

MidKent College

General further education college

Inspection dates

31 January–3 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The proportion of students who achieve their qualifications at levels 1 and 2 is not yet good and too few apprentices complete on time.
- Students' development of skills and achievement in English and mathematics require rapid improvement.
- The majority of teachers do not use the results of initial assessment well enough to plan sufficiently challenging lessons so that students can reach their full potential.
- Students' attendance has improved but remains too low.
- Achievement gaps between different groups of students are not reducing quickly enough.
- Leaders and managers have not been successful in ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at least good.

The provider has the following strengths

- Since the start of this academic year, leaders and managers have made rapid progress in building a culture of continuous improvement and accountability that is having a positive impact on the progress and achievement of students.
- Since September 2016, leaders and managers are using accurate and reliable data to monitor the quality of provision and tackle poor performance.
- Students benefit from a curriculum that is planned well and meets local needs and priorities.
- Classroom-based students benefit from good careers advice and guidance and develop good employment skills and the vast majority progress to employment, higher and further education or apprenticeships.
- Teachers use their industry experience well to make vocational learning interesting and relevant.

Full report

Information about the provider

- MidKent College is a large general further education college with two sites serving the communities of Kent and Medway. The campus in Gillingham serves the towns in the unitary authority of Medway. The campus in Maidstone, the county town of Kent, serves Maidstone, Swale and Malling. Both regions include diverse areas of deprivation and prosperity. The number of pupils at schools in both the Medway towns and Kent that achieve five or more GCSE grades at A* to C is slightly above the national rate. Employment in Maidstone is slightly above the national average unlike the Medway towns which are below both national and regional rates.
- The college provides a range of post-16 education and training, including 16 to 19 study programmes in a good variety of vocational areas, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships. At the time of the inspection, approximately 5,700 students were enrolled at the college.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should reduce the wide variations in achievement across ages, levels and subject areas so that all students and apprentices achieve well.
- Leaders and managers should strengthen English and mathematics teaching to ensure that students develop the skills and achieve qualifications that enhance their learning and career options.
- Managers should apply relentlessly strategies to improve attendance and punctuality further to increase students' opportunities to make good progress.
- All college staff should ensure effective use of well-defined and measurable targets for improvement in every aspect of college operation.
- Teachers should ensure that they use students' initial assessments to challenge individuals and ensure they can fulfil their potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Governors and senior leaders have been too slow to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Namely to improve the quality of provision and ensure consistently good performance. While the proportion of students and apprentices who achieve their qualifications has increased slightly, this remains too low.
- Several areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection remain. The new principal and senior leaders have increased the pace of change significantly in the last six months. They are yet to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are consistently good and that more students are able to make progress and achieve.
- Leaders' actions to improve students' achievement and progress in English and mathematics have been too slow. Too many students fail to make sufficient progress and achieve their qualifications in these essential subjects.
- Senior leaders and managers have a clear vision and high expectations for both students and staff. Since the start of this academic year, leaders and managers have made rapid progress in developing a culture of continuous improvement and accountability, through a challenging but supportive leadership style.
- Senior managers have developed the new 'Hearts and Minds' philosophy and this has been successful in enabling teachers and support staff to improve their practice. As a result, most teachers seek the support they need to improve their teaching without fear or prejudice.
- Leaders now have access to, and use, accurate and reliable data, which they analyse well to monitor the quality of provision. Leaders have established challenging but achievable minimum standards for achievement, attendance, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They hold managers and teachers to account for the quality of provision at monthly review meetings. However, these have not yet had the desired impact on ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at least good.
- Senior leaders' and managers' assessment of the quality of provision is broadly accurate and identifies the large majority of the critical areas for improvement. The leaders' quality improvement action plan reflects the areas for development well. However, too many actions are not specific enough in setting well-defined and measurable targets for improvement. This affects leaders' ability to identify quickly and with sufficient precision the progress achieved, and the impact of actions taken on the progress and outcomes for students and apprentices.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the progress students are making. However, not all observers routinely record all areas for improvement, which limits the planning of staff development activities.
- Senior leaders have successfully analysed the changing employment needs of the community the college serves and realigned the range and level of courses offered to suit the employment needs of the area. For example, the number of apprenticeship places available has increased significantly in line with national priorities.

