

Inspection of City of Portsmouth College

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 October 2024

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

Information about this provider

In August 2021, Highbury College and Portsmouth College merged to form City of Portsmouth College. It now has four campuses across the city. The Arundel campus specialises in adult provision, the Highbury campus has a broad offer, including all four provision types, the North Harbour campus specialises in construction and building services courses for adults, young people and apprentices and the Sixth Form campus offers a broad academic and vocational curriculum to young people. Leaders provide programmes across a wide range of vocational subjects from entry level to level 4. Leaders offer A levels at the Sixth Form campus and T levels at the Highbury campus.

At the time of the inspection, there were just under 3500 learners studying programmes for young people and 265 students in receipt of high needs funding. There were also just under 2400 adult learners. Around 530 apprentices were participating in training from level 2 to level 4 in a wide range of areas, including carpentry, hairdressing and plumbing. Just over a third of apprentices were aged 16 to 18 years old and the majority were over 19 years old.

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

Students and apprentices benefit from studying in a calm and welcoming environment across all four campuses. They feel their teachers and the support staff team are caring and respond to their needs positively. Students and apprentices respond well to the clear expectations from the staff team. Most students attend well and are punctual to their lessons. Most students and apprentices exhibit positive behaviours and are respectful and courteous to each other.

Students and apprentices gain in confidence quickly. They are encouraged to develop a range of skills which help them to be successful in their studies and are relevant for their next steps. For example, animal care students understand the importance of developing their communication skills so that they can communicate clearly and empathetically with animal owners. Sports students can confidently explain why professional behaviours are required to be a successful coach. They understand the importance of being positive and motivational to encourage the individual whom they are coaching.

Students and apprentices, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or high needs, benefit from a consistent and effective focus on careers information, advice and guidance to plan their next steps. For example, T-level health students learn from visitors from the local naval dockyards about opportunities in naval nursing. Students planning to go to university benefit from effective support and advice on UCAS applications as well as an annual higher education fair, where they can speak to representatives from a good range of institutions. They feel well informed about the range of options open to them.

Adult students value the support and encouragement from their teachers. They have a comprehensive range of provision available to them. This includes a well-considered choice of courses for adults who speak English as an additional language as well as bespoke courses aimed at those who have been out of employment and are working towards getting a job. Adult students have opportunities to complete an innovative programme, which enables them to work in the railway industry. They gain confidence and a range of skills with most gaining purposeful progression into the industry.

Younger students, including those with high needs, benefit from relevant and enjoyable work-related learning opportunities. Business studies students build their understanding of core business functions, such as marketing and advertising, across a range of types of businesses. Many attend purposeful work experience in a range of placements. They gain valuable skills such as the importance of personal presentation and become more confident when communicating within the workplace.

Younger students, including those with SEND or high needs, learn about the importance of good physical and mental health. They develop their understanding

of healthy relationships, such as how to identify toxic relationships and to keep themselves safe from sexploitation.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college. They value the support from the staff team and are confident that any concerns would be taken seriously. Leaders and managers have recently introduced a new tutorial framework to ensure that relevant students extend their awareness of safety and local risks, including those of radicalisation and extremism. To date, this has had an inconsistent impact and a small number of students and apprentices do not have a secure understanding of local risks relevant to them.

Vocational students and apprentices have a secure understanding of the importance of safe working practices within their specialisms. For example, they maintain a tidy working environment and understand the importance of protective clothing to minimise the risks of accidents.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work with a wide range of relevant stakeholders to develop a rich and detailed understanding of local skills needs. They liaise closely with employers and key local organisations. For example, they work with local civic bodies, the Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Shaping Portsmouth to understand the skills needs of the city and wider region.

Leaders and staff have well-established and positive relationships with Portsmouth City Council. They collaborate to plan programmes to meet residents' needs. This includes provision for local adults and young people who are more vulnerable and are at risk of not being in education, employment or training. For example, leaders have worked with Portsmouth City Council to design the 'Engage' programme. This provides these young people with a structured programme to support them to make progress. Participants are supported to develop essential employability skills as well as mathematics and English qualifications.

Leaders use the information from their employer advisory boards sensibly to hear directly from employers about their skills needs. Employers appreciate the opportunity these provide to share insights about skills needs and develop professional networks. For example, following feedback at a recent event, travel and tourism teachers now include more role-play activities to help students develop confident telephone skills that are essential when working in the travel and leisure sectors.

Leaders involve stakeholders in most curriculum areas. This helps to support students and apprentices to acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours essential for their future success. For example, computing and information technology curriculum staff work with a large employer in the financial services sector. Students now learn about more agile approaches to project management and why

this is important for software engineering. Hospitality and catering students benefit from master classes led by culinary experts from the Exclusive Collection (a specialist restaurant and hotel company). They apply their learning from these sessions as they develop their skills as professional chefs.

