside is a metropolitan borough in Greater Manchester with a population of 220,800. The unemployment rate in the borough is 5.2% compared with 5.9% across the North West region. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is lower than found nationally. Service industries provide the main source of employment in the borough, including finance and business services, and wholesale and retail.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for learners in underperforming subject areas, by:
 - monitoring closely the impact of actions taken so far this academic year to improve learners' progress
 - identifying accurately any further improvements needed
 - taking action quickly to ensure that a very high proportion of current and future learners make the progress of which they are capable.
- Enhance the skills of teachers who do not provide sufficient challenge to the most-able learners by providing relevant training and development and by encouraging teachers to share good practice.
- Develop the independent learning skills of all learners, by:
 - encouraging learners, particularly those who are less confident, to be more proactive in their learning during lessons, and developing their confidence to articulate their thoughts and ideas and to generate discussion without always being prompted to do so by their teachers
 - ensuring that all learners have sufficiently well-developed skills to extend their learning outside the classroom and beyond the specific requirements of their qualifications.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The Principal and senior managers have developed successfully a culture of high expectations for staff and learners. They have put in place effective strategies to raise the aspirations of learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those arriving at the college with low prior attainment. They ensure that teachers have high ambitions for their learners and provide good support to ensure that the vast majority of learners achieve well.
- Learners benefit from well-designed study programmes that prioritise the development of their English and mathematics skills and include appropriate work experience and work-related activity. Study programmes have a strong focus on careers education and guidance, and include many activities and events that raise learners' aspirations about what they can achieve when they have completed their study programme. This has resulted in a high proportion of learners progressing successfully to higher education, employment or an apprenticeship.
- The college is responsive to local needs and priorities. The A-level programme provides a wide choice of subjects for learners. Managers develop the vocational programme well to match local priorities; for example, they have established successfully courses in creative digital media in response to local demand. Leaders have forged very good partnerships with local schools. The Principal plays a key role in a local educational trust made up of the college and six partner secondary schools. Learners at the college have benefited from the work of the trust through, for example, sharing good practice to improve high-grade achievement in GCSE English and mathematics.
- Self-assessment is detailed, critical and largely accurate. The most recent self-assessment report identifies accurately that the progress that learners make in a minority of subjects is too slow, and that improvement in these subjects has not been rapid enough in previous years. Since September 2015, managers have taken a more focused risk-based approach to improving outcomes for learners. Lesson observations now form part of a full review of learning which takes account of learners' progress as well as the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The actions that managers have taken during this academic year to improve learners' progress in underperforming subjects are beginning to have a positive impact on the progress of current learners.
- Arrangements for managing staff performance are rigorous. Managers use a range of indicators to evaluate teachers' performance accurately, including data on learners' performance, the outcomes of reviews of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and feedback from learners. Most actions for improvement are specific, and include relevant individualised training and coaching where needed. All teachers benefit from a programme of professional development which focuses on key priorities such as developing learners' English and mathematics skills and areas for improvement identified through self-assessment, such as improving the achievement of male learners on the A-level programme. Teachers value the opportunity to refresh their skills in an appropriate industrial setting each year.
- Leaders and managers promote equality and diversity successfully. They have created a strongly inclusive ethos in the college which recognises and celebrates the achievement of all learners. They ensure that learners with learning difficulties and/or disability make a smooth transition from school to college; a high proportion of this group of learners achieve well. Strategies to improve the achievement of male learners are beginning to have a positive impact. A dynamic, multi-faith chaplaincy promotes the understanding of staff and learners about different faiths and the impact of religion and faith on society.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Experienced and skilled governors demonstrate a high level of commitment to ensuring that the college sustains its reputation as a high-quality provider that serves its community well and enables learners to succeed. They have overseen the prudent financial management of the college, investing in a much improved estate and, at the same time, planning for a secure and sustainable financial future for the college.
 - Governors receive detailed reports that enable them to provide a high level of support and challenge to leaders and managers in relation to most aspects of the college's performance. However, their actions have had insufficient impact in increasing the speed of improvement in a minority of courses.
 - Governors review their own performance well. They have sought to improve their effectiveness by commissioning an external audit of their work, and have improved their practice in response to the audit's recommendations. Recent attendance at committee meetings has been low at times, and reports from committee meetings to the full board are not always rapid enough.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - The college works extensively with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that learners are safe. Highly trained specialist staff continually update their knowledge, enabling them to deal swiftly and

decisively with safeguarding issues, concerns and incidents. The recording and evaluation of incidents are exemplary.

