

# South Thames College

General further education college

**Inspection dates**

23–26 May 2016

**Overall effectiveness****Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- The proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who complete their qualifications, while improving, is not yet good; too few have external work experience as a part of their programme of study.
- Despite leaders' and managers' determination to improve teaching, learning and assessment, their actions have not yet led to consistently good-quality provision.
- Teachers do not develop learners' skills and ability to use mathematics in their vocational work and everyday life.
- Too few teachers set precise targets for learning that enable learners to make good progress and achieve distinction grades.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality in lessons, while improving, is not yet good.
- Teachers do not routinely take into account the learning requirements of each learner when planning learning and assessment or check learners' progress in lessons carefully enough.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers plan effectively with employers and partners to develop a broad curriculum that meets well the training and skills requirements of local and regional businesses.
- Learners' behaviour in class and around college is very tolerant and respectful.
- The quality of high needs and apprenticeship provision is good.
- Learners benefit from good-quality personal help from teachers and a highly inclusive learning environment where they feel and are very safe.
- Learners work in high-quality workshops and classrooms and many develop very good practical skills that prepare them well for employment, further training and higher education.

# Full report

## Information about the provider

- South Thames College is one of the largest colleges in London with three main sites in Wandsworth, Tooting and Merton. Most learners live locally to the college, three quarters of whom are from socially disadvantaged areas. The majority of learners are of minority ethnic heritage backgrounds.
- Provision at the college ranges from pre-entry to degree-level courses. All courses lead to vocational qualifications. In 2015, the college ceased to offer GCE A level provision. Apprenticeship learning is a small but growing area of provision. The proportion of school leavers locally who achieve five GCSEs at grades A\* to C is higher than the national rate. The majority of the local population are qualified to level 2.

## What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment rapidly to good by ensuring that:
  - teachers make effective use of assessment of learners' progress and other information to set demanding targets for learners and frequently monitor and review learners' progress against these targets
  - teachers plan learning and assessment that is individual to the learning requirements of each learner and is sufficiently challenging and demanding
  - teachers in vocational lessons develop quickly and effectively learners' skills in mathematics.
- Increase significantly the proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who achieve their qualifications and meet or exceed their target grade.
- Share existing good teaching practice more widely within the college and monitor its impact carefully.
- Managers must ensure that learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, where appropriate, have external work experience as a part of their programme of study.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders and governors are ambitious for the college and continue to strive to secure improvements in learners' achievements. They have yet to achieve this for learners in all subject areas. While achievements for apprentices have improved significantly and are now high, for younger learners on study programmes they remain low and well below those of adult learners at the college.
- Following the decline in the achievements of young learners in 2013/14, governors and senior leaders made significant changes within the management team to secure rapid improvement. Current managers focus more sharply on learning and monitor learners' progress frequently. Teachers have a clear understanding of what is required of them, but as yet, improvements have not been swift enough or had sufficient impact to ensure that learners achieve well or make good progress.
- Leaders have ensured that their judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are more accurate. Managers have an improved understanding of the day-to-day quality of learning. Staff training activities target specifically the areas for improvement that managers and inspectors identified as weak. Managers' action plans for individual teachers resulting from observations of learning are not always sufficiently comprehensive or precise enough in their timescales to ensure that teachers improve their teaching practice rapidly.
- Managers' own review and assessment of standards is largely accurate but they do not fully evaluate or recognise sufficiently the impact teaching, learning and assessment has on learners' achievement of their qualifications. Managers have not acknowledged that the standard of teaching, learning and assessment varies too much across the college or that it is no longer of a consistently good quality for all learners.
- Senior leaders' strategy to improve the teaching, learning and assessment of English and mathematics within vocational subjects across the college has had partial success. Better progress is evident in how teachers develop and extend learners' skills in English and in learners' achievement of external tests. However, as yet, too few vocational teachers promote and extend learners' skills and knowledge in mathematics.
- Leaders and managers work with employers, industry representatives, subcontractors and local businesses to plan a broad curriculum that meets employers' diverse training needs. Managers have been highly effective in taking prompt action to meet local skills shortages – for example, introducing apprenticeships in civil engineering qualifications.
- Managers ensure that most learners receive good and impartial advice and guidance, which ensures that they are on the most suitable course and at the correct level to move into their desired next steps in learning and life. A large proportion of learners move successfully into further and higher study. Managers accept that they do not yet have comprehensive data on those learners who progress to employment, so that they can refine the courses currently offered.
- Senior leaders have ensured the continued good financial health of the college. Learners enjoy and benefit from the very high-quality resources across all college sites that help them to develop good practical skills for employment.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - Governors bring a wide range of relevant expertise including business, financial and educational experience. This enables them to challenge appropriately senior managers' decisions and hold them to account for their actions. The strategic plan for the college pays good attention to meeting the training needs of local employers and learners. All governors are suitably trained and actively fulfil their duties with regard to the 'Prevent' duty and to safeguard learners.
  - Managers ensure that governors are informed of the strengths and areas to further improve. Enhanced reporting on the detailed performance of different subject areas and of different groups of learners has enabled governors to have a better understanding of where improvements need to be made and the areas of concern that remain. However, the quality of provision has declined since the previous inspection.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Management arrangements to safeguard learners are comprehensive and sufficiently detailed to ensure that learners remain safe while at college. Good guidance and information for staff and learners on subjects such as child sexual exploitation, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, provide effective knowledge and engenders appropriate confidence in learners and staff to identify potential concerns and report them appropriately.
  - Managers have worked effectively with a wide range of partners to implement successfully the