Leaders and managers are aware that there are a few areas where curriculum staff do not work with relevant stakeholders to inform the design or teaching of their course.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear and determined focus to be an inspirational and inclusive place for staff to work and students to study. They have worked diligently to establish the college as a trusted partner with local stakeholders. Leaders and managers have developed appropriate and relevant curriculums to meet skills shortages locally, regionally and nationally. They are acutely aware of the needs of the community they serve and provide opportunities for local people with a wide range of starting points and interests. For instance, they provide a broad curriculum offer for local adults to help them gain the confidence and skills they need to improve their life chances. They have recently expanded their provision for unaccompanied asylum seeker children, who benefit from a highly relevant curriculum, which helps them to flourish at college.

Senior leaders, supported by governors, have taken decisive action to improve the quality of provision and the finances of their college since the recent merger. They have invested in highly relevant training and development for managers at all levels to ensure their management team is skilled and able to lead on improvements across all provision types. Teachers and support staff participate in many useful training opportunities that enable them to develop their teaching skills as well as update their subject specialisms. For example, staff worked with a local specialist school to better support students with high needs. Those that are new to teaching are well supported to develop their skills through coaching sessions, peer observations and helpful feedback.

Curriculum managers ensure that teaching teams carefully plan the courses they teach. Most teachers now structure the curriculum sensibly so that students and apprentices can build their knowledge and skills. Sports students learn about the musculoskeletal system first so that they have a secure understanding of the bone composition of the body before moving on to learn about physiology and applying their knowledge to how elite athletes maintain their fitness. Brickwork apprentices learn important health and safety knowledge relevant to their industry, alongside developing simple brickwork construction skills. They then start to learn about more complex brickwork structures, such as arches, and they practise and refine their skills working safely.

Most teachers are well qualified and skilled practitioners. They share their expert knowledge with passion and enthusiasm. This helps students and apprentices to

enjoy their studies and acquire the knowledge and skills they need for their next steps. For example, T-level health students gain helpful insights into the health and care sectors from their teachers, who draw on their professional experiences to bring learning to life.

Most teachers use a range of teaching methods effectively. They introduce new topics clearly, design and use relevant resources to help students grasp new content. Most teachers use assessment effectively to check understanding. They use the results of this to inform their teaching and provide feedback for students and apprentices. For example, adults studying on the Railtrack programme benefit from incremental assessments of their skills and readiness to make emergency telephone calls. Many students and apprentices benefit from clear and relevant feedback, which helps them to build on their strengths and improve on their weaker areas. However, in a small number of curriculum areas, feedback and targets for improvement are imprecise. In these instances, students or apprentices do not understand how to improve their work or achieve higher grades.

Most teachers develop students' English and mathematics skills well. They integrate relevant opportunities to do this effectively into lessons. For example, level 1 construction students learn to use geometry accurately when setting up a brick or block corner. Most students and apprentices, including those with high needs, benefit from helpful advice on improving aspects of spelling or grammar.

Students and apprentices enjoy demonstrating their emerging knowledge and understanding of subject-specific language and terminology. For example, A-level biology students develop fluency and confidence in using concepts and theoretical content accurately. They strengthened their understanding of cyclic and non-cyclic photophosphorylation by debating and evaluating the content of peer produced videos.

Specialist staff assess students with high needs' starting points thoroughly and they plan transition arrangements in detail. They monitor students' progress carefully and intervene quickly, where students may be at risk of falling behind. Students benefit from individually tailored programmes that meet their individual needs and provide appropriate challenge for most. Most students with high needs develop skills that prepare them for progressing at college, work experience readiness, greater independence and/or voluntary or paid work.

Leaders and managers have a solid understanding of their strengths and the progress they have made in recent years. They also have a clear understanding of their areas for improvement and remaining challenges. They have developed robust and effective quality assurance and quality improvement processes, including for the small sub-contracted provision. Most curriculum managers and staff confidently take responsibility for their areas, and they strive to improve the experiences and quality of education for students and apprentices. They have a good understanding of the key challenges relevant to their own areas, for example improving retention, improving attendance or increasing the numbers of students or apprentices who achieve higher grades.

In a small number of curriculum areas, staffing vacancies and staff turnover have slowed the pace of improvements. This is particularly the case for apprenticeship provision, where this has contributed to the high number of apprentices who do not complete their apprenticeship on time. Leaders and managers have sensible plans for improvements, which are beginning to have marked impact. However, it is too soon to see the impact on apprentices' outcomes.

The highly qualified and experienced board of governors know their college well. They receive a wealth of information via detailed and thorough reports from leaders and managers. The well-established governor link scheme ensures governors have a firm understanding of the experiences of staff, students, and apprentices.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Accelerate the pace of improvements in apprenticeships so that more apprentices achieve their qualifications on time.
- Continue to support curriculum managers to implement appropriate quality improvement strategies in the few weaker areas.
- Make sure students and apprentices have a secure understanding of radicalisation and extremism as well as risks in the local areas in which they live and study.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130697
Address	Tudor Crescent Cosham Portsmouth Hampshire PO6 2SA
Contact number	02392383131
Website	https://city-of-portsmouth-college.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Katy Quinn
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	23 to 26 April 2018
Main subcontractors	Pompey in the Community

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy chief executive officer and deputy principal for curriculum and quality as nominee and the vice principal for foundation and adult learning services as skills 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

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