

Milton Keynes College

General further education college

Inspection dates

23–26 May 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders, managers and governors have made rapid progress in building a culture of continual improvement with determination. They have communicated this very successfully to staff and, as a result, staff across the college are enthusiastic and apply the improvement strategies effectively to their work.
- Leaders and managers have invested extensively in improving the standards of teaching and learning so that most students make good progress.
- Students benefit from imaginative, well-structured and interesting lessons that motivate them to succeed in their qualifications.
- Students and apprentices behave well, are respectful to each other and their teachers, are confident and develop good skills to prepare them for progression or employment.
- Managers have created a safe and inclusive environment for students to learn. Staff have been very effective in ensuring that students and apprentices know how to protect themselves and others against the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Apprentices make good progress from their starting points, gain valuable skills that their employers appreciate and the majority achieve their qualifications within the planned time.
- Leaders and managers maintain good partnerships with local and regional employers, schools and community leaders, aligning the curriculum well to local priorities and skills needs.
- The vast majority of students and apprentices aged 16 to 18 who complete their programmes successfully progress to an apprenticeship, employment or the next level of study, including to higher education.
- Leaders and managers use accurate and reliable data to monitor the quality of provision and identify areas of poor performance effectively.
- Students' achievement of GCSE mathematics at grades A* to C remains too low.
- A small minority of teachers do not plan effectively to make sure that students that are more able receive sufficient challenge and make good or better progress.
- Students' attendance has improved but is not yet good in a few subject areas.
- Not all students benefit from high-quality external work placements or internships to improve their skills for employment.
- Students are not developing their English skills well enough to prepare them for employment or progression in education.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Milton Keynes College is a medium-sized general further education college located on three campuses in central Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes includes large areas of social and economic deprivation and smaller areas of prosperity.
- In 2015/16, the proportion of pupils at schools in Milton Keynes that achieved five GCSEs grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was slightly below the national rates but particularly low compared to the regional rates. Unemployment in the area is higher than regional averages but lower than national averages.
- The college provides a wide range of post-16 education and training, including 16 to 19 study programmes in a variety of vocational areas, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships. At the time of the inspection, approximately 6,000 students and apprentices were enrolled at the college.
- The college holds contracts for the provision of education and training for prisoners and offenders in custody, which were not in scope for this inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should continue to implement their well-conceived strategies to further improve the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications.
- Managers should ensure that more students and apprentices are able to improve their skills in English and mathematics and achieve their GCSE qualifications, in line with their specific targets.
- Leaders and managers should further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the small minority of lessons where students make insufficiently rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide sufficient challenge to the most able students, so that they make good progress and achieve or exceed their target grades
 - all students and apprentices are set aspirational targets, taking into account their starting points.
- Managers should continue to increase opportunities for external work experience placements for vocational students, particularly for those at level 2, so that they are able to learn about and experience work in their vocational area. This should include increasing the number of supported internships for students in receipt of high-needs funding.
- Managers should take effective steps to ensure that students' attendance improves further, across all subjects, to increase their opportunities to make good progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors have dealt effectively with almost all of the areas for improvement at the previous inspection. The pace of improvement has been significant over the last 18 months, with the appointment of new staff and governors and a redistribution of responsibilities and accountabilities. Staff understand and support the leadership team's priorities and aspirations for the college and its students. The extensive improvement actions and strategic restructuring of teams have not yet resulted in all the recommendations from the previous inspection being implemented fully. For example, a small minority of staff do not challenge the most able students to achieve their potential sufficiently.
- Leaders use their strategic links with the local enterprise partnership well to align the curriculum to business priorities, develop new provision and raise the profile of apprenticeships. Employers value their links with the college and its role in supporting the surrounding community. Their experience of students on work placement is overwhelmingly positive; they are impressed with the quality and the improved organisation of placements.
- The college has a good reputation among members of the local business community and in the local authority for its contribution to the city's inward investment strategy. Managers are regarded as particularly responsive in meeting businesses' needs, such as recruiting new apprentices or providing training to increase the skills of existing workers.
- Managers continually review the curriculum offer to support students' progression. For example, they have introduced a new entry route to help increase the number of students wishing to progress to higher education. Managers work effectively with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged students are met and that they have the opportunity to engage in education and improve their prospects, which many do.
- Managers have an accurate understanding of the quality of the teaching in their areas of responsibility and recognise the strengths and most areas for improvement. Leaders have established thorough arrangements to support teachers to improve their teaching. Evaluations of the quality of teaching are based on a broad range of evidence, including lesson observations, students' progress and attainment. College business support staff accompany managers in selected observations so that they understand how their role contributes to the work of teachers. Evaluations lead to targeted coaching and mentoring and professional development events. Where teachers do not respond well enough to developmental support, underperformance is tackled rigorously. Leaders and managers have high expectations of their staff and for students.
- Managers know their students well and are held stringently to account for the progress they are making in monthly performance boards, where they monitor the quality of the provision.
- Self-assessment leads to quality improvement planning that accurately identifies specific themes. These themes translate into detailed action plans and targets for individual managers and teachers as part of the appraisal process. The judgements in the most recent are broadly in line with inspectors' findings.

