

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Itchen College

Date of visit: 24 March 2009

Context

Itchen College is a 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. 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.

The college offers courses in 11 of the 15 sector subject areas. A range of vocational courses is offered as well as GCSEs and GCE AS and A levels. 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 programme in residential care work for approximately 160 adults.

At the previous inspection effectiveness of provision and capacity to improve were judged good. Achievement and standards were satisfactory. The quality of provision and leadership and management were judged to be good and equality of opportunity was considered to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

What success has the college achieved in the improvement of overall success rates for 16-18 year old learners on long courses?	Reasonable progress
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Achievements and standards remain satisfactory. Overall success rates show an improving year on year trend from 71% in 2005/06 to 75% in 2007/08. At level 1 overall success rates for 16-18 year old learners declined from 69% in 2005/06 to 66% in 2006/07 and declined further to 59% in 2007/08. At level 2 the rates showed a slight improvement from 68% in 2005/06 to 71% in 2006/07 and a further rise to 73% in 2007/08. At level 3 there was also a slight improvement from 73% in 2005/06 to 75% in 2006/07 and a further improvement to 79% in 2007/08.

What success has the college achieved in the improvement of overall success rates for adult learners on long courses?	Reasonable progress
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Achievements and standards remain satisfactory. Overall success rates show an improving year on year trend from 49% in 2005/06 to 63% in 2007/08. The college made significant progress with overall success rates for 19+ learners at level one from 33% in 2005/06 to 64% in 2006/07 although rates declined to 53% in 2007/08. At level 2 rates increased from 53% in 2005/06 to 62% in 2006/07 and remained at this figure for 2007/08. Overall success rates at level 3 improved from 53% in 2005/06 to 63% in 2006/07 and to 68% in 2007/08. Overall success rates success rates for Train to Gain learners were low at 63% in 2007/08 and timely success rates were lower at 49%.

What success has the college achieved in the improvement of key skills success rates?	Reasonable progress
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The college has identified the delivery of key skills as a priority for development and has appointed a manager who is responsible for the college wide co-ordination of key skills. The management and teaching of key skills has improved. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 have increased at all levels and are now satisfactory. At level 1 overall success rates have increased significantly from 23% in 2006/07 to 75% in 2007/08. Level two rates have improved from 56% in 2006/07 to 65% in 2007/08 and at level 3 overall success rates have also improved from 21% in 2006/07 to 42% in 2007/08. However, achievements are too low for courses in IT at level 2 (32%) and communication at level 3 (34%).

What success has the college achieved in the improvement of learners' attendance?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection attendance rates on level 2 courses were judged to be unsatisfactory. The college has recently appointed an attendance officer and a progression manager. These appointments have been particularly effective in following up learners' absences. College data shows that attendance of learners on most courses has improved, particularly attendance for 19+ learners at level 1 which has improved from 49% in 2006/07 to 74% in 2007/08. Most courses are close to or above the college target of 81%.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made by the college in increasing learners' contribution and involvement in lessons?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in increasing learners' contribution to, and involvement in, lessons. It has clearly focused on developing strategies for involving learners and encouraging their contribution and independence, placing particular emphasis on making good use of group work in lessons. It has provided

development for staff and reviewed the use of group work in different curriculum areas. Some teachers are using a greater variety of teaching and learning strategies than before, to facilitate learners' contribution and involvement. However, in a small number of lessons, teachers give insufficient attention to the needs of individual learners. It is too soon to see the full impact of these changes on success rates for learners.

What success has the college achieved in the consistency, rigour and effectiveness of target-setting and tutorials?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, feedback and action planning to help students improve was an area for improvement, and target-setting in tutorials varied in quality. The college has made reasonable progress in tackling these areas for improvement. Its progress review programme is well established. Students' understanding of the process and purpose of progress reviews is good and they find their targets helpful. Improved attention to target-setting has made tutorials more purposeful than before. However, some individual targets for learners are not specific enough and do not always give enough information on how targets are to be achieved. The best examples of constructive feedback to learners show clearly what has been done well, and why, and what needs to improve. However, some feedback on written assignments does not always indicate clearly what has been done well or identifies areas for improvement.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made with the revised quality assurance systems and their impact on achievements and standards?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in revising quality assurance systems and assessing their impact on achievement and standards. In the last two years the college has introduced learning area managers with clear responsibilities for monitoring and assuring the quality of provision. Curriculum reviews are regularly carried out and course performance is much more thoroughly reviewed. Detailed discussion takes place among senior managers to ensure that appropriate action is taken to support poor performance of courses and staff. The quality assurance system has been revised, is well established and thorough. The teaching and learning observation programme is thorough and makes good use of internal and external assessment and validation of the quality of provision. Teaching and learning observation reports are detailed and place an appropriate emphasis on learning. However, some are descriptive and do not always provide judgements on the quality or success of learning experiences. Self-assessment is used well to review provision across the college.

