

# Itchen College

Inspection report

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Provider reference 130704  
Published date May 2008

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

#### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); and the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on students and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

### Description of the provider

1. Itchen College is a comprehensive sixth form college serving the eastern side of Southampton, a unitary city authority with a population of around 220,000. There are several competitor colleges in or near the city. Most local schools are 11 to 16 comprehensives. Southampton has two universities. The social mix and levels of prosperity of the area from which Itchen College draws its students are varied, with some affluent parts as well as some of the most deprived parts of the south east region.
2. Unemployment in Southampton is low at around 2.6%, but a high proportion of residents are economically inactive. Around 12% of the local adult population have no qualifications and there are low levels of literacy and numeracy. Just

over 8.5% of the population are from minority ethnic groups. Itchen College enrolls nearly 10% of its students from minority ethnic groups.

3. Performance in Southampton schools is significantly below the national average, by about 10 percentage points for those achieving 5 general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades A\*-C in 2006/07. Absenteeism in local schools is one of the highest nationally, at 11.7% in 2006/07 and rising.
4. The college offers courses in 11 of the 15 sector subject areas, from entry level to level 3 with one course at level 4. A range of vocational courses is offered as well as GCSEs and general certificates of education (GCEs). Students are able to combine vocational and academic courses and to work at different levels. In November 2007, there were 1,823 funded students enrolled, the large majority of whom were aged 16 to 18 and studying full-time. The numbers of adults has fallen significantly in the last two years and most of these study part-time in the evening. Most enrolments for both age groups are at level 3 but substantial numbers enrol at levels 1 and 2. The college runs a Train to Gain (T2G) programme for adults training in residential care work. Three courses are run for local school pupils aged 14 to 16.
5. The college's mission is to be a force for change in the community by providing high quality education and training for all and acting as a sporting and cultural centre for the locality.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: Contributory Grade 1</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

6. Itchen College is good. Over the last three years it has continued to improve the success rates of its younger students whilst their prior ability, as measured by their GCSE results at age 16, has steadily declined. In particular, it has improved the retention of students whose attendance in local schools is one of the lowest in the country. It has dramatically improved the success rates of adult students to above the national average. Achievement and standards are satisfactory because success rates overall remain below the national average for sixth form colleges and students generally make the progress that is expected of them at GCE A level. However, the progress made by boys at all levels is good, as is that of all students of middle to higher ability. Minority ethnic students achieve well.
7. Teaching and learning, and guidance and support, are good because most students are imaginatively stimulated, energetically motivated and sensitively channelled over two years into successful patterns of learning. Many students arrive without having developed the habits of structured study or the language of academic discourse. They have low educational esteem. Regular homework is alien to them. Their particular support needs are identified and a range of strategies adopted to try and fulfil them. Knowing that there is a direct correlation between grades attained at A level and rates of attendance, the college vigorously pursues high attendance targets. Teachers successfully engage and stretch more confident and able students, who in 2006/07 gained three times as many grades A and B at GCE A level as was predicted.
8. The college is outstandingly inclusive, both educationally and socially. It understands the vital role it plays in its community and constantly seeks ways to serve the educational and social needs of the local population. It provides a particularly broad range of courses to meet students' interests and needs and is highly flexible in compiling students' individual timetables across courses and levels. It encourages subject areas to develop their own localised identity, so that students feel that they belong not only to the college but also to one or more sub-cultures within it. This improves collective responsibility and personal motivation, and is notably successful in areas such as physical education and public services. The college works collaboratively with other providers and agencies to bring into education and training members of the local community who might otherwise not have chosen to undertake further study.
9. The college is well led and managed, with robust quality assurance systems, discerning self-assessment and an increasingly diligent attention to how students learn. Equality of opportunity is outstanding.

## Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college has a good capacity to improve. Robust quality assurance systems and thorough, realistic self-assessment give it the capacity to identify its priorities for further improvement. Progress against the quality improvement plan is systematically monitored. All core functions, particularly the analysis of data and staff development, are clearly focused on improving the educational achievement and promoting the overall well-being of students. New management roles and responsibilities are clearly defined with accountability at all levels. Teachers and managers have a common sense of purpose and a shared commitment to the inclusive work of the college in its local community. Governance is strong and plans for relocation to a new site are well laid.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. The college has taken effective steps to promote improvement. It has remedied almost all of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection and has maintained most of the strengths. Additional strengths are now evident, as are some new areas requiring improvement. Success rates have risen steadily and at a better rate than nationally, but remain well below national averages.

## Key strengths

- successful raising of the achievement of boys
- much dynamic teaching and learning
- good provision and use of information and learning technologies
- diverse and responsive curriculum
- outstanding promotion of health and well-being
- outstanding social and educational inclusion and equality of opportunity
- comprehensive and highly effective staff development
- rigorous quality assurance
- extensive collaborative partnerships to improve participation.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- low success rates
- insufficient progress by least able students
- unsatisfactory attendance by students on level 2 courses
- enabling more students to think for themselves in lessons
- insufficient focus on feedback and action planning to help students improve.

## Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

*Contributory grades:*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: Grade 2*

*Learners aged 14 to 16*

*Good: Grade 2*

12. The college accurately assessed students' achievement and standards to be satisfactory. For students on the Train to Gain programme and for school students aged 14 to 16 they are good.
13. Over the last three years to 2006/07, the overall success rate for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses has risen by seven percentage points, a rate of improvement that surpasses the national rate. This has been accomplished against a simultaneous trend of declining GCSE points scores of applicants to the college, but it remains below the national average for sixth form colleges. The success rate declined in 2006/07 at level 1, but rose at levels 2 and 3. The GCE A level success rate rose by three points in 2006/07 to be three points below the previous year's national average.
14. For adult students, the success rate at all three levels rose significantly in 2006/07. The overall success rate for adults is now just above the previous year's national average.
15. An analysis by the college of current retention and interim achievement data for 2007/08 shows that overall success rates are predicted to rise by at least three percentage points this year. The standards of students' work are satisfactory.
16. The college recruits almost all its students aged 16 to 18 from schools where the average GCSE points score is some ten points below the national average. Moreover, absenteeism at many of these schools is higher than anywhere else in the south east region. Many students join the college with low academic esteem, poor study skills, limited confidence and ambition and habits of irregular attendance. The college is particularly successful at remedying many of these shortcomings and so raising the achievement and standards of specific groups. Boys now succeed at age 18 almost as well as girls, in stark contrast to the local picture at age 16. Students of minority ethnic heritage now do at least as well as white British students. Students who come with high or medium GCSE grades make very good progress and exceed the grades predicted from their prior attainment. In 2006/07, over 30% of students achieved grades A or B at GCE A level against a prediction of 10%. Those with low GCSE grades generally make satisfactory progress but some still under-achieve. In all, some two thirds of students meet or exceed their predicted grades at GCE A level. Attendance rates have improved considerably, but on level 2 courses they remain unsatisfactory.



17. Success rates in key skills are low with the notable exception of the course in improving one's own learning and performance, designed to improve students' progression aspirations, which almost all students take and pass.

## Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

18. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is well planned and its lively variety engages and challenges students. Most teachers are particularly good at checking how well students are learning, and the best lessons are skilfully differentiated to ensure that students can work at their most apposite level. Aware that many students arrive lacking foundation knowledge and established habits of study, teachers work effectively to build their confidence and to provide them with structured ways of working, both individually and in groups. To this end, good use is made of information and learning technologies.
19. Many lessons are dynamic and ensure that students stay alert and participate. For example, in one GCE A-level history lesson the teacher interspersed his use of oral questions with invitations to students to add more substantial comments to his skeletal diagram on the whiteboard. The simple act of frequent physical movement, coupled with students having to compose written statements for collective scrutiny, kept the whole class sharply focused and competitively engaged. Here, as elsewhere, students were comfortable in challenging each other's ideas. However, in a small minority of lessons such active engagement is not sufficiently encouraged: the checking of learning is undirected, written feedback is sometimes superficial, and students are not made to think enough for themselves.
20. Teachers know their students' abilities very well and most refine how they teach accordingly. Students are initially set aspirational targets. These are regularly reviewed through subject tutorials, although the rigour and effectiveness of these is variable. Additional learning support is effectively integrated in classroom activity.
21. The college has successfully created a culture in which most teachers think a great deal about how they might modify their teaching so that students might learn better. Lessons observed in local schools help teachers anticipate the learning habits and needs of prospective students. The peer review scheme is highly valued and in a spirit of mutual professional trust and pedagogic adventure teachers reflect critically on their own work and share their best practice.
22. The college has a very good range of provision which is highly responsive to the needs of the local community. Courses are offered from entry level to level 4. A growing range of vocational courses is available, notably in care, public services and sport. Every effort is made to meet the particular subject interests of individual students at the appropriate course level. One budding young archaeologist, who had a weak science background but was making good progress towards his ambition, reported that Itchen was the only local college able to accommodate his precise requirements. The college wholeheartedly embraces the need to offer opportunities to many under-achieving school

- leavers, but is also developing a stimulating programme for the most able. It offers specialised provision for the visually impaired and for local Brethren. It also sustains a good range of courses for adults, including English for the local Polish community and other migrants, and Train to Gain in care.
23. In close collaboration with other local providers, the college has successfully attracted students who might otherwise not have furthered their education or training. The flexible Earn and Learn programme responds to some students' need to earn whilst they study, though the college has been unable to find suitable work for all who want it. Links with local feeder schools are strong and productive. The college offers three courses to some 180 school students aged 14 to 16.
  24. A wide range of enrichment activities is available, including many team sports, a college radio station, voluntary work in local primary schools and veterinary surgeries, and a sustainability group. The level of participation in these opportunities is, however, disappointing in some areas.
  25. Guidance and support are good and are carefully tailored to match demand. There is a strong ethos of support for all, from students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to those with the highest academic potential. At recruitment, students receive extensive, objective advice and are placed on courses that suit their interests and abilities. Induction, initial assessment and special learning support are all comprehensive and largely effective, although too many students who need extra help with studying outside lessons decline to accept it.
  26. The tutorial system is good. It is well managed, and appropriately pitched to stimulate interest and guide on such essential themes as maintaining health, ensuring personal safety, embracing diversity and researching careers and higher education. Following students' requests, the theme of physical and mental health has been developed much more fully and a weekly professional clinic is now offered.
  27. Tutors and teachers work effectively together to record and review students' progress against their personal targets. However, there is insufficient emphasis on the structured actions students need to take to meet these. The monitoring of attendance is thorough and response to unauthorised absence is prompt.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grade:*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Outstanding: Grade 1*

28. Leadership and management are good. Governors and the senior management team have a clear, shared vision for the college, and they implement it well. Leadership is appropriately consensual and evolutionary. Changes in the management structure were introduced in September 2007. Lines of accountability are clear and effective. Improved performance is already evident. Timely and accurate data are used well to monitor performance against

challenging targets. The prompt interventions of new managers are successfully tackling under-performance. Improved access to student information, penetrating analysis of what it tells managers, and internal and external quality reviews all contribute to comprehensive, robust quality assurance. There is a multi-faceted programme of lesson observations which produces an astute evaluation of their quality. Resulting dialogues with teachers and agreed plans of action inform the annual staff review and the staff development programme.