The governance of the provider

- Governance has been refreshed with the addition of experienced educational leaders who provide strong support alongside informed challenge and scrutiny to hold managers to account. They know the college well because they have regular, informative and accurate reports on students' attendance and progress. They verify reports with their own learning walks, student focus groups and detailed scrutiny of achievement rates.
- Governors have set a clear strategy for improvement. They recognise that improvement was too slow until 18 months ago but that it is now more rapid.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders regularly update policies and procedures to meet statutory requirements. All staff undergo regular training to ensure that they are familiar with the risks to children and young people and know how to respond to safeguarding concerns.
- Staff fully understand their role in helping students to protect themselves against the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Members of the local 'Prevent' partnership share the college's policies and frameworks to support other organisations to respond to the duty. Staff training is well structured and offered to other organisations on an in-fill basis. Links with regional police and other agencies are effective and used well to seek advice and make referrals where necessary.
- The college's strong culture of safeguarding is exemplified by how swiftly and appropriately staff reacted to concerns raised by two students about potential extremist behaviour in the week following the Manchester bombing.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Students benefit from imaginative, well-structured and interesting lessons; they enjoy their learning and consequently most make at least the progress expected of them.
- The large majority of students and apprentices develop high-level practical and work-related skills as teachers apply their current experience in well-planned, industry-related learning activities. Consequently, students explore employment opportunities and practise the skills that local employers require in high-quality, commercial beauty and hair salons, specialist confectionery kitchens, an award-winning restaurant and well-equipped engineering and construction workshops.
- Teachers and learning support staff use their thorough understanding of each student's individual learning requirements well and plan successful learning strategies that result in most students gaining confidence and making good progress and achieving in line with their peers. Students with high needs benefit from well-planned learning activities that build on their previous learning and skills.
- Teachers use the virtual learning environment very well to set learning and assessment activities, resulting in the large majority of students working independently outside of lessons, enabling them to make good progress and improve their information technology skills.

- Teachers make good use of recent significant investments in the college’s virtual learning environment and apps. They develop students’ digital skills well. For example, students on business courses work together and share ideas on various group-work activities online in their own time. Consequently, students are able to continue working together outside of lessons and improve the quality of their work. Students benefit from a wide range of industry-specific software and use it confidently in their learning. As a result, they develop the specific digital skills required to successfully progress to their chosen careers in games development, creative media, the arts, music and engineering.
- A significant proportion of employers work closely with teachers and assessors to plan curriculums and assessments that link directly to their current working standards. As a result, students and apprentices develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours employers need and improve their chances of securing employment. For example, a catering company specialising in confectionery and patisseries has helped to develop a new curriculum pathway. They provide very high-quality learning resources, resulting in successful students securing employment during and on completion of their course.
- Teachers and managers create a positive and harmonious environment where all staff and students respect each other and work together very well. In sessions, teachers and assessors actively promote and include topics that develop students’ broad understanding of British values. As a result, students behave very well, support each other and are quick to tackle discriminative behaviour.
- Teachers and managers ensure that assessments are well planned so that students and apprentices are able to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding. Students and apprentices receive clear and constructive feedback on their assessments that helps them to reflect on their learning and identify how they might improve their work further. Mechanisms to monitor students’ progress are often helpful and provide students, their parents and employers with detailed information about their progress and future actions. Teachers monitor students’ progress well. However, students’ and apprentices’ targets are not always sufficiently challenging to ensure that they achieve the level of which they are capable.
- During learning activities, teachers question students skilfully and provide them with opportunities to reflect on their answers with peers. Consequently, students arrive at their own conclusions and deepen their understanding. However, in a small minority of lessons, students undertake less challenging activities and do not develop their English skills well enough nor the analytical skills required to achieve high grades.
- Despite vocational teachers improving their English and mathematics teaching skills, the effectiveness of their teaching requires further improvement to ensure that students can apply new concepts in vocational and everyday circumstances.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students and apprentices behave well across the college and in the workplace. They are respectful to each other and their teachers, work well together, are polite and the vast majority are eager to learn.
- All students benefit from work-related learning, and the large majority of students improve their skills by attending high-quality, well-designed external work experience.

