

Inspection of Richard Huish College

Inspection dates: 26 to 29 April 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

Richard Huish College became a 16 to 19 academy in 2021. Before that, it had been inspected as a sixth form college in 2007 when it was graded 'outstanding'. In 2021/22, 1867 learners aged 16 to 18 enrolled. About two thirds of these study A levels. The remainder attend full-time vocational study programmes or a mixture of A levels and vocational courses, mostly at level 3. A small number of learners study level 2 vocational programmes alongside English and/or mathematics GCSEs. Twelve learners with high needs are enrolled on 16 to 19 study programmes, and one enrolled as an apprentice.

In addition, the college has 121 apprentices in accounting, business administration, health and social care, and teaching assistance. This represents a significant reduction in the number of apprentices over recent years. Sixty-one adults study courses in health and social care, accounting and learning support.

Richard Huish College is the largest provider of academic post-16 courses in the area. A small number of state schools and several private schools also offer A levels. A further education college and several training providers offer apprenticeships and vocational programmes. Many learners travel to the college from the towns and villages in Somerset and East Devon.

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

Learners develop an excellent attitude to their studies. This is demonstrated through their commitment to purposeful independent study. This commitment is not achieved by accident. It is the result of teachers using evidence-based methodologies to teach learners the benefits of independent study and instilling the attitudes and behaviours learners need to be successful students of their subject.

Staff and learners are not complacent about the fact that many learners have high levels of academic achievement and personal skills when they arrive at the college. Teachers use their knowledge of learners' previous achievements very effectively to set exceptionally high expectations for their learners, including those with high needs. They provide education, encouragement and a wide range of excellent additional activities to develop learners' knowledge, character, articulacy and ambition. As a result, learners develop their subject knowledge, a clearer understanding of their place in the local community and wider world, and they pursue their interests and hobbies with enthusiasm.

Learners enjoy their time at college and feel safe as a result of the respectful relationships that exist between members of the college community. They mostly value the tutorial programme through which they learn about risks to their safety in the world around them. They are confident that issues concerning their safety in college are dealt with effectively.

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

The strong local reputation of this college is justified. Leaders and staff establish and promote a culture of respect and high aspirations. This culture is well-embedded. The supportive and respectful working environment that inspectors found at the previous inspection in 2007 has formed a solid foundation for the reflective, aspirational community that now exists. Teachers set high academic standards. In turn, learners set high standards for themselves. They meet these by studying hard and making the most of the excellent opportunities the college offers.

Highly qualified and experienced teachers carefully construct curriculums in each subject and teach these extremely well. Teachers make the most of the professional independence leaders give them. They diligently carry out research that enriches the curriculum. For example, teachers developed a set of materials to introduce learners to independent study. They trialled it with a group of learners, which allowed them to evaluate the materials compared to those they used routinely. Teachers also collaborate effectively with organisations which provide unique and inspiring experiences for their learners. For example, in English, staff work with the Somerset Heritage Centre to provide a local historical context that helps learners understand how language changes over time. In music, students experience an excellent introduction to a wide range of commercial venues and events through producing and playing gigs.

By paying so much attention to their curriculums, teachers identify the small but significant improvements that lead to a rich experience and successful outcomes for learners. For example, in chemistry, teachers have carefully threaded key concepts through the curriculum so that these are revisited and their importance reinforced. This is done through learners reconsidering topics independently, during one-to-one discussions, and in tests. In level 2 media, teachers use their current learners' interest in podcasts to provide a way into teaching learners about media production techniques. As a result, learners on many courses produce work of an exceptionally high standard and develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in examinations and progress to the next steps in education or the workplace.

The importance of the curriculum to leaders' thinking is illustrated by one of their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders and teachers recognised that learners have lacked experience of external assessment in recent years. Therefore, they adapted curriculum and assessment methods to develop learners' confidence and competence to take examinations in 2022. For example, in September 2021, leaders added mentoring sessions to the timetable. These sessions provide valuable time for teachers to help learners develop effective strategies for learning their subject and preparing for assessments.

Senior leaders carefully research initiatives before implementing them. They train staff very well and monitor how effectively initiatives are implemented. For example, the process to review learners' progress hinges on the powerful, one-to-one discussions between teachers and learners. It also minimises unnecessary record-keeping. As a result of these conversations, learners understand much better how to achieve their potential.

Teachers receive relevant, valuable professional development to improve their subject-specific knowledge and teaching skills. They use this extremely well to reflect on and adapt the courses they teach. The resulting curriculum ensures that learners successfully work independently. They build on what they have learned in class and produce their own useful resources, such as revision notes, which help them prepare well for examinations. On vocational courses, learners complete work to a high standard when in class. However, a small number of these learners are not taught to use their independent study time effectively.

Staff help learners well to prepare for their next steps. This includes valuable tutorials, careers advice and access to external events such as the UCAS fair and apprenticeship events. Support for progression to higher education is particularly strong and well organised.

Teachers supplement the academic and vocational content of courses with excellent additional activities. These include a highly engaging programme of visiting speakers, and valuable contact with industry practitioners and academics. On many vocational courses, learners put their learning into practice through very useful work experience. However, on a small number of courses, such as level 2 business and

level 3 information technology, learners do not get such good opportunities to gain an insight into working in their chosen field.

Leaders have developed a highly effective method of monitoring and improving the quality of courses. They swiftly identify underperforming areas and deal with weaknesses rapidly and comprehensively. Governors play an effective part in this by requesting frequent updates on underperforming courses. For example, after identifying concerns about A-level sociology, governors, leaders and teachers made a concerted effort, each playing their part, to make improvements. Improvement has been rapid and learners on this course now do very well.

When senior leaders identified weaknesses in apprenticeships, they took effective actions to make improvements. These actions included ceasing to offer apprenticeships that the college did not do well and raising standards in others. As a result, the small number of apprenticeships that remain are good.

Teachers ensure that programmes for adult learners are highly individualised, to reflect the jobs in which the learners are employed. As a result, learners in the care sector, for example, become more confident and provide good care for their clients. Teachers are well-qualified and vocationally experienced. They carefully assess their learners' competence to do their jobs. However, they do not teach learners enough to extend their knowledge of the care sector.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders, including governors, have effectively established a culture which emphasises learners' safety. Governors are well informed and provide the support and challenge senior leaders need to keep learners' safety a priority for staff. The senior leader responsible for safeguarding regularly checks what staff know about safeguarding and provides effective training when they find gaps in staff's knowledge.

When learners disclose, or staff report, a concern, senior leaders quickly investigate and put in place support for learners. Their interventions are swift and coordinated with relevant external agencies. Leaders monitor closely how safeguarding concerns are dealt with, and they assess the impact of their support on learners' mental health.

Provider details

Unique reference number	148791
Address	South Road Taunton Somerset TA1 3DZ
Contact number	01823 320800
Website	www.huish.ac.uk
Principal	Emma Fielding
Provider type	16 to 19 academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

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. 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.

Inspection team

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