- Leaders and managers have established good partnership arrangements with local schools, businesses and subcontractors to develop provision in subjects where the demand is high, such as engineering, and transport and logistics. Leaders have been successful in securing funding from the local enterprise partnership to improve the resources for students in these priority areas. Subcontracting arrangements are used well to engage local young people who are not in employment, education or training.
- The management of subcontracted provision is good. Managers monitor the quality through regular visits and observing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers hold subcontractors to account for their performance well.

The governance of the provider

- Governors recognise that the pace of improvement has been too slow and have reviewed their oversight of the college to ensure that the pace of improvement increases. For example, insufficient preparations were made to accommodate the significant numbers of students who would need to complete their English and mathematics qualifications.
- New members with additional skills have joined the board to help increase the pace of change. Governors have improved their scrutiny of the quality of provision and now have a good understanding of the key strengths and areas for improvement.
- Since the start of the academic year, governors have access to accurate information and data, using it to monitor the progress and achievement of students and identify areas that require improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding processes and procedures are effective and as a result, students and apprentices are safe and feel safe. Students and apprentices know how and to whom to report any concerns they may have. Managers adopt appropriate staff recruitment practices. All new staff have extensive training in key aspects of health and safety, safeguarding and their responsibility under the 'Prevent' duty. However, leaders do not check that these staff have a sufficient depth of understanding following this training.
- Managers assess the risks to students and apprentices effectively and have detailed processes and procedures which staff to follow.
- Managers responsible for safeguarding have good partnerships with relevant external agencies; they follow up any issues comprehensively and professionally. Investigations following safeguarding referrals are thorough and documented diligently. The security of the college is good and adds to the feeling of safety that students experience.
- Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. All students have an e-safety induction and managers use proprietary software well to monitor and review students' use of the internet.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers set high expectations of teachers which are starting to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. However, they have not taken sufficiently swift action to ensure that teaching across the college is consistently good. In a minority of subject areas, staff shortage inhibits learning and assessment for apprentices and study programme students.
- Despite teachers improving their English and mathematics knowledge, the effectiveness of their teaching requires further improvement. Teachers are now more confident in developing students' English skills but do not always ensure that they have grasped new concepts or can apply them in vocational and everyday circumstances. A minority of students have insufficient guidance to avoid repeating the same grammatical and spelling errors.
- Most teachers do not use the results of students' initial assessment well enough to plan sufficiently challenging learning. The most able students often find learning activities too easy and are not set more difficult tasks to help them achieve their full potential.
- Not all teachers promote diversity well within lessons. Students' appreciation of how diversity applies in their chosen subject or industry is underdeveloped and too few teachers do little to dispel or challenge students' preconceived views about stereotypes. In a minority of subjects, teachers raise awareness of cultural diversity well, for example in performing arts where students performed songs by inspirational black artists.
- The small number of students aged 14 to 16 attend interesting lessons where they develop useful vocational skills to help them progress onto further learning. Teachers use good strategies to motivate these students, carefully balancing theory with activity. One group of students applied their knowledge to identify health problems from photographs of small animals and reptiles in preparation for carrying out health checks on snakes in the next lesson.
- The quality of coaching and tuition given by teachers in practical lessons and workshops is good. Students benefit from highly individualised tuition helping them to develop the skills they need for work. Their teachers help them learn useful technical terminology. In a health and social care lesson, students explained factors behind 'disengagement of older service users in activities' – linking these well to the health and social care code of practice.
- Most teachers use information learning technology well to enliven lessons. They develop interesting learning materials, activities and quizzes which students use frequently in lessons and at home to support their learning. Sports students videoed an activity using role play to demonstrate the components of anaerobic respiration and put it on the virtual learning environment for them and future students to use as a learning resource.
- The majority of students receive good practical help and support. Learning support assistants help students to maintain concentration in lessons. Where appropriate, they use adaptive equipment well, for example in hospitality and catering where a student in a wheelchair made a Spanish omelette using an automatic potato peeler and portable hotplate on an adjustable table.
- For the majority of students, the quality of assessment is effective. Teachers use a broad range of methods and media during assessment. For example, students on the hair and

media make-up course took photographs to record styles from the 1920s they had created.