'Prevent' duty. For example, learners have worked directly with the London further education network of colleges to design thought-provoking posters and publicity material to raise learners' awareness of the risks posed to them from radicalisation and violent extremism.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** requires improvement

- Despite managers' recent actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the standards reported at the previous inspection have not been maintained and consequently not enough learners make good progress with their learning.
- Too few teachers take into account the learning requirements of each learner when planning learning. Teachers do not always develop sufficient understanding of the skills and knowledge their learners still need to acquire. This is because teachers do not always check what learners have understood and learned in lessons well enough and consequently they are not able to plan further learning that is sufficiently personalised to what each learner needs to do to achieve well.
- Most teachers provide accurate assessment of learners' written work and have a good understanding of what learners need to do to improve, but do not use this information and other data, such as learners' attendance and punctuality, consistently well to set clear, specific and demanding targets for improvement. In addition, teachers do not routinely monitor and review learners' achievement of their targets.
- Teachers and assessors are well qualified in their vocational subjects. The vast majority have relevant industry experience which they use very effectively to help learners and apprentices develop good practical skills relevant to the needs of industry. Teachers and assessors use their vocational experience very well to help and guide learners and apprentices in their next steps in learning or employment.
- The extent to which vocational teachers develop and improve learners' skills in English and mathematics varies too much, although teachers are more adept at developing learners' English skills. The more confident and skilled teachers recognise the importance of these skills in the workplace and ensure that learners can apply these skills appropriately. For example in a level 2 childcare lesson, when learners developed their use of data to interpret and analyse information about child poverty to form their opinions on how the media portray this topic. However, too often, teachers fail to help learners improve and apply mathematical skills confidently in their work.
- Teachers, tutors and assessors work effectively to support learners and apprentices with their learning. They help many to overcome personal and social barriers that have the potential to limit the achievement of their qualifications.
- A significant minority of teachers are skilled at setting learners challenging goals in lessons. A range of stimulating and motivating activities, and frequent and effective checks on learning, enable learners to make rapid progress and produce work of a high quality. Over time, these learners are able to improve their work further and go on to achieve merit and distinction grades in their qualifications.
- Teachers provide the majority of learners and apprentices with clear and constructive feedback on the quality of their work and make clear to them what they could do to make better progress. Learners on courses at level 2 and below receive particularly effective feedback on what they need to do to improve. For more-able learners, particularly on level 3 courses, teachers' written feedback is often more limited. This feedback does not help learners improve their work sufficiently well for them to make more rapid progress.
- As a result of recent improvements in the management of apprenticeship provision, current apprentices are making good progress in the development of their skills and knowledge. An improving proportion are now achieving their qualifications within the planned timescale. Employers provide their apprentices with very good support for their learning in the workplace. Assessors visit their apprentices frequently. The majority communicate well with employers so that training needs can be planned appropriately to support assessment and enable apprentices to make good progress. Assessors provide good help to apprentices who improve their English and mathematics skills well.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** require improvement