29. Self-assessment is well established and involves all teachers, managers and governors. Inspectors agreed with all the key grades and most of the summary findings in the 2006/07 report. The improvement plan sets realistic targets and progress towards them is effectively reviewed at course and subject area levels, although some reviews are inadequately recorded. Many of the quality assurance systems were substantially revised from September 2007 so it is too early to assess their full impact on student achievement.
30. Communication with staff and students is good and the college works very well as a harmonious, inclusive community on a small, friendly scale; however, there is sometimes too much reliance on informal means of communication. There is an active Student Union and student representatives at course and board level make a positive contribution to improving the student experience at the college.
31. Governance is good. Governors bring a wide variety of skills and experience to the college and they understand and use data effectively to analyse college performance. There is a comprehensive set of policies with a review timetable in place. Staff are suitably qualified and enjoy very good induction and staff development programmes.
32. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college is fully compliant with race equality, disability discrimination and child protection legislation. It actively promotes equality and diversity in many ways. Students have access to multiple services promoting all aspects of health, well-being and safety. The college serves a wide spectrum of ability and social need in a way that makes all students feel particularly valued. It has significantly raised the educational ambitions and actual achievement of boys at all levels and has reversed the pre-16 under-achievement of many students. The college is an enterprising member of numerous local partnerships and has forged very effective links with other providers to enhance learning opportunities for all.
33. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The management of the estate is good and the college is progressing well with plans to relocate to a new site. The college provides good value for money.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	423	34	64	-30	583	36	56	-20
	05/06	440	69	71	-2	135	33	56	-23
	06/07*	593	66	N/A	-	122	65	N/A	-
GNVQs	04/05	22	77	71	6	-	-	-	-
	05/06	16	63	79	-16	-	-	-	-
	06/07*	-	-	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	-
NVQs	04/05	2	0	-	-	3	33	-	-
	05/06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	06/07*	-	-	N/A	-	4	100	N/A	-
Other	04/05	399	32	63	-31	580	36	56	-20
	05/06	424	69	71	-2	134	34	56	-22
	06/07*	592	67	N/A	-	118	64	N/A	-

\* data supplied by the college

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	895	66	73	-7	343	48	56	-8
	05/06	912	68	78	-10	217	52	64	-12
	06/07*	925	71	N/A	-	172	61	N/A	-
GCSEs	04/05	480	69	78	-9	89	58	65	-7
	05/06	495	72	82	-10	77	60	66	-6
	06/07*	524	74	N/A	-	78	58	N/A	-
GNVQs	04/05	27	63	74	-11	-	-	-	-
	05/06	33	73	77	-4	-	-	-	-
	06/07*	17	82	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	-
NVQs	04/05	61	87	62	25	54	70	58	12
	05/06	52	85	70	15	66	50	68	-18
	06/07*	57	74	N/A	-	55	73	N/A	-
Other	04/05	327	58	62	-4	199	38	52	-14
	05/06	332	58	70	-12	74	46	61	-15
	06/07*	323	64	N/A	-	46	57	N/A	-

\* data supplied by the college

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	2964	71	82	-11	321	60	59	1
	05/06	2903	73	84	-11	337	53	65	-12
	06/07*	2987	75	N/A	-	317	65	N/A	-
A levels	04/05	801	89	92	-3	45	69	76	-7
	05/06	719	87	93	-6	46	72	78	-6
	06/07*	807	90	N/A	-	43	83	N/A	-
AS levels	04/05	1882	62	78	-16	116	50	54	-4
	05/06	1818	67	79	-12	71	55	58	-3
	06/07*	1781	68	N/A	-	91	55	N/A	-
GNVQs	04/05	76	76	74	2	2	100	-	-
	05/06	33	94	74	20	-	-	-	-
	06/07*	-	-	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	-
NVQs	04/05	15	80	-	-	67	52	50	2
	05/06	18	94	-	-	80	54	63	-9
	06/07*	9	67	N/A	-	58	55	N/A	-
Other	04/05	190	80	72	8	91	71	56	15
	05/06	315	71	75	-4	140	46	62	-16
	06/07*	390	75	N/A	-	120	66	N/A	-

\* data supplied by the college

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the college 2006 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006/07	overall	62	82
		timely		
	2007/08 (6 months)	overall	49	N/A
		timely		

Note: 2007-08 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 3 months or greater of the LSC contract year

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'

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