For example, business students work at a branch of a world-leading accountancy firm. A small minority of students who are not yet ready or able to undertake external work experience benefit from internal work opportunities and other activities, such as designing apps, testing software and fulfilling work commissions from employers.

- Students and apprentices know how to stay safe and who to contact if they have any concerns about safety. They have a good practical understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The extensive tutorial programme and good online resources help them to understand how these issues relate to their lives and give them the opportunity to discuss them in depth.
- The large majority of students and apprentices take pride in their work and can talk positively about the skills that they are developing. Because of their learning, they become more confident, self-assured and ready for employment. For example, catering and hospitality students played a substantial part in preparing for, cooking and serving the food for the prestigious 'Students of the Year' awards at nearby Woburn Abbey. They acted in a professional manner, displaying pride in their work and confidence in their abilities.
- Students and apprentices receive good support and impartial careers guidance which help them make well-informed decisions about their next steps. A very large proportion progress to higher levels of learning or training, with a high proportion of level 3 students progressing to university.
- Enrichment programmes provide a wide range of opportunities for students to further develop their learning, increase their work-related skills and develop their social and personal well-being. For example, students following early years programmes complete a paediatric first aid qualification.
- Students and apprentices know how to keep themselves fit and healthy, both physically and emotionally. They learn about this in well-designed tutorial activities. The Milton Keynes Leadership Academy encourages staff and students at the college to get involved in fitness programmes. For example, partnerships with the Lawn Tennis Association enable the college to put on tennis sessions, which particularly encourage those with disabilities, different ethnicities and less active students to get involved. Football and volleyball sessions effectively integrate asylum seekers with other students in the college.
- Students' overall attendance has improved compared to the same time last year, but is still not consistently good. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons has improved in the current year and attendance in English lessons is now higher than other lessons. Students' and apprentices' punctuality is good.
- Teachers support students well to develop their skills in mathematics, but the development of their English skills needs to improve further to prepare them for employment. Assessors do not provide enough guidance on how apprentices can improve their English, nor do they encourage apprentices to practise and develop their English skills in the workplace.

Outcomes for students

Good

- The progress that current students are making is good. They are gaining new skills for work and achievement rates in the current year have improved. For example, English for

speakers of other languages (ESOL) students' achievement for those aged 16 to 18 has increased significantly and is now higher than similar providers nationally.

- Leaders and managers have worked effectively to bring about improvement in students' achievements, with a relentless focus on improving the standards of teaching, learning and assessment and consequently students' progress.
- The proportion of apprentices who are on target to achieve their apprenticeships in the planned time within the current year has increased and is now good. Leaders and managers have tackled the causes of apprentices' poor achievement, and apprentices are now supported well, gaining new skills and valued by their employers.
- The improvement for students studying English and mathematics has been rapid this year. Students' achievement in this academic year for functional skills in English and mathematics has significantly improved and is now higher than similar providers nationally.
- Managers recognised that in 2015/16 too few adult students who retook a GCSE in either mathematics or English achieved a grade C or above and too few 16 to 18 students achieved A* to C in English. Managers have restructured the teams so that specialist English and mathematics teachers work closely with vocational colleagues. A new head of English and mathematics and six learning coaches have been appointed to support teachers in the classroom and to ensure that students achieve the best they possibly can. Inspectors noted improvement, but it is too early to judge the full impact of these changes.
- Adult students' achievement has improved in this current year and is higher than that of similar providers nationally. Students studying distance courses and access to higher education programmes achieve particularly well and most progress to university.
- Students' progression is a particular strength. The vast majority of students who complete a study programme successfully progress to their next steps in further or higher education, or into an apprenticeship or employment.
- Students with high needs achieve well, often making better progress than their peers. In addition, a very high proportion progress to positive destinations in further education, training or employment. Students benefit from good support in the classroom to assist with their learning and help them develop their independence.
- College managers and leaders closely monitor the performance of different groups of students. They recognise and quickly deal with any gaps in achievement. As a result all groups of students are making good progress.
- Managers' actions to improve achievement and progress are taking longer to have an impact in a small minority of subjects and, as a result, students do not yet make the progress expected of them, such as in motor vehicle, construction and public services.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The 2,000 students on study programmes account for around a third of all students at the college. They enrol on a broad range of vocational and academic courses at levels 1 to 3,

with approximately half of the students studying at level 3. A small number of students are enrolled on AS- and A-level courses, but these will close at the end of the next academic year. The most popular subject areas are arts and media and health and care.

