

# Inspection of Peter Symonds College

Inspection dates: 14–17 January 2020

## **Overall effectiveness** **Outstanding**

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The quality of education	<b>Outstanding</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Outstanding</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	<b>Outstanding</b>

## **Information about this provider**

Peter Symonds College is a sixth-form college in Winchester, Hampshire. Students come to the college from across the county. At the time of the inspection, there were around 4,200 students studying full-time education programmes for young people. Ten students attract high needs funding. The college provides a wide range of A levels. The largest subjects are mathematics, art and design, biology, psychology, chemistry and physics. The vast majority of students study A-level courses, with a smaller number studying vocational courses at levels 2 and 3. The college offers a range of adult learning programmes, with 61 students studying an access to higher education course. There are currently 55 apprentices, all aged 19 or over, on level 3 frameworks in supporting teaching and learning in schools and children and young people's workforce.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Most students achieve high grades in their A levels. They are very well prepared for their aspirational next steps to prestigious universities, where they pursue their studies in their chosen careers.

Students are exceptionally mature and well behaved. They are confident and polite, and respect their teachers and each other.

Students are highly motivated and keen to learn. They arrive at classes with their workbooks and the right equipment, ready to study. These exemplary attitudes prepare them very well for their further study and future careers.

Students have very high aspirations and want to excel. A-level students embrace the need to do homework that develops their independent learning skills and reinforces what they have been taught in classrooms.

The purposeful and orderly environment in the college is highly valued by students. They benefit from excellent facilities and resources, such as the well-stocked learning resource centre, where they spend many hours pursuing their independent studies.

Students' participation on enrichment activities develops their sense of social justice and their roles as active citizens. Many students broaden their understanding of other cultures through study trips abroad.

Adult learners on access to higher education programmes appreciate the way that teachers plan flexible timetables that enable them to combine their studies with busy lifestyles. They produce work of a very high standard, and as a result nearly all move on to university to study their chosen subject.

Apprentices gain the knowledge and skills they need to work successfully in supporting teaching and learning in schools. For example, they use up-to-date theories and legislation to support them in working with varied age groups of children.

The small number of students with high needs develop the confidence and resilience to enable them to become more independent. As a result, they are as well prepared for progression to university or work as their peers.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders and managers have designed and developed a challenging curriculum that enables students to achieve and often exceed expectations. They evaluate the curriculum regularly to ensure that it increases students' chances of progressing to the best universities or gaining employment. For example, they introduced new

vocational courses in law, medical science and criminology to the curriculum to enable students to enter careers in allied professions.

Teachers have responded well to the changes to the A-level curriculum. They have reordered the way that subjects are taught so that students do not forget what they learned in the earlier parts of the syllabus. Teachers make considered choices about what course specifications they follow to maximise the skills that students develop. In mathematics, for example, the specification includes greater emphasis on problem-solving, as this is what universities and employers want students to have.

Teachers are adept at building students' knowledge of a subject through the delivery of well-planned sequential steps. In sociology, for example, students start their first year by studying the family, as this is something that they are familiar with. Teachers then introduce theoretical ideas to explain the concept of the family. By the second year, students can compare and contrast a wide range of theories and apply them to different sociological topics.

Teachers frequently revisit previous learning and core principles to reinforce students' knowledge and link it to a new subject. For example, teachers in biology check that second-year students can recall the principles of meiosis before showing them how it relates to the concept of cell generation for growth and development.

Teachers assess students' work constructively to identify the gaps in their knowledge and the areas that they need to improve. For example, in psychology teachers assess students' use of description, application and evaluation in their written assignments to provide constructive feedback on how they should improve their approach to essay writing.

Teachers provide high levels of support for students outside of lessons. Students value the accessibility of drop-in workshops and the one-to-one support they receive. These high levels of individual support contribute to the very low number of students leaving their courses early and the high proportion who achieve better-than-expected grades in their subjects.

Managers and teachers provide students with a wide range of enrichment activities that broaden the knowledge and skills they acquire in the classroom. Mathematics students, for example, compete with other groups of students in cyber challenges and a maths Olympiad organised through a local university.

Highly qualified and experienced careers staff guide students through the process of applying to higher education by helping them to research the best universities and supporting them with interview techniques. As a result, the number of students going to Russell Group universities is very high.

Staff support students to find valuable work experience related to their studies. However, managers have only just recently started to evaluate the impact of these experiences on the overall development of students' skills and knowledge. It is still too early to see the impact of this change on the development of the curriculum.

Since starting the apprenticeship provision in 2017, leaders and managers have ensured that apprentices receive good-quality off-the-job training that supports them well in their job roles.

Leaders and managers place a very strong emphasis on maintaining the well-being of their staff. They enable staff to take part in activities that provide a balance to their working lives, such as yoga and pilates and access to a dedicated teachers' hub. Staff at all levels of the college benefit from high-quality professional development. As a result, staff feel very well supported and repay managers by promoting the college's ambitious culture for all its students.

Governors use their extensive knowledge of the local area and their professional expertise to ensure that the college improves and responds to local employment opportunities. They have worked with senior leaders to maintain an inclusive curriculum and supportive ethos, while still maintaining expectations about high standards.

Senior leaders are very honest with governors about their successes and their areas for development. They respond to governors' challenges to put things right. For example, since the recruitment of a new principal, the senior management team have instigated a revised staff survey, 'love and ideas'. Positive staff feedback has enabled senior leaders to identify good practice and inform further areas for improvement.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders have appointed managers across all curriculum areas to act as designated safeguarding leads to ensure that safeguarding is given a high priority.

Staff at all levels in the college and students know how and to whom they should report any safeguarding concerns. Managers analyse the concerns to identify any trends and learn lessons from any incidents. As a result, managers have increased their support for students with mental health and anxiety issues.

Senior leaders meet frequently with the local police to share intelligence about the growth of county lines and forms of extremism in the area to agree strategies to counteract the risks these pose to students.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130708
<b>Address</b>	Owens Road Winchester Hampshire SO22 6RX
<b>Contact number</b>	01962 857500
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.psc.ac.uk">www.psc.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Sara Russell
<b>Provider type</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	26–27 March 2008
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## 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. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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