

# Inspection of South Essex College of Further and Higher Education

Inspection dates: 29 November to 2 December 2022

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Provision for students with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education (SEC) merged with Prospects College of Advanced Technology in February 2019 and with the National College for the Creative Industries in January 2020. The college has six sites which run along the Thames Estuary. The largest is based in Southend-on-Sea, with other sites in Basildon and Thurrock.

In November 2022, senior leaders implemented a new management and college group structure. The restructure identifies three distinct colleges: City of Southend College, Thurrock College and the Basildon College. The strategic aim of the reorganisation is to implement local leadership at each campus. The different college sites will aim to meet the skills needs in the locality.

The college provides a broad range of vocational and academic courses for students aged 16 to 18, adults and apprentices. The college has 4,549 students aged 16 to 18. SEC has 99 students in receipt of high needs funding. There are 3,279 adult students and 1,281 apprentices. The college works with three subcontractors to

provide courses for adult students and commercial goods vehicle training and testing.

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

Most students enjoy their courses and show positive attitudes towards their studies. Such students grow in confidence as they develop their skills and knowledge. They value the personal support given by their teachers that helps to motivate them in their chosen studies and career pathways. However, on a minority of programmes, students and apprentices do not enjoy their learning.

Students' attendance in their vocational lessons is high but in English and mathematics their attendance is too low. Vocational teachers have high expectations for attendance and punctuality. They relate this well to industry standards and future employment. For example, travel and tourism students can explain the impact on flights and income if they were late to work as a member of cabin crew.

Students work harmoniously in a safe and secure environment because of the high expectations for behaviour that staff set. Staff model good professional behaviours, such as calmness and humour in their speech and conduct. They treat students with respect.

Students in receipt of high needs funding build strong and positive relationships with their peers. This enables them to develop confidence and independence in the classroom. Furthermore, it prepares them well for the wider world.

Adult students develop a good understanding of mental health and well-being, for themselves and others. The nature of their learning focuses on the need for fairness and equality. Teachers create a supportive learning environment by encouraging them to talk about their own culture and faith.

Apprentices are valued and well-supported by their employers. For example, welding apprentices have progressed within the workplace. Their employers are keen to provide apprentices with secure employment to replace their ageing workforce. However, too many apprentices on other programmes find the teaching monotonous, and they would not recommend the college to friends.

Most students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have a good understanding of healthy relationships. They can talk confidently about topics such as consent, abuse and how to stay safe online.

Most students benefit from the college's specialist accommodation, equipment and learning resources. For example, performing arts students benefit from a suite of large, purpose-built dance and drama studios. However, in welding, technical equipment does not reflect industry expectations.

Most students develop a good understanding of British values, such as respect and tolerance for one another. This helps them to deepen their understanding and

appreciation of the society they live in. However, too few students have a good understanding of risks they may face in their workplace or personal life. For example, they do not have a good understanding of how extremist views may be a risk in their employment sector. Students feel safe and know who to report to if they have any concerns. They appreciate the presence of security personnel and teachers in college, and outside.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have a good awareness of the skills priorities across Essex. They are well represented on regional and local skills boards. Leaders engage with a wide range of stakeholders at a strategic level, such as local authorities, business forums, local colleges and employers. Leaders work extensively with stakeholders as part of the Southeast Institute of Technology project and have aligned the curriculum effectively to the five growth sectors in the Essex Sector Development Strategy. These sectors include construction, retrofit, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and engineering, digi-tech and life sciences. However, the education programmes for young people curriculum does not yet reflect the involvement of stakeholders sufficiently. Leaders are at the early stages of planning to meet the wide range of skills needed to meet the long-term local and regional development projects. Leaders are working with partners for major projects in the area, including the Lower Thames Crossing and the Thames Freeport.

Leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders, including the Department for Work and Pensions, Thames Clipper, Royal Opera House, Tesco, and local and regional universities. They have developed specialist provision in logistics and performing arts. For example, the international freight forwarding specialist apprenticeship enables local businesses to grow their export and importing business. Leaders have designed an effective adult curriculum to provide skills to unemployed adults to meet local job vacancies, such as sector-based work academy programmes. As a result, adult students secure employment in sectors such as security, CCTV, forklift truck, warehousing and healthcare.

