

# Inspection of Itchen College

Inspection dates: 1 to 4 October 2024

## Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

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

## Information about this provider

Itchen College is a sixth-form college located in the city of Southampton, Hampshire. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 1,900 students studying education programmes for young people, including 112 students with high needs and 95 adult learners. Many students who study at the college come from the most deprived areas of the city. They often arrive at the college with lower previous attainment than their peers across the region. Large numbers of students at the college study GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics due to their previous low attainment or persistent absence at school.

The college offers a wide range of courses from entry level to level 3. This includes a small bespoke provision for students with high needs to prepare for vocational or academic qualifications. A large minority of students study programmes at levels 1 and 2 in preparation for further study at the college. Most students study A-level or vocational programmes at level 3, in a wide range of subjects including sports, law and criminology and business. Students also study T levels in health and education and early years. Adult learners study programmes such as English, mathematics, access to higher education and working with children.

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

Students and adult learners at Itchen College benefit significantly from the very purposeful and welcoming learning environment that staff create. They value the caring, nurturing and supportive culture of the college. Students and learners become confident and develop resilience rapidly. As students and adult learners grow in knowledge and skills, they quickly gain ambition and aspire to be successful.

Students and adult learners share the high expectations that staff consistently set throughout their time at college. They behave impeccably. Students are friendly and respectful with each other, staff and visitors. Students and learners look forward to coming to college and thoroughly enjoy their learning. A small minority of students do not attend well. These students have often missed significant amounts of their education in the past. In these instances, staff take highly effective action that helps students improve their attendance.

Students, including those with high needs, and adult learners receive useful training and support that equip them with knowledge and skills for life. They have opportunities to learn about and celebrate a range of equality and diversity topics, such as International Women's Day and Pride awareness. Students and adult learners participate in a range of enrichment activities to support their local community. For example, adult learners work with the local food bank to produce and distribute Easter hampers to vulnerable families. Students' participation in enrichment is good. Many students explore their interests through positive enrichment activities, including pop choir and filmmaking clubs. A small minority of learners are unable to participate in these due to the demands of their timetabled lessons, and so do not benefit from these opportunities.

Students, including those with high needs, and adult learners receive useful information and advice to help them start planning their next steps. Most students participate in relevant and helpful work experience opportunities. T-level students rightly value the useful experience and skills they develop through their placements. Staff guide adult learners to the National Careers Service, which delivers specific job application workshops.

Students and adult learners rightly feel very safe at college and know that staff do not tolerate bullying and harassment. Students' well-being is a priority for leaders and staff. While students in their second year can recall learning about the risks of radicalisation and extremism, too few students can recall the content of this training.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work very effectively with a broad range of stakeholders to identify and respond to skills needs both locally and regionally. They are held in very high regard for their purposeful innovation, creativity and flexibility in meeting the needs of the local community. For example, they have developed a close partnership

with Southampton City Council's early years advisory team to identify and respond to the skills that students need to work with children, and provide a source of new recruits to the nursery workforce.

Leaders are passionate about their work to support those who are economically inactive. They work with partners such as Seetec, Hampshire Learn and Thrive, and Palladium to support those furthest from the labour market, to provide opportunities to learn and to raise aspirations. Leaders provide courses that are relevant to the needs of the community. For example, they introduced a new level 1 health and social care course after discussions with the local authority and local employers; consequently, key priority areas identified are catered for.

Leaders and managers have a very secure understanding of the skills needs within their area. They identify employment skills and needs successfully through a range of highly effective forums. They hold useful employer meetings, where representatives discuss sector-specific skills needs and gaps with curriculum staff. They use the information they gather to inform the content and activities that students experience. Staff adapted the uniformed public services curriculum to help students understand the skills, fitness levels and attributes that they need to be successful in the rigorous recruitment process.

Leaders and managers work well with stakeholders, industry experts and community organisations in the planning of most areas of the college's curriculums. Staff benefit from working with local employers to identify the skills required to work in their sector. Staff work with ground handlers in the travel and tourism sector to better support learners to develop the behaviours and communication skills needed to work with customers. In mathematics, using feedback from BAE Systems, staff adapt the curriculum to include more problem-solving and data analysis to better prepare students to work in this sector.

Leaders recognise that the involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of all programmes of learning is not yet consistently established.

