

City of Sunderland College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 131347

Name of lead inspector: Tim Gardner HMI

Last day of inspection: 29 January 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Shiney Row Campus
Success Road
Houghton-le-Spring
DH4 4TL

Telephone number: 0191 511 6000

Information about the provider

1. City of Sunderland College is a large general further education and tertiary college with vocational skills centres at Shiney Row and Hylton, and sixth forms at Usworth, St. Peter's and Bede. A new sixth form, Headways, is co-located at the Bede Centre. Most learners come from Sunderland and the Sunderland travel to work area. The college is located in an area of considerable disadvantage; Sunderland is the 22nd most deprived of the 354 local authorities in England. Three quarters of the college's 16 to 19-year-old full-time learners are in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs).
2. In 2008/09, the college enrolled 4,246 full-time and 542 part-time Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded 16 to 18-year-old learners, and 5,511 part-time and 571 full-time adult learners. A further 3,199 learners followed employer responsive programmes. College programmes cover all sector areas. The inspection focused on the provision in: health, public services and care, construction and the built environment, information and communication technology (ICT), social sciences, and preparation for life and work.
3. The college has achieved the Training Quality Standard and holds the Sunderland Learning Partnership's 14 to 19 Gold Standard Quality Mark. Recently the college was awarded a Queen's Award for its Skills for Life provision and holds three Beacon Awards for literacy and numeracy, 14 to 19 partnerships, and copyright.
4. Since the last inspection a new principal and two new vice-principals have been appointed. The full-time learner population is evenly balanced in terms of gender and 58% of the part-time adult learner population is female. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is small and accounts for 7% of enrolments. Minority ethnic groups account for 3% of the local population.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Washington Church of Christ
 - Sunderland Women's Centre
 - Pennywell Youth Project
 - Millennium Centre Trust
 - City of Sunderland Performers
 - Salvation Army Social Work
 - Bridge Women's Education Centre

6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:

- New Skill Training
- LOMAX
- Carillion Construction Training
- Sunderland Engineering Training Association Ltd
- Eventcover Education Ltd
- Development Training NE Ltd (Prince's Trust)
- Northumberland Fire and Rescue (Prince's Trust)
- Infinite Resources
- Tyne and Wear LGV

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	275 part-time learners
Further education (16 to18)	4,246 full-time learners 542 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	571 full-time learners 5,511 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	3,199 learners 135 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
------------------------------------	---------

Capacity to improve	Grade 1
---------------------	---------

	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	1

Subject Areas	
Health, public services and care	2
Construction and the built environment	2
Information and communication technology	2
Social sciences	2
Preparation for life and work	1

Overall effectiveness

- City of Sunderland College is a good college with an outstanding capacity to improve the outcomes for learners and the quality of the provision they receive. In most areas the outcomes for learners are improving, especially for learners taking literacy and numeracy courses. Most achieve well compared to their starting point except for learners who are studying on GCE AS- and A-level courses who achieve as expected. The college is aware of subject areas that still do not perform at the required level and is taking effective action to continue to improve these. The quality of the provision at the college is good as is the quality of the teaching and learning. The college has developed an extremely effective strategy to improve the standards of literacy and numeracy for learners and the quality of provision in the preparation for life

and work department is outstanding. Another particular strength of the college is the way that it works with a wide range of partners in developing the range of courses and programmes for all learners in the city.

8. The leadership and management of the principal and senior managers are very strong and they have established an open and transparent approach in all of their activities. Learners are represented on a range of college committees and student governors are active and effective. The college's approach to both equality and diversity and safeguarding is outstanding. Learners feel safe at all college sites. A wide range of activities, some of which are supported by additional project funding, have extended the opportunities provided for learners who might not otherwise participate in education and help learners to develop the skills of tolerance and respect for others.