- Learners report that they feel very safe at college. They have a very good understanding of safeguarding and the threats of radicalisation and extremism, and are aware of whom to report any issues or concerns they may have. The college carries out appropriate checks to ensure safe recruitment of staff.
- Preventing radicalisation and extremism has a high priority in the college. Leaders and managers were proactive in implementing the 'Prevent' duty well ahead of the statutory implementation date. The college has trained all leaders and managers, governors, staff and learners exceptionally well in the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders and managers work closely with partners and external agencies to develop highly effective and inspirational training materials for staff and learners to raise awareness and understanding of the threats of radicalisation and extremism. The designated 'Prevent' coordinator is an active member of the local steering group.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- 16 to 19 study programmes account for the vast majority of the college's provision. The small adult learning programme is made up predominantly of part-time English and mathematics courses. During the inspection, around a half of adult learners were engaged in examinations or out-of-college activities. Seven apprentices are currently completing their programmes.
- Learners receive comprehensive and helpful information, advice and guidance prior to starting their programmes, and an accurate assessment of their level of attainment. This ensures that learners join programmes that meet their individual needs and their career aspirations.
- Teachers have high expectations of their learners. They use their subject expertise and experience skilfully to plan and carry out innovative and exciting activities that inspire learners to achieve their targets. As a result, the vast majority of learners produce work to a high standard, develop skills and behaviours that employers need such as resilience and initiative, and achieve their qualifications.
- Learners benefit from exceptionally good individual support to help them to meet the academic demands of their courses and to enable them to overcome any personal issues and difficulties. Learners who need extra help are identified quickly. A range of highly effective support, including mentoring for essay writing, support for study skills and one-to-one progress tutorials, ensures that these learners catch up quickly and improve the quality of their work. The small number of learners with high needs are supported particularly well to achieve their qualifications. Learners who have complex personal issues, and are in danger of leaving their courses, value highly the support of specialist staff in helping them to remain at college and succeed.
- Teachers consider carefully how to develop learners' English and mathematics skills, and frequently include opportunities to develop these skills in the activities that they carry out. For example, in sports lessons, learners use accurate technical vocabulary such as cardiac hypertrophy. In physics lessons, learners use equations and graphs competently to develop their understanding of the Hubble constant.
- Teachers integrate equality and diversity very successfully into their lessons, including through the highly effective use of case studies and scenarios. In health and social care, for example, learners explore case studies that deal sensitively with immigration and its impact on the health sector. Consequently, learners develop a good understanding of the diverse society in which they live, and of values such as tolerance, respect and democracy.
- Assessment of learners' written work is accurate and timely, and provides teachers and learners with a clear indication of the progress that learners are making. Teachers monitor learners' progress closely, and act swiftly to support learners if they fall behind with their work. In a few instances, learners' progress is not rapid enough because the feedback that they receive on their assessed work is not sufficiently detailed to help them to improve. Teachers do not adhere consistently to the college's assessment policy; as a result, they do not always identify and correct errors that learners make in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers accept superficial answers from learners too readily, and do not challenge or extend their learning. Consequently, a minority of the most-able learners do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are good