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

Leaders, managers and staff are passionate about promoting social mobility. They are highly aspirational for students and adult learners, many of whom come from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve and succeed. This is reflected in leaders' actions to increase the number of level 1 and 2 courses and so provide students with clear pathways into higher levels of study. In the same way, leaders are committed to supporting students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to remain in education.

Leaders, managers and staff work exceptionally well to support students to engage with their learning positively and develop a strong work ethic. They work tirelessly to break down barriers to learning. Where students face significant challenges during their time in college, leaders have made sensible and sensitive changes to

programmes in year to ensure that these learners continue in learning. While this has had an adverse impact on retention rates, the impact on students is transformative and most move on to positive destinations as a result.

Well-qualified and experienced teachers use initial assessment carefully to plan learning that recognises students' often low starting points. In GCSE English, staff analyse initial assessment activities to set individualised targets and provide specific support to students. Teachers plan learning skilfully so that students' knowledge and skills build in fluency and complexity over time. In A-level accounting, students become increasingly adept at a range of accounting techniques and analysis for a range of businesses, and able to calculate more complex cash flows as a result. Teachers provide very strong support to help students and adult learners to remember and consolidate their learning. For example, in access to higher education courses, teachers use memorable historical cases to explain the impact of brain injuries on patients.

Teachers present information clearly and succinctly. Teaching activities are selected with care so that they are very suitable, well-paced and, consequently, highly engaging. In A-level sociology, teachers use past examination papers expertly to help students develop their analysis and application of sociological concepts.

Teachers provide clear and motivational guidance to help students and adult learners improve their work. For example, GCSE English students strongly benefit from feedback related to exam strategies. Students are more aware of how to answer different questions and how much time they should spend on each one. They are more confident they will get the grade they need when they sit the exam. Consequently, students and most adult learners produce increasingly high standards of work and are proud to share it.

Teachers make excellent use of the high-quality, up-to-date resources to add significant value to students' learning. For example, adult learners studying access to higher education courses use referencing successfully from early in their courses due to the highly supportive and clear resources that teachers provide.

Students with high needs make outstanding progress and achieve their goals successfully because of the highly ambitious and progressive pathways that leaders have created. Teachers and support staff work together exceptionally well to make sure that students and learners access their learning easily. Managers coordinate support staff, resources and therapies expertly so that students' needs are consistently met. Students studying foundation learning become competent and confident in money management, accessing the community and tailored personal development subjects such as parenting. They develop a deep understanding of important topics such as equality and diversity and how to apply their learning to their lives and work. They receive highly effective and individualised careers education, information, advice and guidance that helps them to move on to their desired next steps.

Students in T-level education and early years benefit from a highly purposeful curriculum. Leaders worked closely with the Southampton City Council early years advisory teams and early years settings to ensure that students have the skills to work with a range of children, including those with SEND. They rapidly develop essential knowledge in safeguarding and health and safety. Students value the opportunities to practise and develop their knowledge and skills through highly appropriate placement settings.

Adult learners make good progress. Adult learners on early years courses use their knowledge of pedagogical theory to improve their practice. They become increasingly confident to embed mathematics into their activities with children. Leaders' vision for the local community is demonstrated in the close support given to access to higher education learners, who apply to universities successfully and support skills shortages in nursing and mental health care. Most adult learners who complete their courses achieve well, and many go on to positive next steps.

Staff are exceptionally supportive of the college's mission and its commitment to inclusivity. They are very positive about leaders' consideration of their workloads and well-being. Staff describe the frequent and close communication they enjoy with leaders. Leaders have a consistently strong focus on staff development, which is very appropriate and useful. For instance, staff recently completed very useful training in trauma-informed practice, which is helping relevant students to access and remain in learning.

Senior leaders and governors have a strong focus on providing exceptional teaching, learning and support. They have an exceptionally strong knowledge of their college, and their students and adult learners. The close collaboration of leaders, managers and college staff has had a significant impact on the quality of education programmes for young people and those with high needs.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130704
<b>Address</b>	Middle Road Bitterne Southampton Hampshire SO19 7TB
<b>Contact number</b>	02380435636
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.itchen.ac.uk">www.itchen.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Alex Scott
<b>Provider type</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	30 November to 3 December 2021
<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 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

Emma Leavey, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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