- Managers have not ensured that learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, where it is appropriate, have an equitable chance to access external work experience. For example, learners in hospitality and catering benefit from good-quality work experience at the Wimbledon tennis tournament and from work experience involving world-renowned chefs. However, for learners in other subject areas, for example business, construction and engineering, the proportion of learners who have external work experience is very low.

- Learners' attendance and punctuality are improving across much of the college provision but are not yet consistently good. Poor punctuality in lessons disrupts the learning of many. Leaders, managers and teachers set high expectations for learners to attend regularly and punctually but this is not yet having sufficient impact. Learners' poor punctuality and attendance is quickly followed up and recent management action has resulted in better attendance, particularly for learners who joined the college in the current year.
- Learners benefit from good access to a wide range of welfare and support services, provided by skilled and experienced staff. These enable learners to improve their health and well-being, to stay safe and to develop life skills that enable them to enhance their lives and their learning. Managers monitor closely the take-up and quality of these services in order to secure on-going improvements for learners and to ensure that learners who should access these services do so. For example, previously under-represented male learners are now benefiting from the available support.
- Learners aged 16 to 19, in particular, benefit greatly from specialist support by qualified and experienced youth workers at both the Merton and Wandsworth sites. These staff provide carefully targeted, individual interventions with learners, that enable them to develop the skills and behaviours that they need to work within the culture and expectations of the college and to succeed in life.
- Learners from across the college participate well in a wide range of activities, which enrich their learning and enable them to improve their health and welfare, for example sporting, drama and dance activities. Managers analyse carefully and evaluate the take-up of enrichment activities to ensure that all learners from across all subject areas benefit equally.
- Teachers' development of learners' personal and social skills is good and learners understand how to live in a diverse community and are tolerant of others. Learners increase significantly in confidence and are ambitious for their future progression. Adult learners develop good team-working and study skills and apprentices improve their interpersonal skills such as talking to a wide range of clients, which they apply well in the workplace. Learners aged 16 to 19 develop a wide range of practical skills relevant to their chosen career and their behaviour is good.
- For the majority of learners, the development of their skills for employment is good. For example, adult learners on access programmes improve significantly their research and written presentation skills and apprentices develop work-related skills above the requirements of their programmes. The majority of learners aged 16 to 19 benefit from participating in a broad range of work-related activities. For example, the college progression and employability week enables learners to meet potential employers and consider their possible career opportunities.
- The college pays good attention to ensuring that learners and apprentices are safe. All learners display college identification and thorough checks on entry to college sites are in place. Learners report that they feel safe at the college, are clear about how to report any concerns and have confidence that staff will respond appropriately to any issues they may raise.

## Outcomes for learners

## require improvement

- The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications has improved since the time of the previous inspection but is not yet high enough. Managers have not ensured that enough learners achieve at a high rate. Adult learners achieve much better than learners aged 16 to 19. On level 3 courses, too few learners make good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of learners who achieved their functional skills qualification in mathematics has declined and is too low. Not enough learners improve and develop good skills in mathematics.
- Learners who have a learning difficulty and/or disability do not achieve their qualification as well as their peers. Managers recognise they need to focus more closely on the progress and achievement of discrete groups of learners. Until very recently, managers did not monitor the progress and attainment of children under the care of the local authority or of those learners entitled to free school meals. Male and female learners make the same levels of progress.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their functional skills qualifications in English has improved significantly and is high. The small proportion of learners who take GCSE English and mathematics at A\* to C have high achievement.
- Many learners make good progress in developing the relevant vocational skills that they will need to gain sustainable employment. For example, learners in the college hairdressing salon undertake skilfully a wide range of complex cutting techniques and learners in motor vehicle workshops expertly carry out diagnostic testing to ensure that vehicles are safe.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualification is high, although not enough complete within the planned timescale. Current apprentices are now making good progress, remain in employment

on completion of their qualification and secure promotion. A significant minority progress into higher education.

