

# Inspection of USP College

Inspection dates: 30 April to 3 May 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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

## Information about this provider

USP College is a large general further education college formed in a 2017 merger between Seevic College and Palmer's College. It has three sites in Essex, located in Benfleet, Grays and Canvey Island. Most college courses are for young people, with a small number for adults and students with high needs. The college also offers a small number of higher education courses, but these were outside the scope of the inspection.

At the time of the inspection, there were 3,414 students aged 16 to 18 and 217 adult students. Around three-quarters of students were studying at level 3, and a further sixth at level 2. The curriculum is designed around five specific sectors: creative industries; digital innovation and emerging technologies; financial and professional services; medical technologies and life sciences; and sport and healthcare. The college received high-needs funding for 126 students. Of these, 69 students were on foundation programmes aimed specifically at students with high needs. USP College does not offer apprenticeships and has a very small number of subcontracted courses.

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

Most students are very satisfied with the education and training that they receive. They are enthusiastic and keen to learn. Young people conduct themselves in a mature and professional manner. They work diligently and complete independent tasks well. Students with high needs are positive about their studies and increase their independence. Adult students are very upbeat about their courses and their next steps in education.

There is a positive and professional culture at the college. Staff and students have a clear focus on careers, and this contributes well to the development of students' personal and professional behaviours. Students are polite, helpful and welcoming and as a result, the college is an inclusive, supportive and friendly place.

Most students complete their courses and achieve their qualifications. They develop a good range of knowledge and skills. Their work meets and often exceeds the required standards.

Students feel safe at the college. They know to whom they should report concerns and are confident that staff will respond quickly and appropriately if they do so. They feel reassured by the security at college entrances. They are aware of the support available to them through, for example, the safeguarding hub. They benefit from tutorials that explore a range of topics related to staying safe.

Students benefit from the involvement of employers and other stakeholders in the design of courses. This involvement ensures that course content is relevant and up to date. Employers also provide live briefs and masterclasses for students that help to bring topics to life.

Students develop their confidence throughout their courses. This helps them to remain optimistic and motivated in their work and studies. They are encouraged to experiment and helped to worry less about failure. As a result, students become more resilient and aspirational.

Young students benefit from an excellent range of additional activities that helps them to prepare for adulthood. A range of clubs, societies and extra-curricular activities allows them to explore their interests; a well-developed tutorial programme helps them to learn about themes related to health and well-being; and a broad range of activities supports them to make good career choices.

Adult students benefit from a small range of courses with a clear focus on higher education and employment. Students gain the skills they need to confidently take their next steps in education or work. English and mathematics students become more confident, and those who study accountancy often gain employment or promotion. Strong partnerships with universities ensure that almost all access to higher education students progress to degree courses.

Most students on foundation courses for students with high needs participate in individually tailored learning programmes that lead to vocational courses or supported internships. Those who want to progress on to a supported internship receive good support that helps them find a placement that matches their interests and aspirations.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have high expectations for the quality of education offered by the college. Through a range of suitable processes, they ensure that teaching is consistently good. They have developed successful relationships with employers and other stakeholders. These stakeholders include those very local to the college and others across the region. Senior leaders engage particularly well with Essex County Council to meet the requirements of the local skills improvement plan (LSIP). They have aligned their curriculum with five of the LSIP's key priorities. These five areas reflect the college's areas of expertise. Managers have worked with other local providers to ensure that those priorities they cannot meet are provided for locally. As a result of this work, leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of how the college contributes to local and regional skills needs.

Leaders have a clear stakeholder engagement strategy. They make use of long-established sector boards to draw on the expertise of employers. This helps staff to identify the specific skills and knowledge that are likely to be the most useful to students. In most subject areas, employers and other stakeholders are involved very closely in the design of courses. Stakeholders in creative industries, for example, help to ensure that courses contain the specific vocational knowledge and skills that students need and help students develop the broader skills that they require to be successful in the sector. Many stakeholders complement this work by contributing through careers talks, masterclasses, work experience placements and real-world projects for students to undertake. This helps to prepare students well for progression to high-quality destinations. Although work with stakeholders is evident in all curriculum areas, in a very few subjects, it is less well developed.

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

Managers and staff take account of local, regional and national priorities when selecting the content of courses. For example, in response to the need for more physiotherapists, they have included relevant topics in sport and exercise science programmes. This ensures that students develop the knowledge they need to study this subject at university.

