

Inspection of USP College

Inspection dates: 9 to 12 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

USP College is a large general further education college. In August 2017, Seevic College merged with Palmer's College. The newly merged college is named USP College. It has three sites in Essex. One is in Benfleet and one is in Grays. Leaders recently opened a third, smaller site in Canvey Island with a focus on digital technologies and virtual and augmented reality.

The college provides study programmes and adult learning programmes. At the time of the inspection, there were 3,383 learners aged 16 to 18 years and 205 adult learners. The curriculum is designed around five specific sectors: early years, childcare and education; health, care and medical; life and sports science; creative and digital; and financial sector and professional services. Most learners were enrolled on a level 3 programmes. A total of 328 learners were in receipt of high needs funding or had special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), of which 73 are on study programmes. USP College does not offer apprenticeships and has no subcontracted provision.

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

Learners have high ambitions for their future careers. They study programmes that help them focus on their future plans and gain the skills they need to succeed. Young learners benefit significantly from a broad range of additional development opportunities as part of their experience of attending the college. These include employer-led skills workshops, project briefs and meaningful work experience.

Learners, including those with high needs and SEND, are enthusiastic about learning. They value greatly the frequent contact they have with employers. Learners receive excellent support that enables them to progress quickly into adulthood, towards employment or further training, and to gain independence. They benefit from the inclusive environment across the college campuses and take an active part within the college community.

Adult learners gain the skills and knowledge that help them to progress towards their career aspirations effectively. Most adult learners study Access to Higher Education (Access to HE) programmes and the majority advance successfully to their first choice of university on completion of their studies.

Learners arrive to lessons eager to learn and prepared to be challenged by their learning activities. They welcome new learning, and value the range of new skills they gain from attending college. Learners are respectful of each other and take on board the constructive criticism of their peers without challenge.

Young learners, and those with SEND, enjoy being treated as adults by staff. They quickly become mature and self-confident. They benefit from the support staff provide for their well-being. Learners develop positive relationships with their teachers and their peers. They have high expectations for their own academic achievement.

Learners benefit from a college culture that is inclusive and makes them feel safe. Their existing gender stereotypes are positively challenged through a rich curriculum. This includes widening their participation in sports they would not otherwise consider, such as female powerlifting and darts. They trust that staff will deal appropriately with any concerns they may have about their well-being or welfare.

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

Following the merger in 2017, leaders and governors have successfully redesigned the curriculum and taken effective actions to improve the quality of provision. Leaders have aligned the programmes they offer with five sectors, informed by local priorities, national skills shortages and the local further education offer. Learners, including those with SEND, develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their chosen careers.

Leaders have developed an outstanding curriculum for learners with high needs. This widens learners' experiences and life skills, enabling them to progress confidently to their next steps in learning and life. Learners participate in highly effective, individually tailored learning programmes. The choice of qualifications available ensures that learners progress quickly into further learning, vocational training, employment and independent living.

Support for learners with high needs, including for learners with SEND on study programmes, is exceptionally well planned and highly effective. Support staff are highly effective in ensuring that the help learners receive is expertly tailored to meet their specific needs and development targets. Teaching staff robustly review learners' needs, their existing skills and the support they require to ensure that programmes challenge learners to excel academically and become independent. As a result, learners make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. In vocational subjects, they build new skills and knowledge in line with those of their peers.

Learners have high aspirations for their future and benefit greatly from the additional opportunities that leaders provide for them. Adult learners studying Access to HE programmes can choose to successfully complete their learning remotely. The 'scholar programme' helps to improve the aspiration of learners studying A-levels who do not have any immediate family members who have been to university. The programme also enables parents and carers to understand how they can help their children achieve their goal of studying at university.

Leaders work exceptionally well with a broad range of employers to further enrich the curriculum. In the healthcare and medical area, for example, the science curriculum has been broadened recently to offer the specialist pathways identified by employers, such as in biomedical science and forensics. Young learners participate in employer-led activities, such as continuing professional development (CPD) days, which enable them to develop the specific skills employers need. Learners, including those on supported internships, know their specific development targets for their meaningful work experience placements.