Leaders are planning to introduce employer forums for all curriculum areas across the college. However, at the time of the inspection, these were not yet in place. Most curriculum areas have a sufficient level of local stakeholder involvement to inform curriculum design and implementation, such as work experience, careers advice and guidance. However, there are gaps and inconsistencies in a few programmes, particularly at level 1, notably in multi-skills.

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

Leaders have planned a broad skills-based curriculum with clear internal progression pathways. Leaders are rightly proud of the high levels of internal progression

students make. Leaders ensure that students have opportunities, regardless of their starting points or motivation. Leaders have designed bespoke adult programmes to secure employment for the local long-term unemployed. ESOL students are developing language skills in a variety of situations, including a bespoke employer offer. However, the quality of education for students and apprentices across the college varies too much. While the proportion of students and apprentices who achieve is improving over time, it remains too low.

English and mathematics teachers do not use effective teaching strategies. They do not establish students' existing skills and knowledge to personalise their learning. Teachers do not help students to understand key concepts in order to make swift progress and achieve. For example, too few teachers ensure that students understand how to approach calculations, such as percentages or ratios. Any subsequent practise or self-study that teachers direct students to is unhelpful. As a result, too few students are making good progress towards achieving their intended target grades. Leaders have ensured that English and mathematics teachers receive helpful training to strengthen their practice. However, too few teachers apply this training effectively.

Too few apprentices make good progress. Too few teachers have high expectations of what apprentices can do. On level 3 electrical installation and maintenance and operations engineering technician programmes, teachers do not provide sufficient explanation to ensure that apprentices understand what they need to do to improve. Consequently, apprentices lose interest and motivation. Teachers do not ensure that apprentices are fully prepared for their final examinations. For example, maintenance and operations engineering apprentices have to wait several months at the end of their programme before they are able to take their examination. Furthermore, they lack the subsequent support they need to revise and prepare for the examination. However, on programmes with fewer apprentices, such as the International Freight Forwarding Specialist and Welding programmes, apprentices make good progress. Teachers make good use of student profiles, which detail how each apprentice prefers to study and any support needs they may have. Teachers adapt the curriculum to meet individual apprentice's particular needs. For example, teachers will break down learning activities into smaller chunks of learning. This helps apprentices to build their confidence and concentration.

Teachers have good industry experience and up-to-date vocational and technical subject knowledge. This enables students and apprentices to develop the skills that employers need. For example, on the access to higher education nursing programme, the teaching staff are actively involved in the healthcare sector. As a result, students learn about the latest changes in medical science and practice. Most teachers sequence their vocational curriculum in a logical order. This helps students to learn simple concepts before moving on to more complex concepts.

Much teaching on vocational programmes, and particularly level 3, is effective. This is because teachers consider carefully what to teach, when to teach it and how to teach it. Teachers frequently check what students understand and can do before introducing new topics. For example, in dance, students develop the basics of core

control, balance and posture when dancing in heels. Teachers incorporate more advanced choreography and increasing speed once it becomes second nature to students. As a result, students can develop their understanding of what they need to improve further.

Teachers use a good variety of teaching strategies skilfully to help students learn more and remember more. These include effective questioning, case studies, peer assessments, targeted discussions and practical demonstrations. Teachers on adult programmes build the key concepts of language effectively, through clear presentation, sustained recap and recall. Adult students are proud to describe how they have used these language skills when meeting their children's teachers and making appointments.

Many apprentices develop good subject-related behaviours through their training in the workplace. Apprentices on the logistics programme develop good customer service. They learn how to be assertive and confident on the phone. They also learn how to deal with irate customers while remaining professional.

Students in receipt of high needs funding in vocational areas of the college have positive learning experiences. They achieve and make progress in line with their peers. They develop the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to move on to a higher level of learning or into employment. Students receive consistent and effective help from the support worker and learning mentor. This includes, where appropriate, access to professional therapeutic services and assistive technologies. Teachers help with adjusting timetables, setting task reminders, scribing, recapping instructions, modifying and simplifying language and arranging examination concessions. However, in a minority of cases, staff do not always put specialist support in place in a timely manner.

Leaders do not ensure that the curriculum for students who follow discrete high-needs programmes is ambitious. These students do not get the tailored curriculum or the work-based experience they need. As a result, too few make the rapid progress of which they are capable or maximise their chances of leading more independent lives.