- Teachers and tutors prepare learners well for their next stage in education, training and employment. Many learners gain jobs as a result of their learning. The proportion of learners who move on to higher education has improved and is now high. A small but increasing proportion attend prestigious universities.

## Types of provision

### 16 to 19 study programmes

#### require improvement

- The college provides programmes of study for over 2,200 learners in most subjects from entry level to level 3 with good progression routes to employment, apprenticeships and higher study. The opportunities for learners to experience external work experience as part of their programme of study varies from good in media, hospitality and catering to poor in engineering and construction.
- Teachers do not routinely plan learning and assessment to enthuse and motivate all learners successfully in their studies, nor do they ensure that all learners make at least good progress in their learning.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their learning goals in mathematics is too low. Too few vocational teachers challenge learners successfully to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Learning and assessment is more often of a higher standard in practical and workshop sessions where learners develop and improve their practical skills for employment. In these lessons, teachers use well their good industry knowledge to enhance learning and motivate learners to aspire towards excellence. Too often, theory lessons are not demanding enough of learners, particularly the most able, to make good progress. In these lessons learning is often lacklustre, learners find lessons boring and as a result they make slow progress.
- Teachers broaden learners' understanding of life outside the college well and challenge them to reflect on the consequences of their decision-making. For example, in a tutorial session for hairdressing learners the tutor skilfully facilitated a discussion on what the potential impact on employment rights for women might be as a result of voting to leave the European Union.
- Learners benefit well from the wider aspects of their programme of study and participate in a range of suitable activities to prepare them for work. For example, learners work in high-quality workshops and realistic work environments in vocational areas, and are set industry-based project assignments. Learners greatly value the cross-college enterprise week to help them focus on their potential career options by meeting potential employers, attending curriculum vitae writing workshops and attending mock interviews.

### Adult learning programmes

#### require improvement

- Currently 6,200 learners are working towards qualifications in functional skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) access to higher education, and employability.
- Too few teachers plan learning and assessment skilfully enough to ensure that individual learners make good progress. The more able learners are not challenged sufficiently and the learners who need more help to grasp learning struggle to keep up.
- Teachers do not use the results of learners' ongoing assessment of progress consistently well to set and review learners' targets for improvement. Managers recognise that more work with teachers is required to ensure that they all set specific and relevant targets for learning and attainment and to ensure that all learners make good progress towards completing their qualifications.
- Adult learning programmes are appropriately planned and meet local needs and those of the community well. Learners develop good practical and study skills that prepare them well for their future careers and next steps. For example, ESOL learners also develop their word processing skills as a part of their programme and learners on Access to HE programmes develop good research skills and improve their ability to give formal presentations. Learners referred from Jobcentre Plus attend workshops to develop skills required to gain employment, such as how to dress professionally for a job interview.
- Teachers effectively ensure that learners develop and improve their skills in English and broaden their use of technical language. For example, learners in accounting develop a good understanding and use of accounting terminology such as bank reconciliation and loss adjustment. Learners improve their confidence as a result and feel better prepared when interviewing for a potential job.
- Staff and teachers have high expectations of learners and provide much personal and pastoral help and advice to ensure that those learners who would be at risk of not completing their studies remain in learning. Learners have a good understanding of life in modern Britain, are exceptionally tolerant and respectful of their peers and work well together in class.