- Managers, teachers and tutors have introduced a range of well-considered and thoughtful strategies to improve performance. They have high expectations for students and, as a result, the vast majority of students make good progress and demonstrate good levels of skills.
- Standards of work are high. Teachers plan lessons well to take account of students' starting points, and consequently the large majority make good progress with many entry-level students completing their formal qualifications early and then continuing to extend and build their skills.
- Students benefit from well-managed, industry-standard resources. Teachers use their current industry experience well to enhance students' work-related experiences. For example, construction students develop good practical skills as well as their mathematical and English skills through an innovative project where they have designed and are building an 'English and maths bungalow'.
- Study programmes are well planned to meet the needs and interests of students. Students benefit from opportunities to enrich their learning and prepare well for their future study or careers. For example, students on sports programmes participated with professional teams at the London Marathon, developing a first-hand understanding of post-exercise massage, and performance students were enthused by an innovative project working with the National Youth Theatre on a production of 'Extremism', which they adapted and performed at a local theatre.
- The large majority of students benefit from high-quality work experience placements, particularly at advanced levels of study. Students speak eloquently about how their placements allow them to enhance their practical skills as well as increase their confidence in the workplace. Managers need to ensure that students across all curriculum areas benefit from relevant and meaningful work-related learning.
- In most lessons, teachers support individual students well, using an effective range of methods to check their progress. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not challenge students who are more able sufficiently well and, as a result, these students do not always achieve their potential or gain the high grades they are capable of.
- Most students are on target to achieve their qualification at or above their predicted grade, but for a significant minority of students their target grade is too low considering their starting points, and they are working at a lower level than they are capable of.
- Teachers do not develop students' English skills well enough in vocational lessons so that they can improve their written work to develop essential skills for employment and progression in education.

Adult learning programmes

Good

- The college has approximately 4,000 students on adult learning programmes studying full and part time. Managers work effectively with partners and agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, to ensure that the needs of students and employers are met. Provision includes access to higher education, ESOL, adult basic skills, sector-based work academies and

programmes to prepare adults for employment. The latter is developed in conjunction with employers and other stakeholders.

- A large number of students study by distance learning and their tutors support them well. The very large majority of distance-learning students achieve their qualification and progress into employment or improve their performance within their current job role.
- Teachers on access to higher education programmes provide students with very detailed, precise and helpful written feedback on assessed work. This helps students develop advanced analytical skills and prepares them well for their next steps. The very large majority of these students progress to university.
- Adult students receive good information, advice and guidance that help them study at the appropriate level and guide them to their next steps in further study or into employment. For example, teachers on access to higher education programmes work with individual students on specific details within their assignments to help them prepare for university.
- The large majority of teachers in ESOL and adult basic skills work enthusiastically in lessons and set challenging targets for their students, who respond accordingly, with the majority progressing well. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not always meet the needs of the more able students and, as a result, these students do not progress as well as they could.
- Students' standard of work on the very large majority of courses is high. A small minority of adults work alongside full-time students in the college to gain the knowledge and skills they need to improve their employment prospects. The standard of their work is more variable and, in a small minority of cases, is below the standard expected.

Apprenticeships

Good

- At the time of the inspection, around 400 apprentices were in training. Apprentices are divided evenly between intermediate and advanced levels, with one apprentice on a higher-level apprenticeship. The majority undertake programmes in engineering and manufacturing technologies, business administration, hairdressing or sport. Subcontractors train 87 apprentices.
- Apprentices benefit from good support and guidance from trainers and employers, who use their extensive industrial experience to work closely together and ensure that programmes match apprentices' workplace needs and aspirations. Apprenticeships fully meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Staff, apprentices and employers make good use of online tracking systems to monitor performance and progress. Leaders and managers also conduct monthly progress review meetings that ensure effective actions are in place to support those making slower progress. The very large majority of current apprentices are making at least the progress expected of them.
- Apprentices' vocational skills are well developed. Trainers and teachers use their good sector knowledge to check, develop and extend apprentices' practical skills, knowledge and understanding. Employers value these skills and the roles that apprentices perform in the workplace. Most apprentices can relate their learning well with on-the-job activities and use technical language suitably. For instance, engineering apprentices, manufacturing vehicle lighting systems, have a clear understanding of injection moulding and the

complexities of mould design and can relate this to learning that has been completed off-the-job.