Main findings

- Learners value highly their learning and achievement at the college. Success rates are very high on long courses for foundation learners and are high on intermediate and advanced programmes. Key skills and Train to Gain programme outcomes are outstanding. However, learners in some subject areas such as science and mathematics and modern and foreign languages achieve less well.
- Most, but not all, learners achieve well in relation to their starting points and inspectors could see signs that the progress made by learners is improving. There is no significant difference in the performance of any identified population group at the college.
- Learners enjoy their time at the college and acquire good personal, social and vocational skills. The college has developed and implemented a highly effective strategy to support learners' acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills.
- There are differences in the quality of the provision provided on different campuses, particularly for the small proportion of learners on GCE AS- and A-level courses.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use successful strategies and activities that focus on learners and the college's systems to improve teaching are excellent. However, teachers do not always use appropriate questioning techniques or provide activities that stretch learners that are more able.
- Support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is outstanding. Well-managed support enables learners, many from hard to reach cohorts, to complete their programmes successfully.
- The college provides an extensive range of courses, from entry level to degree level, in a number of settings to meet the needs of learners exceptionally well. Through highly effective employer engagement, the college has developed and tailored successfully its provision to meet the needs of individual employers and their employees.

- The college's partnership working is outstanding and its focus on the learner is at the heart of all that it does. Many senior staff are involved in city-wide initiatives at strategic level and staff at all levels are involved in initiating and developing partnerships. Partnerships are highly successful and of direct benefit to learners in a variety of ways.
- Learners receive good support overall and specialist support is excellent. Tutorial provision and the programme of work are well designed and organised. The performance review system is effective and target setting and monitoring motivate learners to do well. Information, advice and guidance are available to learners from their first contact with the college and services are tailored to meet individual needs.
- Very strong leadership from senior managers has raised the aspirations and expectations of staff and learners. Staff are set challenging targets and robust arrangements for performance management ensure that they are accountable for the quality of the experience they provide for learners.
- The principal, managers and staff from across the college place a high priority on the promotion of equality and diversity which is outstanding. A wide range of projects and effective curriculum development contribute to the economic and social regeneration of the area.
- The college's approach to safeguarding all learners is outstanding.

What does City of Sunderland College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to embed teaching and learning improvement strategies across the college to improve teachers' use of questioning skills and planning activities to stretch learners who are more able.
- Analyse and evaluate the underlying causes of differences in the quality of provision provided on different college campuses to inform improvement actions.
- Continue to develop strategies to improve further the progress of learners in relation to their starting points on all qualifications.
- Improve the success rates on intermediate and advanced courses by monitoring and tracking the impact on progression between levels of courses following the high success rates on foundation programmes.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the excellent teaching they receive from lecturers passionate about their subject
- the preparation for the next step in their career
- the variety of courses that meet a range of their needs
- the excellent knowledge of the tutors who are able to answer questions

- the level of support provided while at the college
- the way the college prepares them to progress to other courses
- the fascinating and fun activities that are carried out within the classroom
- the good monitoring of progress through apprenticeship programmes
- the quick and helpful response from student services to address identified problems or issues
- the way the college uses other provision such as the Prince's Trust to provide support and guidance and boost the confidence of those less sure.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the pace of some lessons
- the speed of the recruitment of replacement tutors to cover staff absence
- the availability of space in learning resource centres to accommodate growing student numbers
- course timetabling to prevent learners having to come to college for just one hour of class.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the way the college staff ensure that they meet all of their requirements
- the clear, unambiguous training agreements that ensure that each knows what to expect of the other
- the good communication and support received
- the quick response to requests and support in selecting apprentices
- the joined up approach to all training
- the interest college staff take in meeting specific, individual needs
- the accessibility of college staff
- the helpful way that staff provide useful information and advice on safeguarding and equality and diversity.