## **Apprenticeships**

**are good**

- Currently approximately 525 apprentices are in training, the majority of which are on advanced and intermediate programmes, with a small proportion on level 4. Most are on civil engineering, facilities management and business administration programmes. A small proportion are working towards apprenticeships in hairdressing, health and social care, building services and engineering.
- Apprentices develop very good work-related skills. They quickly develop good attitudes to learning, attend college well and are prompt and ready to learn. Apprentices value their time at college and benefit from sound careers advice and guidance. Most remain in work on completion of their qualification and a small minority progress to higher education.
- Managers have implemented successfully a range of strategies that have led to much improved achievements for most apprentices. Assessors' monitoring of apprentices' progress is now rigorous and impactful. Assessors visit learners in the workplace frequently and meet with managers and workplace supervisors to review learners' progress and plan further learning, taking swift action should an apprentice fall behind in their learning. Current apprentices make good progress in completing all aspects of their qualification.
- Assessors provide very good verbal and written feedback to apprentices, which ensure that they know how well they are progressing and what they still need to achieve to complete their qualification. Assessors are confident and able to correct learners' written work and promote effectively the use of appropriate technical language. Most assessors ensure that apprentices recognise the need for and use of mathematics in their everyday work and ensure that apprentices develop and improve their mathematics skills and knowledge.
- Employers provide good opportunities within the workplace for apprentices to develop a wide range of additional skills that improve apprentices' levels of customer awareness and client safety. For example, facilities management apprentices working in hospitals complete specialist legionella and asbestos awareness courses to protect patients better.
- Apprentices feel safe and adopt safe working practices. They understand how to protect themselves from the potential risk of violent extremism and radicalisation and are clear about whom to report any concerns they may have.

## **Provision for learners with high needs**

**is good**

- Currently the college has 99 learners who receive high-needs funding from 11 local authorities. Forty learners are on mainstream vocational programmes across all levels, 22 are on preparation for life programmes and 37 study within a dedicated centre for learners with autistic spectrum disorders and/or complex learning needs.
- Teachers work closely and effectively with the local authorities, parents and carers to prepare learners for the transition from school to college. As a result, learners settle well into college life and learning.
- Managers and teachers identify accurately learners' starting points on entering college. They use this information well to plan appropriately challenging individual programmes for learners who make good progress in their learning and improve their communications skills.
- Learners with autistic spectrum disorders and/or complex learning needs and those on pathways programmes benefit well from high-quality specialist resources and equipment. Learners increase their independence, develop better self-confidence and improve their coordination skills as a result of using equipment such as the accessible climbing wall and companion bikes. In the well-equipped kitchen, learners practise and improve the cookery and food hygiene skills they need for living a more independent life.
- Staff manage learners' behaviour particularly well for the significant minority of learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties. For example, learners work with speech and language therapists, and learn how to better manage and improve their own behaviour. Most learners develop improved language and communications skills.
- Managers and staff ensure that learners with high needs are integrated well into life at college. Learners are considerate to others and are keen to work as members of a team or in small group work. However, teaching and support staff in vocational areas across the college are not sufficiently discrete when discussing the support and care requirements of learners with high needs when in the company of other learners.
- Managers do not organise learners' next steps into further learning and life well enough. For example, too few learners on discrete and mainstream vocational pathways have access to timely specialist careers advice and guidance to enable them to be prepared well for their next steps in learning and life, and too few have as yet had their annual review as a part of their education, health and care plan.

## Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	10,772
Principal/CEO	Sue Rimmer
Website address	<a href="http://www.south-thames.ac.uk">www.south-thames.ac.uk</a>

## 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+
	489	3,013	738	2,200	865	579	7	21
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	53	187	103	172	0	10		
Number of traineeships	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:	<div><div></div> Learning Curve Limited</div> <div><div></div> Sigma Group Limited</div> <div><div></div> Cano Training Services Limited</div> <div><div></div> James and McLain Limited</div>							



## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Julie Steele, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Janet Mercer	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Pemble	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathy Tyler	Ofsted Inspector
Charlotte Corfield	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Muggeridge	Ofsted Inspector
Teresa Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Kathy Brennan	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the deputy 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 students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors completed further half-day visit to follow up on additional information received. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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