- Learners are positive about their education, and they demonstrate high standards of behaviour. They are resilient, and they persevere when they find learning challenging. Learners work well together in lessons, and demonstrate a high level of respect for other individuals, cultures and perspectives. This reflects the success of leaders, managers and staff in promoting inclusion and diversity.
- Learners benefit from very effective impartial careers guidance from highly-experienced specialist advisers that enables them to make informed choices about their future education and employment. They also take part in a wide range of initiatives that increase their awareness of possible progression routes. These include programmes and activities designed to raise learners' aspirations for their futures, visits from regional and national higher education institutions, and mentoring by former learners. As a result, a very high proportion of learners progress to higher education, employment or an apprenticeship.
- Teachers support learners well to develop their personal and social skills, including skills that learners need for work. Many learners, including all learners on vocational courses, benefit from high-quality work-experience placements that successfully develop work-related skills such as punctuality and team-working. During lessons, learners develop a wide range of work-related skills, including effective written and verbal communication, that prepare them well for the world of work.
- Learners participate in a wide range of enrichment activities, including visits to employers and universities and educational trips to other countries. These activities enhance learners' personal development, raise their aspirations, and broaden their awareness of other cultures.
- Learners develop their English and mathematics skills well as a result of the strong focus that teachers place on developing these skills. Learners successfully improve their understanding and use of subject-specific terminology and mathematical concepts that they will need for future study and for employment.
- Learners feel safe at the college. They benefit from an effective tutorial programme which raises their understanding of safeguarding. As a result, they understand how to stay safe, and make sensible choices about staying healthy and using social media and technology appropriately. They have an exceptionally good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and the actions they would need to take if they had concerns. Learners are fully aware of their social responsibilities; for example, in tutorial sessions they discussed their democratic right to vote in forthcoming elections. Learners are confident that the college will deal effectively with any bullying or safeguarding issues raised.
- Attendance and punctuality are high. Learners understand the importance of attending their lessons regularly and arriving on time. However, attendance remains slightly below the college's target.
- Teachers do not always encourage learners to develop their independent learning skills. As a result, a minority of learners lack the skills and confidence to extend their learning both during lessons and outside the classroom.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Most learners make good progress and achieve well. The proportion of learners on study programmes who complete their courses and achieve their qualifications is in line with that of similar providers. Learners on A-level programmes who arrive at the college with lower than average prior attainment make particularly good progress, and a high proportion exceed their target grades.
- In a minority of subjects, learners do not always make the progress of which they are capable. A minority of the most-able learners do not achieve the high grades to which they aspire.
- On advanced-level vocational study programmes, most learners successfully acquire the skills and knowledge that they need to progress into further study or into employment and a high proportion achieve their qualifications. On the intermediate-level programme, which accounts for around a tenth of learners on vocational programmes, the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications is lower than that for similar providers.
- Learners following GCSE English and mathematics courses on study programmes make good progress in improving their skills, and many achieve high grades. Managers have identified accurately the reasons for the low success rate on functional skills English and mathematics courses and actions taken this year have resulted in a significant improvement in the progress that learners make on these courses.
- Adult learners, the great majority of whom are on part-time English and mathematics courses, make good progress, and a high proportion successfully achieve functional skills and GCSE qualifications. The proportion of adult learners who are successful increased significantly in 2014/15 and is well above the rate for similar providers. The very small number of remaining apprentices are making good progress and

are on track to achieve their qualifications in the planned time.

- Leaders and managers identify accurately any gaps in achievement between different groups and put in place actions to reduce the gaps. The performance of male learners on the A-level programme is lower than that of female learners. Teachers have carried out training and development this year that focuses on improving the achievement of male learners, and this is beginning to have a positive impact. Learners who receive additional support, including those with high needs, make good progress; success rates for these groups are above those for their peers.
- Comprehensive and accurate information that leaders and managers gather about the destinations of learners on study programmes when they complete their courses show that almost all learners have positive destinations, either to higher education, employment or an apprenticeship programme. A high proportion of learners progress from the first to the second year of their A-level programmes, and most of the few who leave after the first year gain employment, secure an apprenticeship or enrol on a different course. Most learners who successfully complete an intermediate-level vocational course progress to an advanced-level course. Managers have begun to gather data on the destinations of the small cohort of adult learners, but this is not yet complete.

Provider details

Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,399
Principal/CEO	Janet Nevin
Website address	www.asfc.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	1	60	130	131	1,899	34	11	8
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	1	0	4	2	0	0		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16	0							
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"> ■ None 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Steve Hailstone, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathy Passant	Ofsted Inspector
Louise Tipping	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college'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 parents; 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 college.

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