What employers would like to see improved:

- Employers did not identify any area that they would like to see improved.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement Grade 1

9. Inspirational leadership from the principal has changed the culture of the college to one where all staff are empowered and take responsibility for improving the quality of the experience for learners. Very rigorous and highly effective strategies for performance management and improving the quality of teaching and learning are at the heart of the college's strategies for raising standards. Managers at all levels use self-assessment highly effectively to review performance and support improvements in all areas of the college's work. All staff use their excellent systems for engaging with employers to further improve their provision. Since the last inspection there have been consistent improvement trends in success rates in most areas. Managers have a very good understanding of the action needed to sustain improvements. Recent improvements to arrangements for governance have increased the board's capability to challenge senior managers significantly. The quality of the provision to improve learners' levels of literacy, numeracy and key skills is outstanding. Extensive partnership working has ensured that the college is able to respond effectively to rapidly changing local and national priorities. Financial management is strong.

Outcomes for learners Grade 2

10. Learners value highly their learning and achievement at the college. Success rates are very high on long foundation programmes and are high on both long intermediate and advanced level programmes. The proportion of high grades achieved on advanced level vocational programmes has improved significantly and is now high. The short course adult provision success rates are extremely high and this provision is outstanding.
11. Learners on Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national programmes achieve well in relation to their starting points, particularly on ICT programmes. Learners on other programmes achieve less well against their starting points. The overall progress of learners, taking account of their background factors has improved and is now good. However, learners on General Certificate in Education (GCE) AS- and A- level courses perform less well. Learners enjoy attending the college and they acquire a good range of personal, vocational and academic skills. Behaviour on all campuses is good and the atmosphere is welcoming at all sites. The college has developed a highly effective strategy to support the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. The achievement rates for key skills at all levels are high and are outstanding.
12. On employer responsive programmes the Train to Gain provision is outstanding with very high overall and timely success rates. Both the Skills for Life and further education National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) success

rates are very high. The apprenticeship provision is new but learners' progress is good and they are developing relevant vocational skills.

13. The implementation of the college's key skills and Skills for Life strategies is outstanding. The successful outcomes from these strategies give learners the confidence to enter education and gain knowledge and skills that enable them to progress to further study or gain employment.
14. Learners say that they feel safe in and around the college. Although a small proportion of learners are less confident about moving between centres, the majority say that college sites have a welcoming reception, an inclusive atmosphere and are well kept. Attention given to internet safety measures is very good and learners are aware of safe working practices.
15. Learners acquire good knowledge to make informed choices about their own health and well-being. The college became a designated non-smoking campus in July 2007. Considerable work relating to 'being healthy' has been done in conjunction with the Sunderland Primary Care Trust (PCT) of the NHS. 'Healthy Sex' sessions are delivered to every tutorial group for those aged under 19 at each college centre. Healthy eating is promoted and evaluations show that the proportion of fruit and vegetables purchased in the refectories is steadily growing.
16. Learners make a good contribution to the college and wider community. Learners speak with confidence of changes that have been made as a result of their suggestions. Student representatives are given training by student services. However, further work is needed to ensure that representatives fully understand their roles and that they work consistently between centres.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

17. Teaching and learning are good. Lesson planning is systematic and makes clear links to prior learning. Better lessons are well planned and focus on student-centred learning. Good aspects include the active involvement of learners in their learning, imaginative approaches to subjects and excellent relationships between staff and learners. However, the less-good teaching does not sufficiently focus on higher-order thinking skills or questioning strategies and does not stretch more able students. Learners receive effective written and oral feedback. However, there is variability between centres and some written feedback is not detailed enough to inform learners of what they need to do to improve.
18. Arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning are outstanding with accurate and constructive judgements made by observers. The observation system is learner focused and evidence based. Observation outcomes are closely linked to the college's continuing professional