- Apprentices enjoy their work and studies. They gain in confidence and are extremely proud of the standard of their work. Hairdressing apprentices work confidently with clients in well-resourced salons and maintain the high standards required to ensure that clients return for more treatments on a regular basis. Feedback on apprentices' written work, in most cases, helps them to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Assessment is well planned, challenging and rigorous. Employers ensure that assessment opportunities are organised and available to suit the needs of the apprentice.
- Apprentices receive good advice and guidance during induction on the expectations of an apprenticeship. Most receive good advice on their possible next steps and, in a few cases, take functional skills qualifications higher than required for their apprenticeship. The majority of apprentices progress to positions of responsibility in the workplace, supervising others and in some cases training the next generation of apprentices.
- Trainers do not provide sufficient guidance on how apprentices can improve their English skills in the workplace. Too few trainers identify poor spelling, punctuation or grammar and, as a result, apprentices continue to make errors in assessed materials.

Provision for students with high needs

Good

- The college receives funding for 110 students with high needs. Leaders and managers have ensured that these students have access to and enjoy a range of learning activities, which enable them to develop their academic and vocational skills, English and mathematics and their personal, social and employability skills. Students enjoy a range of courses and practical activities such as animal care, catering, hospitality and supported internships, which challenge them to improve their skills and knowledge and help them develop their personal, communication and social skills.
- Students benefit from effective partnerships with schools, community providers, local authorities and businesses. Managers focus well on meeting the demand for high-needs provision and support for employment in the local area. They work in conjunction with partners to ensure that the needs of students are met while at the college and for their future study and work.
- Students with high needs receive comprehensive information, advice and guidance, which helps them make informed choices about their next steps.
- Arrangements to manage the transition of students from school to college are detailed and effective. Students benefit from visits, taster sessions and placements before they join. This enables teachers and support staff to fully identify students' needs and place them on the most appropriate course with the correct level of support. Students gain further benefit from individual guidance throughout their courses, which supports them and their families well in planning their next steps.
- Teachers plan the large majority of lessons well to meet students' individual needs. Teachers set students individualised targets for their English and mathematics skills and personal development. Students understand the progress they are making towards their targets and are proud of their achievements.


- Students benefit from well-considered support that enables them to succeed in their learning. The college support team has a good range of specialist support skills, including for autistic spectrum disorder, speech and language difficulties, mental health and well-being and therapy. Students with high needs are integrated into vocational and A-level provision very well. They receive individualised support and the vast majority make good progress, often exceeding their target grades.
- Students gain and practise their work-related skills well. Students enjoy and participate in a range of structured activities and events at the college which help them to develop their communication and work-related skills, such as operating the college shop, providing a flower delivery service and working in the Brasserie. A small number of students have secured high-quality, supported internships with local hotels and companies.
- Students work productively together, often providing support for each other, and are developing a good understanding of British values in their lessons.
- Students' progress against their qualification is recorded well within the college's visual and electronic systems. However, students' achievements towards personal goals are not routinely recorded in their education, health and care plans or fully shared at reviews so that the achievements they are making are fully understood.
- Resources do not always fully support all practical activities. For a minority of sessions, such as animal care, resources do not emulate industry standard and students do not have the opportunity to develop their skills in a high-quality environment.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130609
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	8,230
Principal/CEO	Dr Julie Mills
Telephone number	01908 684444
Website	www.mkcollege.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+
Total number of students (excluding apprenticeships)	364	944	966	1,602	1,129	1,072	0	276
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	164	136	88	91	0	1		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of students aged 14 to 16	44 school partnership links							
Number of students for which the provider receives high-needs funding	110							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	New Generation Training and Consultancy Limited Milton Keynes Dons Football Club Sports and Education Trust Limm Skills Academy Limited London Churchill College Limited Vista Training Solutions Synergy Music Limited (Herts College of Music) ARTS1							

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5E Limited
Learning Curve (JAA) Limited
UKCC (NCT Skills)
Talent Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection 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. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Kate Hill, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Gadfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Keith Boulnois	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector
Stefan Fusenich	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Monaghan	Ofsted Inspector
Lynne Plested	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Fitt	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Deane	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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