

Tech City College

16–19 academy free school

Inspection dates

10–12 May 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		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Inadequate	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not yet secured sufficient and sustained improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for learners.
- Leaders' and managers' evaluation of the college's performance, although detailed, is often overly descriptive, and quality improvement plans are insufficiently linked to all key areas for improvement.
- Students' achievements are improving, but they are not consistently good and vary too much across subjects.
- Too many students still make insufficient progress on their courses, especially at A level, and the proportion of high grades they achieve continues to be too low.
- The proportion of students who achieve grades A*–C in GCSE mathematics has declined, and was very low in 2015/16.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good enough across the different subject areas.
- In lessons, teachers do not provide students with sufficiently challenging tasks to enable them to make good progress and to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

The provider has the following strengths

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have successfully moved the college from an inadequate position, and are working effectively to embed consistently effective quality improvement measures to raise standards.
- Managers and teachers are improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners.
- Students' behaviour is good and they are respectful of their peers and teachers.
- The proportion of students who go on to higher education is high.
- Over the present academic year, the further development of students' skills in English and mathematics in lessons has improved significantly, and is now good.
- Leaders and managers have successfully further developed an excellent range of partnerships with local and national employers, helping to shape the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of students and employers.
- Leaders and managers have established innovative and highly effective approaches to developing the employability skills of students.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Tech City College joined Aspirations Academies Trust in September 2015. At that time, the chief executive of the trust, along with the current principal and a newly appointed governing body, took over the leadership of the college.
- Tech City College's sole campus is in the London Borough of Islington, and most students are drawn from the borough and nearby surrounding boroughs.
- Students are on level 3 study programmes, mainly studying for A levels, but with a minority studying for level 3 vocational qualifications. The curriculum is predominantly focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- The local economy is increasingly vibrant and buoyant, with significant positive impact upon employment and business opportunities from increased investment, including many substantial construction projects. About three quarters of the local population come from minority ethnic heritages and this is reflected in the make-up of the student body.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Governors, leaders and managers must ensure that their productive actions taken so far to promote recovery now secure sustained and consistent improvements to teaching, learning and assessment, outcomes for learners, and the progress that students make, leading to good, or better, performance on all courses.
- To best promote this improvement, leaders and managers need to ensure that their self-evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement is comprehensive and precise in its judgements and in the actions identified for quality improvement.
- To maximise improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, managers must ensure that individual teachers' action plans for improvement, following lesson observations, carefully describe how the craft of teaching should, and can, be improved, and provide a record of the extent of improvement.
- Continue to raise the standards of teaching, learning and assessment, and improve students' progress, by ensuring that teachers:
 - are fully equipped with the skills they need to plan, and teach, lessons matched to the different needs of all students, including the most able and weaker students
 - make better use of the results of students' progress monitoring to plan suitable interventions to ensure that students falling behind make better progress and reach their target grade
 - develop further the range and effectiveness of strategies they use in lessons to deepen students' understanding of topics taught
 - learn from the good practice often evident in the teaching and learning of English and mathematics.
- Improve students' achievement of grades A*–C in GCSE mathematics, by the relentless use of the best practice in higher performing areas.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have worked hard and effectively to help the college recover from its legacy of inadequacy, and successfully to ensure the associated transfer of governance arrangements.
- Leaders and managers have not yet ensured that teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners are good. They have put in place the foundations to secure this, and implemented a comprehensive programme of training for teachers, but a consistently positive impact from this work is not yet fully evident.
- Leaders' and managers' self-evaluation of the college's performance correctly recognises the significant progress that they have made since the previous inspection. However, in detailing a wide range of sources of information, it is often overly descriptive, and insufficiently quantifies the real extent of impact of the quality improvement actions taken. The development plan for 2016/17 accompanies the self-evaluation, but does not address all areas for improvement needed, and is insufficiently rigorous.
- One essential part of quality improvement arrangements, the college's observation scheme for assessing the quality of its teaching and learning, requires improvement. Leaders and managers do follow up on identified areas for improvement, but detailed action plans to guide improvement are too often absent, hindering maximum progress.
- The principal, governors and senior leaders have a clear strategic vision for the college and high ambitions for students, creating an employment-focused culture. All staff, including leaders, know students well and encourage them to achieve well, promoting their progress to further studies and employment. Managers monitor any performance gaps of different groups of students carefully and take appropriate action where required.
- Improved management actions have ensured that teachers are now well qualified, and have good technical skills, and that students have good-quality accommodation and resources.
- Leaders and managers have continued to develop the college's strong and productive partnerships with local and national employers. Staff listen carefully to employers to ensure that the curriculum meets their particular needs, and employers comment positively on the skills of students. In contrast to the previous inspection, study programmes are now managed well and meet programme requirements.
- Courses are well structured to enable students to progress to an apprenticeship or employment, or to higher education. Very effective links with employers make a positive and valuable contribution to college life and ensure that students develop appropriate employability skills through the use of very relevant employment-related projects.
- The performance management of teachers and managers is increasingly rigorous, enabling teaching and learning, since the previous inspection, to have improved from inadequate to requires improvement. Staff have clear targets, of which they are aware, and know what they need to do to achieve these.
- The college is a welcoming environment with an inclusive and tolerant culture. Students are respectful to their teachers and peers and are prepared well for living in a diverse society.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a clear strategic vision for the college and have high ambitions for students. They have been successful in initiating improvements since the previous inspection and have a thorough understanding of the strengths of the provision and what needs to be done to further improve.
- Governors skilfully shape the strategic direction of the college, taking into account the wider work of the parent Aspirations Academies Trust, and provide robust scrutiny and challenge to the principal through the district board. Governors have a diverse range of specialisms and bring a wealth of experience to the board, which they use well.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Appropriate checks on staff are in place, including ensuring the validity of references. Staff undertake assessments of risk and checks on visiting speakers, for work experience and for external visits, to ensure that students are safe. All staff have received training on safeguarding students, including for the 'Prevent' duty.
- Staff monitor safeguarding referrals effectively. They maintain strong links with local multi-agency groups to provide students with the help they need. For example, Alone in London provides counselling support to students.
- Staff and learners receive training in the 'Prevent' duty, which has been effective in raising awareness of the issues involved. Most learners have an appropriate understanding of the risk posed by extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good enough across the different subjects and curriculum areas, and does not ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable.
- In the significant amount of weaker teaching and learning, teachers do not effectively plan classroom-based activities that enable students to maximise their learning and progress. Teachers provide them with insufficient opportunities to extend and to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the subjects taught.
- Teachers take insufficient account of the prior knowledge and ability of students, including those who have specifically identified support needs. Too often, students work at the same pace and level, on the same activities, using the same learning resources, and the most able students finish quickly, and have to wait until others catch up.
- Students who understand topics at a slower pace get left behind in the tasks in lessons, do not always fully develop their understanding of key learning and do not have sufficient opportunities to reinforce their learning, affecting their progress adversely.