- development activities. These activities are carefully evaluated and can demonstrate direct and sustained impact on teaching and learning.
19. Learners receive outstanding support to develop their literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills. Additional learning support is well resourced and managed. Initial and diagnostic assessment is thorough and effective. Good specialist support and assistive technology meet a wide variety of learners' needs including visual impairment and mental health issues. Learning mentor and curriculum support staff are skilled and well qualified and give good individual support in classes and in small groups. Well qualified, skilled teachers use their expertise to inspire learners. The college's learning coaches are outstanding role models and provide good professional development activities and support to individual teachers and subject areas.
 20. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support learning is good. Staff and learners use interactive white boards and the college's virtual learning environment well to improve learning, assessment and teaching. Social science, construction, and information technology learners use technology extensively to support learning.
 21. The college provides an extensive range of courses, from entry level to degree level, in a number of settings to meet the needs of learners exceptionally well. Learners are able to study full time, part time or via distance learning. They are able to progress through the different levels in almost all areas, with progression routes mapped and monitored to ensure coherence. Although progression in some areas has been low, this is being addressed through development strategies and, although in their early stages, these already show positive outcomes.
 22. The portfolio of courses is constantly developing and the college has taken a leading role in the development of diploma courses. Currently 10 lines are available to learners in the city and from September 2010 all 14 will be offered. The new skills centres for 14 to 16-year old learners, opened in partnership with the local authority, are extending the range of provision and breaking down barriers between different groups of learners.
 23. Through highly effective employer engagement the college has developed provision which is tailored to the needs of individual employers and their employees. The college is highly responsive to local and national priorities and takes very good account of labour market needs, with a strong focus on enterprise initiatives. A key strength of the provision is the flexibility of the offer and the arrangements for training and assessment. Recently apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships have been added to the portfolio and although the offer is small as yet it is developing very well.
 24. Learners are highly complimentary about the enrichment activities they have access to in college. Activities are well organised and publicised and cover a good range, including a number of different sports. Many activities are linked

to curriculum areas so that they support learners in developing useful skills and in their career plans. There are good opportunities for students to be involved in community work; for example, through the Duke of Edinburgh award and enterprise activities.

25. The college's partnership working is outstanding and its focus on the learner is at the heart of all that it does. Many senior staff are involved in city-wide initiatives at strategic level and staff at all levels are involved in initiating and developing partnerships. Partnerships are highly successful and of direct benefit to learners. Examples include the long-standing partnerships with schools which support smooth transition at 16 and ensure learners have access to appropriate courses to meet their needs. Partnerships with employers are extensive and highly productive as are those with the local community. There are numerous examples of successful partnerships that are supporting people from hard to reach groups and those who are disengaged, back into learning.
26. Learners receive good support overall and specialist support is excellent. Identification of specialist support needs has a high priority. Systems to put support in place are effective and the support provided is of a very high standard. Support for learners with visual impairment and for those with mental health concerns is particularly well developed. Tutorial provision is well organised. Tutors meet regularly to liaise with curriculum staff, discuss individual learners and to share good practice. Learners value their group tutorials and the one-to-one sessions that they have with their tutor. The tutorial programme is well designed, with common themes across the college, which are customised to meet the needs of learners at different centres. The performance review system is effective. Target setting and monitoring motivate learners to do well. Outcomes of reviews are used well to identify learners who need intervention or who deserve praise for doing well.
27. The wider aspects of support are very strong and accessible to all learners, including learners in the workplace and the community. Services, such as financial support and counselling, are very well publicised and monitored to assess their impact. There are wide-ranging and very effective partnership arrangements with numerous external agencies to support learners.
28. Information, advice and guidance are available to learners from their first contact with the college to when they leave. The degree of advice and guidance given is related to the needs of the individual and is used well to help learners make decisions about their future plans. The criteria used to advise students on the most appropriate course to enrol on and progression criteria have recently been changed and the evaluation of the impact of this initiative is ongoing.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