- Students benefit from useful feedback from their teachers about how they can improve. Students act upon this feedback to improve their grades, performance and quality of work. For example, students evaluate their own work more thoroughly and make precise links between their working methods and health and safety legislation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Students' overall attendance is improving slowly but managers have not yet ensured that it is consistently good; it is not yet meeting the college target and is particularly low in mathematics and English classes. During the inspection, inspectors noted low attendance in the majority of subject areas and apprentices were frequently late for lessons, which disrupts learning and fails to prepare them for employment.
- Students do not develop the English and mathematics skills they will need in the workplace well enough. Too much teaching in English and mathematics requires improvement; as a result, students do not make sufficient progress and this is reflected in their low achievement of GCSE grades A* to C.
- Most students on 16 to 19 study programmes understand the risks associated with radicalisation, extremist activity and what to do if they have any concerns. They know how to stay safe online. Adult students and apprentices are less clear and this requires improvement.
- Students' behaviour on college sites and in the workplace is good. They are self-assured, show respect to each other and to their teachers and take pride in their work. Student ambassadors, and students more broadly, work co-operatively with teachers and managers to secure improvements for all students, for example in the quality, variety and pricing of food in the college.
- The large majority of students benefit from well-planned work experience to meet their individual needs and support their vocational studies. Students understand the world of work and develop good employability skills.
- Careers guidance supports students' career plans and helps their progression. Students benefit from well-organised and impartial careers guidance, embracing advice on employment and training, including apprenticeships, and higher education. The careers team is highly qualified. Their work is complemented by the 'Jobshop', which provides expert support for students wanting advice on employment or to discuss their work experience.
- Curriculum managers ensure that students benefit from good links with employers and the opportunity to attend employment events. Many students maintain good contacts with prospective employers, enabling them to have secured a job or an apprenticeship when they leave college.
- Most students enhance their employability and social skills through a wide range of valuable enrichment activities. For example, catering students have excellent opportunities to participate successfully in national and regional competitions and business students organise community charity events. All students add to their main qualification through the college's online 'Essentials' programme, with certificated

outcomes in relation to life and work skills.