- Leaders and managers have now resolved the staffing issues noted at the previous

inspection in 2015/16, but the legacy of the time lost has had a negative impact on second-year students. Students in a number of subject areas, for example in computer science, have needed to catch up on work and assessments that they did not complete in their first year, slowing their learning and progress in 2016/17.

- Leaders and managers have implemented an effective process for assessing and monitoring the individual progress of students, which the majority of teachers use. Students are clear about their target grades and progress, and teachers and managers have an accurate indication of progress during the year. While many students are on track to meet their identified targets, a significant minority are currently below their expected progress and identified targets, and staff interventions have not yet enabled all students to catch up.
- Too many lessons are less effective because not all subject areas have resources available for students on the college's virtual learning environment which would help in their learning. It is being replaced and currently its use is restricted. Individual teachers provide students with access to online learning resources and make good use of email and social media to promote teaching and learning.
- The majority of teachers teach well-structured lessons, making good use of interesting activities which promote learning well; they also regularly check individual learning and progress. With students' examinations due soon, inspectors noted some examples of very well-planned revision sessions, where teachers relate students' work directly to their specific individual areas where improvement is needed, enabling students to target their revision and to maximise its impact.
- Students who need extra help to achieve benefit from good support. At the start of the year, teachers accurately identify students' starting points and any with specific support needs they may have. Teachers carefully monitor and track the progress of students who receive additional support, and liaison with parents and carers is good.
- In the majority of subjects, teachers carefully mark students' work and provide feedback that enables students to be clear about how they can improve their work and grades, but the quality and precision of feedback vary too much across subjects.
- The further development of students' skills in English and mathematics is now good. For example, in mathematics, they develop a good understanding of technical language and of the requirements of the language used in examination questions. Most students develop their speaking and listening and presentation skills well.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well in lessons. For example, in economics, students challenged stereotypical views in relation to pay gaps and considered wealth equality and inequality; in mathematics, students discussed issues around appropriate dress codes for female professionals.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students come to their lessons ready, keen and prepared to learn. Attendance levels are high and students are punctual. Leaders, managers and teachers have put in place effective systems to support good behaviour, attendance and punctuality, and students recognise the importance of these characteristics.
- Students are polite and well behaved around the college and in lessons. They are

respectful of their peers and teachers and speak highly of the sense of community among students in the college. In lessons, students listen respectfully to the views of others, while also being prepared to challenge and debate.

