

Itchen College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

31 January to 2 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The majority of learners studying on academic courses at level 3 do not make the progress they are capable of, given their entry qualifications. Senior managers do not provide clear and complete information to governors on this matter and, as a result, governors' challenge is not effective.
- Senior leaders, governors and managers do not set key performance indicators that are sufficiently clear and aspirational to assist with the rapid improvement of teaching, learning and outcomes and to ensure that learners make progress according to their potential.
- Too few learners undertake work placements or appropriate work-related activities as part of their study programme and as a result are not well prepared for employment.
- Senior leaders and managers have not been effective in monitoring and maintaining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Learners' attendance is too low across too many courses and this has a negative impact on their progress.
- Leaders and managers have not succeeded in ensuring that learners receive a consistently good experience across subjects, courses and levels.

The provider has the following strengths

- Staff have created a welcoming and inclusive college environment where learners feel well supported and cared for.
- Learners have a sophisticated understanding of the wider issues of living in modern Britain, including the dangers of extremism and radicalisation, and are able to relate these topics well to the local context.
- Many learners take pride in their practical and written work. They demonstrate improvements in their confidence, skills development and breadth of knowledge.
- Learners feel safe and know who to go to for support and guidance if they have any concerns about their well-being and safety, or that of other learners.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Itchen College is a small sixth form college on the east side of Southampton and is one of two sixth form colleges in the city. The proportion of pupils in Southampton gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is lower than the national average. Some 20% of learners come from low-income households. Learners' prior attainment on entry to the college is below the average for sixth form colleges. The college offers a wide range of academic and general vocational courses from level 1 to level 3. Most learners are aged 16 to 18, and most of the smaller cohort of adults study on the access to higher education course. The college has a small cohort of learners with high needs.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Set targets for learners' achievements, attendance, retention and progression, which clearly identify the aspirational outcomes that governors and senior managers want to achieve. These targets should be reflected in improvement plans at all levels and closely monitored by governors and managers to ensure that they bring about rapid improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Set and monitor aspirational targets for individual learners and ensure that current performance is regularly and accurately assessed. Managers should use the new monitoring systems to identify learners who are underperforming and ensure that effective and rapid support leads to progress in line with expectations.
- Leaders should improve the monitoring and risk assessment of visiting speakers.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - identifying effective quality improvement strategies and ensuring that good practice in management and teaching, learning and assessment is shared across all subjects and the impact is measured
 - ensuring that observations and learning walks evaluate the standards that learners are achieving, the progress they are making and the quality of feedback to learners. Managers should report the findings to governors in a form that allows effective challenge.
- Ensure that managers develop more links with local businesses, so that learners benefit from access to work placements, work experience, or work-related activities and are better prepared for employment and their next step.
- Improve attendance by swiftly supporting learners who do not achieve minimum attendance targets, reinforcing expectations with regard to good attendance and improving the consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The actions of governors, senior leaders and managers since the previous inspection have not led to high standards across all courses. Too many learners do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teaching, learning and assessment are not yet consistently good. Learners on, for example, vocational sports courses and those studying academic subjects such as sociology and English language, achieve well and make good progress; however, others do not, most notably on the majority of level 3 academic programmes.
- The recently restructured leadership team has implemented a number of new procedures that are having a positive impact on learners' experiences at the college. Monitoring of learners' attendance and progress is much improved. Learners have a good knowledge of their target grades and their progress towards achieving them. However, senior leaders and managers have not yet adequately addressed a number of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection, including improving the quality of teaching and learning, and focusing on the progress of all learners during lesson observations and learning walks.
- Senior leaders do not set sufficiently ambitious goals for learners' progress. Judgements about the progress made by learners in 2015/16 were based on insufficiently complete data and were too positive. Targets set for leaders and managers to improve achievement rates and learners' progress are not aspirational enough and are often poorly defined at all levels of management.
- Managers have strived hard this year to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly through staff training and the sharing of good practice provided by the newly appointed teaching and learning champions. However, these actions have not yet had a sufficiently positive impact on standards of classroom practice in all areas of the college. Lesson observations and learning walks do not focus clearly enough on learners' standards of work or their skills and knowledge development. Governors, senior leaders and managers do not focus enough on standards of teaching and assessment in key meetings. Governors and senior managers do not have accurate information on the current standard of teaching, learning and assessment and the areas for improvement.
- Performance management requires improvement. In too many cases, appraisals of teachers focus on their own performance and not enough on the impact of different aspects of classroom practice on learning and learners' progress and achievement. As a result, this process is not contributing enough to raising the standards of teaching. Managers carrying out review and development sessions with teachers do not always make sufficient reference in their judgements to the evidence they have gathered from lesson observations and learning walks, or from key performance data.
- The management of study programmes for learners aged 16 to 18 requires improvement. Learners' achievements and progress vary too much across the college. Progress in terms of mathematical skills within courses and qualifications is weak, although progress in English skills is much better. There is a wide selection of academic and general vocational courses to choose from, particularly at level 2 and level 3. Too few vocational learners currently complete a period of external work experience as part of their course. Learners study a wide range of additional qualifications that enhance their employability skills.