Outcomes for students

Requires improvement

- Although achievement rates are improving, they are not yet good. There is too much variation between curriculum areas, age groups and levels of learning for all students and apprentices. The chances of students achieving well depends on the subjects they are studying. For example, in health and social care, public services and travel and tourism students make good progress and achieve well. In contrast, in construction, engineering and preparation for work and life too many students do not complete and pass their courses. Students working at levels 1 and 2 achieve less well than those studying at level 3 and too few young apprentices achieve within their planned time; adult achievement has declined over the past three years and is low.
- Too few students who retake a GCSE in either mathematics or English achieve a grade C or above. Not enough students working towards a functional skills qualification in mathematics or English are successful, and, in both subjects, there was a marked decline between 2014/15 and 2015/16.
- Leaders and managers have not been successful in reducing achievement gaps for different groups of students. Male students do not achieve as well as females. Students that require additional learning support or receive free meals do not achieve in line with their peers. Managers have recognised why these gaps are not reducing, for example staffing problems in construction and engineering led to male students leaving their studies without achieving.
- Managers have focused on improving and increasing the apprenticeship provision. Overall apprenticeship achievement has improved but remains below the national rate for similar providers. Not enough apprentices complete all qualifications needed for their framework and of those that do, too many do not progress into the role they trained for or to the next level. Too many apprentices fail to complete their frameworks in the planned time frame. In this current academic year, managers are ensuring that more apprentices have remained on their programmes compared to the same point in 2015/16.
- The large majority of students who complete a study programme successfully progress to their next steps in further or higher education, into an apprenticeship or employment.
- Full-time students on level 3 courses achieve well and the majority attain high grades compared to similar providers.
- Pass rates for students on study programmes have increased significantly but retention rates declined further for the third year running. Managers have recognised that rapid intervention was essential and as a result, in the current academic year to date, more students have remained on their courses compared with the same period in 2015/16.
- Students on vocational courses develop the good practical skills they need to progress into relevant employment or further studies.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The college has approximately 3,980 students following vocational study programmes, just under half are taking courses at level 3, a third at level 2 and the remaining students at level 1. The most popular subject areas are construction, engineering, arts and media, health and social care and preparation for life and work.
- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across different subjects, levels and campuses. In too many lessons, teachers do not plan activities well enough to ensure that all students make good progress and understand the topics being taught. Such lessons do not consistently maintain all students' interest and attention, so they become bored and easily distracted.
- Overall achievement for students on study programmes is improving, but remains too low. Students on study programmes fail to improve their skills in English and mathematics relevant to their vocational areas and too few achieve their English and mathematics qualifications. The pace of learning in mathematics is often too slow, with students spending too long repeating basic tasks that do not increase in difficulty to help develop their skills.
- Students' targets do not sufficiently address all aspects of their development. Typically, students' targets relate to the completion of assignments or units of a qualification rather than the skills they need to gain to be successful in their careers and further studies.
- Students develop good practical skills and use industry-relevant language to prepare them for their future careers. They benefit from good-quality, impartial careers advice to help them plan their future careers and progression. As a result, a large majority of students progress to positive destinations that include further and higher education, apprenticeships and employment.
- Teachers use their industry expertise well to make vocational learning interesting and relevant. A plumbing teacher reinforced good customer service skills with a small group of students within the context of repairing a tap properly and to industry standards. The majority of students benefit from work or work experience and teachers make good reference to this, encouraging students to apply learning in a meaningful context.
- Managers have designed the curriculum well to meet the requirements of study programmes. In addition to their main programmes and English and mathematics, students benefit from an extensive range of non-accredited enrichment activities that widen their knowledge and help them to prepare for employment.

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Approximately 980 adult students attend programmes. The majority of students attend access to higher education courses which align well with the south east local enterprise partnership priorities. Managers continue to develop the curriculum to meet the needs of the community. For example, they have designed new courses to attract adults, including a pre-access course to support them to develop their study skills in preparation for the demands of the level 3 course.

- Too few adult students achieve their qualifications; achievement rates are low and declining, particularly for students on preparation for life and work courses. Mathematics and English achievement rates are too low and students are not developing well enough these vital skills for their future careers or progression. Students who request additional support for their mathematics or English skills do not always receive help and advice quickly enough.
- The quality of teaching experienced by adult students is not consistently good. In a minority of access to higher education lessons, teachers do not check students' understanding well enough. Students become frustrated and do not learn sufficiently well when teachers move too quickly onto the next task. Teachers allow the more dominant students to monopolise lessons by allowing them to answer most of the questions and not encouraging other students to participate, which slows their progress. Teachers set homework and independent learning activities which help students to develop good research skills. This is particularly beneficial in helping adult students catch up, should they miss lessons.
- Access to higher education courses raise students' aspirations and prepare them well for their future careers. Most who achieve their qualification progress onto university to study a range of subjects including nursing, social work and politics.
- Managers have been successful in retaining more students this academic year. Students who are at risk of withdrawing from their course are supported well by their teachers who encourage them to use the virtual learning environment to complete assignment work.
- Students benefit from good and prompt feedback on their work which they are able to use well to improve their skills.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- At the time of the inspection, around 800 apprentices were in training. Apprentices are divided evenly between intermediate and advanced levels, with over two-thirds aged 16 to 18 years. Most apprentices take business and administration, retail, engineering or construction courses. The provision meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Managers and staff work well with employers to increase the number of apprenticeships in line with regional, national and local priorities. They align provision well to the needs of employers and local industry. However, achievement rates and the quality of provision varies too much across subject areas. For too many students, staff shortages and absence has resulted in slow progress in learning and assessment.
- Too few apprentices achieve their framework within the planned timeframe. Achievement rates improved in 2015/16 in all subject areas except construction, which declined significantly and was low. A high proportion of hairdressing and information and communication technology apprentices achieved their qualifications on time. However, engineering, business administration and health and social care apprentices' timely achievement rates, along with construction, were too low. Managers improved their tracking systems and are now monitoring the progress of current apprentices better.
- Apprentices do not develop sufficiently good skills in English and mathematics to support their learning and career aims. Teaching in these subjects is not yet good and as a result