Teachers plan and sequence learning carefully so students can build and develop the knowledge that they need for the next stage of their education or employment. Courses often incorporate useful additional qualifications that help to prepare students for their next steps. For example, A-level science students take health and

safety qualifications through which they learn how to complete risk assessments, use personal protective equipment and work safely in a laboratory environment.

Staff provide effective support for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They conduct detailed assessments of students' needs and develop individual support plans for them. Teachers use these to guide their decisions about how best to support these students, through additional tuition, different resources or the deployment of learning support assistants. Staff support students with high needs well. Managers organise specialist support effectively such as the use of a specialist communicator.

Most teachers have good subject knowledge, vocational experience and teaching skills that they use to plan and teach effective lessons. For example, sociology teachers use their expert knowledge to explain sociological theories such as feminism and Marxism to instruct students and to guide well-informed debate on how these theories inform views on topics such as education.

Teachers plan lessons well and use a range of suitable activities and materials to help students understand key concepts. Where appropriate, teachers make use of innovative approaches and technologies to enhance their teaching. For example, teachers of uniformed protective services courses use virtual reality simulations to help students practise planning for emergency situations. Teachers of students with high needs use their experience to plan interesting, engaging and meaningful sessions.

Tutors help students to retain information in their long-term memory effectively through repetition and revision. Teachers reinforce key concepts and vocabulary at the beginning and end of each lesson. They use a range of assessment activities such as quizzes and past-paper questions to boost students' recall of topics and use the results of these assessments to plan further instruction.

Students develop a good range of new knowledge and skills. As a result, most complete their courses, achieve their qualifications and take positive next steps. Most students with high needs develop a wide range of skills to support a greater level of independence in their everyday life.

Teachers of students with high needs make effective use of procedures for recognising students' progress and achievement on accredited courses. They set rigorous and purposeful targets that clearly link to students' education, health and care plan outcomes. However, a few teachers do not make effective use of processes for recognising students' progress and achievement on non-accredited courses. As a result, it is unclear whether targets are appropriate or whether students make good progress.

Teachers set clear expectations in lessons and model professional behaviour. They frequently reinforce these expectations. As a result, lessons are calm and productive. In addition, managers work hard to ensure that the communal spaces in the college are orderly and welcoming. Senior staff are visible to students and talk to them,

behaviour officers provide support and mentoring for students and security staff are conspicuous.

Attendance has improved in the current year and is satisfactory. Managers have strengthened induction processes, communicated expectations more clearly and worked hard to reinforce the importance of good attendance. Staff in specific subject areas also take action to support student attendance. For example, GCSE mathematics teachers collaborate with vocational teachers to improve attendance. On the level 3 engineering course, teachers run a competition between different groups for the best attendance record.

Staff explore topics related to British values well, involving students in productive discussions and debates. As a result, students develop a sound understanding of these topics. Teachers help students to develop their awareness of the risks of radicalisation, extremism and local gang culture.

Leaders and managers ensure that the college's culture supports inclusion and well-being very effectively. They encourage students to participate in new initiatives at the college such as the student-led thrift shop, in which students can purchase high-quality clothing at reasonable prices, as well as participating in workshops and clubs to support well-being and celebration events such as Pride Month.

Leaders and managers provide a highly effective careers programme that includes work experience, careers fairs and guest lectures. These activities provide students with the range of information they need about potential next steps, including apprenticeships.

Leaders have implemented useful quality assurance activities, such as internal quality reviews, that provide them with oversight of the quality of education. They use this information to plan training for teachers on an individual and a whole-college basis. Leaders make sure that teachers keep their subject knowledge up to date through participation in industry days. They have appointed teacher improvement practitioners who help to share good practice. As a result, the good standard of teaching across the college has been maintained.

Governors have a range of backgrounds and experiences that enable them to contribute effectively. They have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They use the information they receive at board meetings to challenge appropriately and support leaders to make improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

During the inspection, a student showing signs of extreme views was reported to inspectors. After consultation with inspectors, college leaders referred the student to the appropriate authorities.

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

- Ensure that staff set and monitor appropriate personal development targets for all students with high needs on non-accredited courses that help them to make good progress.
- Continue to work with staff and students to ensure that attendance is consistently high.
- Continue to develop stakeholder engagement in the very small number of curriculum areas where it is less well advanced.

## Provider details

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<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.uspcollege.ac.uk">www.uspcollege.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Dan Pearson
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 to 12 November 2021
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Learning Curve Group Limited

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the college nominee and strategic envoy, 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

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