- Self-assessment is not sufficiently rigorous, or accurate, in assessing learners' outcomes. In 2015/16, a number of key strengths in the report were not supported by sufficiently wide-ranging evidence. Quality improvement targets are too imprecise to measure the impact of the actions taken. Managers' reports on progress focus too much on developing new processes and procedures and not enough on their impact on learners' experiences at the college.
- The senior leadership team's mission for the college to be inclusive underpins all its work with young people and adults. Many learners come from challenging backgrounds and have low prior attainment. Managers have been successful in closing achievement gaps for different groups of learners, particularly young males who perform much worse than their female counterparts in schools across the city. Teachers and specialist support workers devote a lot of extra time to support learners with identified learning needs or those who request additional help; additional learning support in lessons for learners with high needs is good.
- Curriculum planning is well informed by senior leaders' and managers' desire to avoid duplication with other colleges in Southampton, to refer learners to more suitable provision where appropriate and to recognise where another local college is more successful at offering particular courses. Senior leaders have developed a broad and relevant curriculum which reflects the needs of the local economy and provides progression routes into employment, further education and higher education for learners. Adult provision is responsive to local skills and employment needs.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a clear understanding of the specific strengths and areas for improvement of the different parts of the college's provision. However, their view of the overall performance of the college in 2015/16 is inaccurate. It is based too much on improvements in the proportion of learners who are retained on and pass courses, rather than the amount of progress learners make given their qualifications on entry.
- Governors are highly committed to and passionate about the college's mission to enable the success of learners from challenging backgrounds and with difficult personal circumstances. They are proactive in using their links across the city to provide learners with opportunities to work and gain employability skills, although the college still needs to extend these links significantly.
- The governing body has particularly good representation from all phases of education in Southampton, including further education. The safeguarding, equality and diversity committee places a strong emphasis on monitoring all aspects of learners' safety and this has a positive impact on the attitudes of staff and the safety of learners

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, governors and managers give safeguarding a high priority. As a result, learners feel safe while at college.
- Staff have implemented very effective arrangements to promote British values. Learners have a good understanding of these values and how to protect themselves and their peers from radicalisation and extremism. Managers reinforce messages about safeguarding and British values every day, for example through frequent tutorial events

and eye-catching and thought-provoking posters designed by learners. Learners show respect for each other and their teachers, and behave well.

- Appropriate arrangements are in place to respond to the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty legislation. Clear monitoring of the college's prayer room takes place, which has resulted in managers being able to identify particular concerns about usage that they have resolved well. However, the monitoring and risk assessment of guest speakers are insufficiently rigorous.
- Managers and governors employ safer recruitment policies well. All staff and governors receive high-quality training on safeguarding. They work closely with external agencies, including the police, the local safeguarding children board, mental health, counselling and other specialists, to ensure that appropriate and swift responses are invoked where particular safeguarding concerns become apparent.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The large majority of learners at the college are studying on programmes at level 3. The majority are taking academic qualifications at AS level or A level, with a significant minority taking vocational qualifications or a mix of academic and vocational courses. A small minority of learners are studying on level 2 courses. A significant minority of learners are currently taking GCSEs in a range of subjects, mostly in English and mathematics.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently good across all subjects. As a result, in too many subjects, particularly on level 3 academic courses, learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- In sociology, creative writing, public services and sport, teachers have high expectations of learners. They plan lessons effectively taking into account learners' starting points. Lessons are well paced, learning is stimulating and learners' participation and interest are maintained throughout the lesson. Teachers use questions effectively to elicit answers which are based on evaluative and analytical skills rather than just the recall of information. Consequently, learners demonstrate a good understanding of the concepts learned and make good or better progress.
- In the large majority of lessons, however, teachers do not plan learning activities well enough to meet the needs and abilities of all learners. As a result, too many work on the same tasks, are not challenged sufficiently and do not achieve their learning potential. Teachers do not check the level of learners' understanding throughout lessons. Consequently, learners and their teachers are not clear about what they have learned or what progress they have made. Teachers fail to plan effectively to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teachers do not direct group work activities well enough. Learners are not clear about their roles and so do not actively participate in learning, nor do they acquire the skills to work effectively in a group, which is an important skill for employment.
- Teachers' written and verbal feedback on learners' work is not sufficiently detailed to support learners to improve their skills or to increase the breadth of their knowledge. For example, in chemistry, learners fail to develop further their scientific writing skills, essential for their success in this subject.