too many apprentices fail their mathematics examinations at the first attempt.

- Assessors and teachers do not use the information from apprentices' initial assessment to plan their learning effectively and to develop strategies to ensure that all students progress and achieve to their full potential.
- Apprentices benefit from good-quality on-the-job training which instils high standards of professional behaviour and standards. This helps them gain new skills and take on additional tasks and responsibility at work. However, managers do not ensure that training at college, skills development in the workplace and assessment are sufficiently coordinated to provide challenge or rapid progress for all apprentices.
- Progression to permanent employment and higher-level qualifications for those who successfully achieve is high. However, managers do not gather enough information about apprentices who do not achieve to understand fully why they left or track their destinations. Apprentices approaching the end of their apprenticeship are unsure about their next steps because staff have not given enough attention to discussing this with them, or their employer.

Provision for students with high needs

Requires improvement

- At the time of the inspection, the college was funded to educate 111 students with high needs. Two thirds of these students study on discrete foundation learning programmes and the remaining third are supported on a wide range of study programmes at all levels. Four students are on supported internships.
- The discrete provision for high needs students lacks a focus on developing technical and vocational skills and doesn't prepare students sufficiently to progress to further education, apprenticeships or employment. Teachers place too much emphasis on developing students' English and mathematics knowledge through classroom-based activities at the expense of vocational learning.
- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning. In a minority of lessons, teachers have too little understanding of students' specific needs to teach their group and subject effectively. For example, they do not understand the anxiety that students with autistic spectrum disorder could experience as a result of changing lessons at short notice.
- The majority of teachers establish students' starting points and needs through thorough initial assessment but do not always use these findings sufficiently well to plan lessons that consider and meet individual needs. As a result, students' confidence and their ability to participate are compromised and they lose interest.
- Achievement rates are good. Students with high needs achieve at a higher rate than others. Students at the Maidstone campus are supported through the 'Curriculum +' centre, that provides effective and valued support for students with autistic spectrum disorders. This level of support is not yet good enough at the Medway campus.
- Support for students on mainstream courses is good. They benefit from resources that are of a high standard, including adaptive technology and adjustable furniture.
- Students with high needs benefit from good transitional arrangements which help them settle into college life and their learning programmes well. Staff interpret their needs

effectively, making good use of information in students' education, health and care plans to identify suitable support strategies for students.

- Personal care for students is successful in supporting students with high needs. Where students require access to specialist therapies and support to successfully complete their studies, these are coordinated well by managers.
- Students feel safe in the college; they have a high level of understanding of being safe and can readily discuss issues around e-safety and ensuring that they are safe when using the internet.
- Students' progression to higher levels of study is good, and has improved over previous years.
- Students benefit from an introduction to the world of work through community projects and work experience placements. These placements include working with the Royal British Legion in preparing poppies for sale, enterprise projects within the college and sorting 'shoe box' gifts to ship to Romania. However, students do not understand how these arrangements can lead to work experience opportunities or prepare them for employment.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130726
Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of students	16–18, 19+
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	6,297
Principal/CEO	Simon Cook
Telephone number	01634 383568
Website	www.midkent.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+
	807	137	1,466	502	1,589	435	4	23
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	280	153	220	143	1	1		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of students aged 14 to 16	538 – school partnership links							
Number of students for which the provider receives high-needs funding	111							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency, Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Carillion Construction Ltd CXK Ltd Maidstone United Football Club Medway Youth Trust							

Information about this inspection

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

Inspection team

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