Learners gain and build on their existing skills and knowledge extremely effectively. Teachers ensure that initial lessons allow learners to develop the key knowledge that underpins future learning. Learners gain a secure understanding of photosynthesis early in A-level science to enable their later learning about ecosystems. Learners recall key concepts with ease. Adult learners develop their understanding of key concepts, such as conflict and consensus. They apply these concepts usefully to the sociological theories they study later in the curriculum. Learners participate in challenging projects, such as the 'employer live briefs' used in the creative and digital area. Learners gain an understanding of both the technical and transferable skills they need for their chosen industry.

Assessment of learning is highly effective. Teachers provide frequent, effective feedback to learners using a variety of digital and physical methods. This helps learners to refine their skills through experimentation and reflection on their work

over time. Teachers of learners with high needs use assessment to identify and correct any misconceptions learners may have. Learners revisit prior work continuously and gain a secure understanding.

Learners benefit from high-quality digital resources that reinforce their learning, both in college and remotely. Staff use state-of-the-art resources to enhance their teaching and expose learners to modern technology, including virtual and augmented reality. Learners use industry-standard software and hardware to build projects in real work environments. Staff use learning resources, including assistive technology, effectively for learners with high needs to support learners to overcome any barriers and challenging learning goals.

Too many teachers in GCSE English and mathematics do not take learners' existing skills and knowledge into account in lessons. Too few learners develop the skills they need to improve their GCSE grades. Too few learners value English and mathematics qualifications. Teachers do not ensure that learners understand the importance of these subjects. Learners' attendance to these lessons is low.

Learners develop the appropriate literacy and numeracy skills associated with their curriculum area. They confidently and accurately use technical language. Learners on social science A-level programmes interrogate and present data accurately. Teachers of learners with high needs enable learners to develop useful literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers make sure that learners develop the skills they need for future study or work, such as problem-solving and communication skills.

Learners' behaviour around the college sites and in classrooms is very good. Staff are quick to tackle any inappropriate behaviour or language and learners are quick to follow instructions from teachers. The Learning Plus zones on each campus are particularly valued by learners with high needs, who enjoy having a discrete place to relax, work and practise their social communication skills.

Careers education of apprenticeship pathways is insufficient. Staff do not promote or provide adequate information on apprenticeship pathways to learners. Learners do not appreciate the wide range of apprenticeships in their chosen career sectors or know how to make their intention of taking an apprenticeship a reality. Most students achieve their main vocational qualifications and progress to higher education, further education or employment in the sector for which they studied at the college.

Governance is strong. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths of their provision and priority development areas. Governors hold leaders to account and challenge them effectively to ensure that there is a culture of continuous improvement at the college. Governors work with leaders collaboratively to inform the strategy, identify areas for future investment and to develop the curriculum in new, emerging employment sectors.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders manage safeguarding appropriately to ensure that there is a positive culture of safeguarding at the college. Staff responsible for safeguarding are well informed and have a good awareness of specific threats in the local area, such as gang violence and issues with drug and alcohol misuse.

Staff responsible for safeguarding have been proactive in educating learners about healthy and appropriate sexual relationships. Progress coaches create safe spaces for learners to discuss complex issues around safeguarding and sexual exploitation. Learners discuss these themes with maturity and recognise inappropriate behaviours. Young learners develop a good understanding of keeping themselves safe from risks when working online, the risks in their local communities (including drug and alcohol misuse and gang culture), and the wider threats posed by radicalisation. However, teachers of adult learners do not check learners' understanding of the wider safeguarding issues that relate to their life outside college.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that teachers in GCSE English and mathematics enable more learners to improve their English and mathematical skills, thereby achieving the appropriate level of English and mathematics qualifications that employers demand.
- Leaders need to ensure that the careers education of apprenticeship pathways enables learners to understand the broad range of apprenticeship options available to them in their chosen careers field. Leaders must ensure that learners achieve their ambition of progressing to an apprenticeship, should they choose to do so.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130681
Address	Runnymede Chase Benfleet Essex SS7 1TW
Contact number	01268 756111
Website	www.uspcollege.ac.uk
Principal	Dan Pearson
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the interim deputy principal, quality and curriculum, 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

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