- The majority of learners know the grade that they are expected to achieve and the targets they need to complete in order to be successful in achieving their qualification. They use the college progress tracking system well to monitor their performance and can confidently describe their rate of progress over time. However, too often, learners do not achieve their targets quickly enough, particularly in mathematics, film studies, textiles and graphics courses, because learners are not clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers do not assess learners' starting points early enough in the GCSE mathematics course and do not plan learning and assessment strategies effectively to match learners' strengths and areas for development. Consequently, learners do not develop their skills effectively and make poor progress.
- In health and social care, early years and public services lessons, teachers develop learners' work-related skills well. They encourage learners to draw on real examples from their work experience placements to illuminate the learning in lessons and to put the theory into context. However, in other vocational subjects, too few learners undertake work experience and therefore they are less able to effectively link theory learning at college to workplace practices.
- Most learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and learners with high needs receive good support from staff. The process for identifying these learners' needs, prior to enrolment or in the early stages of a course, is comprehensive and timely. Staff provide learners with appropriate support to facilitate their learning additional help in class and to enable their progression to higher levels of learning. Learners participate fully in learning and make good progress.
- Classroom environments are professional and well presented. Staff use visual displays very effectively to promote safety, well-being and British values, and to support learning. For example, in public services, science and psychology, teachers use resources well to promote learners' use of technical language, to help learners to make accurate calculations and reinforce their learning.
- Staff promote diversity very effectively in lessons to reinforce the college values and ethos. For example, in sociology, learners work well together in groups to produce a range of visual displays to explore the term 'feminism'.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Learners' overall attendance at lessons on too many courses is low. As a result, learners are not making the expected progress.
- Only a small minority of vocational learners undertake a productive work experience placement during their programme of study. Although managers have plans to address this shortfall by the end of the academic year, the current low level of engagement hinders learners' preparedness for employment.
- In too many sessions, learners do not arrive ready to work and do not exhibit workplace standards. For example, a few learners do not have pens and paper to make notes, and some learners continue to wear hats and coats throughout the lesson.
- Most second-year learners, studying on level 3 courses, and the small cohort of learners with high needs, receive good-quality careers advice and guidance to help them to plan their next step. However, first-year learners on level 3 and learners on level 2 courses do

not always receive information on the full range of relevant career pathways. As a result, they do not have clear plans for their next step.

- The majority of learners take pride in their practical and written work. They demonstrate improvements in their confidence, skills development and breadth of knowledge. For example, learners in drama show good performance skills and second-year media studies learners develop good technical editing skills when producing short films. Vocational level 3 sports learners develop good team-working and presentation skills. Learners with high needs develop the ability to travel independently to and from college.
- The majority of learners studying at level 3 enhance their learning and increase their future employment prospects by studying a wide range of additional qualifications or participating in extra-curricular activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award in public services, community and higher leaders awards in sport, and the 'Rock Challenge' competition in A-level dance. Learners on law courses visit the law courts and engage in talks with practising solicitors to gain a better understanding of the legal framework and processes.
- During tutorial sessions, learners develop a good understanding of British values. They demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and exploitation, and are aware of key issues in the local community. Learners' attendance at tutorials has improved and is now in line with attendance rates in other courses. Learners say that they feel safe and know who to contact for support and guidance if they have any concerns about their well-being and safety.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The majority of learners are aged 16 to 18, and most of these learners study on advanced level courses. The majority of learners on A-level and AS-level courses, and particularly the most able, do not make the progress expected, given their entry qualifications.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their AS-level qualification has declined and is below the national rate.
- Learners' outcomes in mathematics require improvement. Adults and learners aged 16 to 18 do not make the expected progress in GCSE, and A-level mathematics. Too few learners complete their course, or achieve their functional skills qualification, or achieve grades A* to C in GCSE mathematics.
- The proportion of adults who complete and pass their qualifications, particularly on the access to higher education course, has declined and is low.
- Almost all of the learners who leave the college at the end of their course move on to known destinations. About a third of these learners progress to higher education and many of these study at local universities. A further third gain employment. Staff do not record in sufficient detail the destinations of those who go into employment and therefore it not possible to judge whether these learners are moving on to appropriate careers.
- Most learners aged 16 to 18 successfully achieve their vocational awards, certificates and diplomas, and achievement rates are improving.
- Most learners make good progress in improving their English skills. The majority of learners achieve grade A* to C in GCSE English.

- Managers monitor the performance of different groups well. Male students now achieve as well as their female counterparts and their outcomes are now in line with national rates. The achievements of learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased but are still just below the rates of other learners.
- Learners taking courses in, for example, physical education, English language, leisure studies, performing arts and sociology make good progress and have high achievement rates. However, in too many other subjects, learners' progress is too slow and achievement rates are low.
- The college provides a broad curriculum which enables learners to progress from level 1 to level 3, and the large majority of learners who complete level 2 progress to level 3.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130704
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,558
Principal/CEO	Vanessa Cass
Telephone number	02380 435 636
Website	www.itchen.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	27	1	185	82	1,211	17	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	22							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, 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.

Inspection team

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