- The college's work with Bathtub2Boardroom is a highly effective, innovative approach to providing work experience and work-related activities, supporting students' employability. This charity, supporting small- to medium-scale start-up companies, has had a base in the college since October 2016. These activities develop a wide range of employability and entrepreneurial skills among students. Students value these opportunities, which support their personal development and broaden their perspectives on future options.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that a significant majority of students now have external work experience or work-related activities, enhancing their employability. Some activities are directly related to their studies or future aspirations and others provide broader, but still valuable, opportunities. Communication, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and broader teamworking skills are well developed during projects, in activities in registration and in assemblies. Students benefit from a good range of enrichment activities, including a student parliament, debating society, film club, fitness activities and theatre visits.
- In positive contrast to the previous inspection, managers ensure that students without at least a grade C in English or mathematics study these subjects in line with the requirements for study programmes. Literacy support is in place both for GCSE students and others identified as needing this.
- Students are clear on their plans for their next steps. The college has adapted individual study programmes where needed if students are unsuccessful on initial courses. Students have good support in their university applications through talks, careers fairs and information on the application processes. Students also benefit from help with personal statements. The college has effective partnership arrangements to provide individual careers guidance, though some students spoken to were unaware of this opportunity.
- Tutorials support students effectively in preparing for life beyond college. Current news issues are discussed on a planned and regular basis, which helps to develop students' understanding of their roles as citizens and their understanding of political, social and moral issues. For example, students discussed the importance of voting and registering to vote and explored the issue of the age difference between the French President and his wife.
- Students feel very safe in college. The small numbers of staff and students at Tech City College mean that students know everyone and there is a sense of community among students. Safeguarding issues are covered effectively within the tutorial programme, where students learn to keep themselves safe, for example from radicalisation and cyber bullying.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, when outcomes for learners were inadequate, the proportion of students successfully completing their courses increased markedly in 2015/16, but still requires further improvement, with low achievement on too many courses.
- In 2015/16, achievement was high for AS-level further mathematics, for A-level further mathematics, English literature, economics and biology, and for the extended diploma in applied science. It fell from 2014/15 levels, and was particularly low, in AS-level mathematics, which had the second largest number of students for any subject, for the 90-credit diploma in IT, the extended diploma in IT and the 90-credit diploma in engineering.
- As at the previous inspection, value-added measures, based upon students' prior attainment, show that too many students do not make the progress expected of them. On this measure, for AS- and A-level students, progress is poor overall, and for A-level biology, chemistry, mathematics and physics, it worsened in 2015/16. In contrast, students on the extended diplomas in applied science and engineering, and on the 90-credit diplomas in engineering and IT make good, or better, progress.
- In the current year, the college's own measures of students' progress, which are useful to identify trends, show some better progress, but also that significant numbers of students are not meeting their target grades. Furthermore, too many students do not make sufficient progress in their lessons.
- The marked variation in progress by students is reflected in the very low overall proportion of AS- and A-level students achieving grades A*–C in their examinations, which fell to a low level in 2015/16. A significantly increasing proportion of students on vocational courses achieve high grades on their diplomas and extended diplomas.
- Students often enjoy their studies and work well towards industry standards. However, the standard of students' work is not consistently good or better. For example, while standards are high in mathematics, they are too mixed in engineering, and poor in computing.
- Student retention on courses is good, and has improved well over the last two years, together with attendance. Lower achievement is largely caused by poor pass rates. Student retention during the current academic year, at the time of inspection, was high.
- The differences in the performance of male and female students, noted at the previous inspection, have now been removed and there are no other significant differences in achievement.
- In 2015/16, of the students who re-took GCSE English, the proportion who achieved grades A*–C is high. However, for GCSE mathematics, it was very low.
- The proportion of students who progress to higher education following their studies is high, with a minority going to Russell Group universities. A small, but increasing number of students become apprentices.

Provider details

Unique reference number	139793
Type of provider	16–19 academy free school
Age range of learners	16 to 18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	237
Principal	Nasrin Farahani
Telephone number	020 3301 3620
Website	www.techcity-aspirations.org

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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	0	0	0	0	76	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Education 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 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 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

David Martin, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steven Lambert	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathleen Tyler	Ofsted Inspector
Jill Arnold	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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