Most students and apprentices do not receive effective and continuing careers education to support their ambitions and future success. Too few students are aware of how the skills they are developing could transfer to other employment opportunities. Teachers prepare students effectively for their next steps, such as moving on to a higher level of learning. However, adult students do benefit from good continuing careers advice and guidance.

Too few students and apprentices have opportunities to develop their character and interests beyond their vocational curriculum. Leaders and managers have designed an appropriate tutorial curriculum for students. The lessons cover a diverse range of age-appropriate topics to prepare students effectively for adult life. However, leaders do not ensure that teachers are confident, or have a good understanding, to teach some of the more sensitive topics, such as sexual violence and mental health.

As a result, too few students deepen their understanding through meaningful conversations with their peers. Leaders have planned an appropriate monthly calendar of enrichment activities. For example, activities include keeping mentally and physically healthy. However, leaders do not promote these effectively. As a result, too few students participate in these valuable activities.

The high turnover of teaching staff and vacancies in some curriculum areas has had a negative impact on students. It means that the continuity of teaching in lessons is often disrupted. Furthermore, teachers' assessment of students' work is unnecessarily delayed. Teachers told inspectors that their workload can be excessive, which adversely affects their well-being. Leaders recognise the negative impact that staff vacancies are currently having on staff workloads. In turn, difficulties in recruiting staff are having a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning in those curriculum areas.

Leaders have accurately identified areas for improvement in certain curriculum areas. These include apprenticeships, construction and engineering. Leaders have introduced targeted teaching, learning and assessment reviews in these areas to monitor performance. Leaders have put additional support in place for teachers to improve their teaching practice. However, these actions do not result in swift improvements. For example, on electrical installation apprenticeship programmes, managers have been too slow to identify the most critical areas for improvement. They have not supported teachers to complete the recommended training as a priority. Leaders are too slow to assess the effectiveness of the quality improvement measures they have put into place. As a result, too few electrical installation apprentices make good progress.

Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. Leaders have strengthened the board to ensure that they benefit from the experience of governors with a background in skills shortage areas, namely construction and engineering. As a result, they can challenge senior leaders on their strategic and curriculum planning. Governors have the skills and experience to challenge leaders on the college's performance. However, it is too soon to see the impact of recent changes leaders have made to drive quality improvement.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established an effective culture of safeguarding across the college. They ensure that students know how to keep themselves safe. They have introduced a well-received online form for students to report anonymously any concerns about themselves or their peers. As a result, students and apprentices feel safe and they receive the support they need. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the main risks in the local area. However, leaders have not yet considered the localised risks for apprentices who work further afield.

Managers have put effective strategies in place to support students and apprentices with mental health and well-being concerns. They refer students and apprentices promptly to appropriate external agencies. Students have a sound understanding of how to maintain healthy sexual relationships.

Students compliment the college on the safeguarding measures on site. For example, they know that students on campus have to go through secure barriers when they enter the college and can only do this with an appropriate lanyard.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the college so that the proportion of students and apprentices who achieve their qualifications increases significantly.
- Make sure that students benefit from effective teaching in their English and mathematics lessons and that they maintain good attendance in these lessons.
- Improve the curriculum for students in receipt of high needs funding on the discrete programme to ensure that it is suitably personalised and ambitious and involves work-based experience.
- Ensure that students understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism at college, at work and in their everyday lives.
- Make sure that students benefit from a well-planned and continuing careers education curriculum that will help them to plan their future pathways.
- Promote the planned enrichment activities to ensure that students participate in wider learning that will enable them to broaden their horizons and interests and become active citizens.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130672
<b>Address</b>	Luker Road Southend-on-Sea Essex SS1 1ND
<b>Contact number</b>	0345 521 2345
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.southessex.ac.uk">www.southessex.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Denise Brown
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	9 to 12 May 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Learning Curve Group Ltd Merlin Supply Chain 2 Start Ltd

## 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Penny Fawcus, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Robert Bamford	His Majesty's Inspector
Lynda Brown	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Breheny	Ofsted Inspector
Jennie Conde	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Winchcombe	Ofsted Inspector
Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins	His Majesty's Inspector
Claire Griffin	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Bates	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Worgs	His Majesty's Inspector
Christine Leeding	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector
Sambit Sen	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for students of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022