29. Very strong leadership from the principal and senior managers, appointed following the last inspection, has established a culture of openness and transparency in decision making and has raised significantly the expectations and ambition of staff and learners, which are high. Senior managers have set a clear strategic direction for the college, supported by governors, that is underpinned by core values focused on providing high-quality personalised learning for all students and contributing to the future prosperity of the city and the region. Senior and other managers make a considerable contribution to key strategic partnerships which ensure that the college's provision responds very well to local and national priorities.
30. Arrangements for quality assurance and self-assessment are rigorously carried out and accurately identify the strengths and areas to be improved in most areas of the college's provision. Robust and regular performance management has been highly effective in raising standards across the provision. Staff at all levels of the college are focused very successfully on securing improvements in outcomes for learners and are set challenging targets. Targets for vocational programmes are mostly met or exceeded. However, although improved significantly, strategies have not yet had sufficient impact across all of the provision, particularly on GCE AS- and A-level provision. Comprehensive staff development and management actions have been targeted very effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Curriculum management is good overall. The management of provision for literacy, numeracy and key skills is outstanding. Effective team working across the college and well-managed support services, such as those for learning resources, social spaces and the refectory, support learning very well. Strong management of provision for employers has secured growth and outstanding outcomes for learners, particularly on Train to Gain provision. Management restructuring of the sixth form centres has been successful in improving communication, team working and the sharing of good practice. However, there is insufficient sharing of good practice generally across centres.
31. Governors are committed to the success of the college. They have a good range of experience and very good local knowledge which they use well to monitor the performance of the college. Recent changes to the committee structure are positioning the college well to be able to respond to changes in the external environment, both locally and nationally. Governors understand and fulfil their statutory duties effectively.
32. The promotion of equality and diversity is embedded across the college and is outstanding. The college has appropriate schemes to comply with legislation and a single equality scheme is being developed. The equality and diversity committee, chaired by the principal, monitors effectively the implementation of the college's schemes. A wide range of activities, some of which are supported by additional project funding, has extended the opportunities provided for learners who might not otherwise participate in education and

provides innovative activities for students to develop the skills of tolerance and respect for others. Governors receive detailed reports on progress against the statutory schemes for race, disability and gender. Staff analyse and evaluate learners' achievement by gender, race and disability to inform course review and self-assessment and effective action is taken to address gaps.

33. The college has a good strategy for involving learners, parents and carers in commenting on, and improving, the quality of provision. Each college campus has an elected student council that contributes well to improving facilities for learners. However, across the sites the councils have different levels of engagement and impact. The most effective have learners on college management committees and contribute to the development of enrichment programmes and the review of the quality curriculum. Support to help student governors carry out their roles is satisfactory. Learners informed inspectors that in most instances the college listens and treats their views seriously. Engagement with employers is excellent.
34. Governors, managers and staff place a high priority on safeguarding. Policies and procedures to safeguard young people and vulnerable adults are up-to-date and reviewed regularly. Thorough procedures for the safe recruitment of staff, including for agency and sub-contractors, are implemented rigorously. Staff and governors are trained well and understand college procedures and their responsibilities. Governors receive bi-annual reports to monitor the effectiveness of the college's policies. Designated staff have very good links with the Local Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults boards, and other key external agencies, to extend the services available in college that support learners who are at risk. Strong pastoral support and extensive welfare services are highly effective in supporting those learners identified to be in need. Health and safety procedures are generally effective in ensuring that the college is a secure, safe and welcoming environment.
35. Strong financial management secures efficiencies in the use of resources. Investment in improving resources for learning is prioritised to meet the needs of learners. Success rates have improved consistently. The college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Context

36. This subject area currently has 3,803 learners taking health, public services, care and childcare courses, of whom 1,366, mostly 16 to 18-years-old, are on full-time courses. Adults mainly study on part-time and distance learning courses.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. The overall success rate has consistently improved and is currently at 92%, which is above the national average. Learner responsive success rates are high at 90% and the retention rate is 93%. Employer responsive success rates are high at 96% for intermediate level and 89% for advanced level. Learners are making good progress and are on target to complete.
- Learners make good progress in acquiring and developing a good range of workplace and social skills. Their social skills develop strongly and their self-confidence increases. Learners are highly motivated. There is a good range of progression opportunities and progression to higher level courses and to higher education is good.
- Learners feel safe and value college measures to maintain a safe and secure environment. They know whom to contact if they feel unsafe at their placement or have any concerns about college life.
- Teaching and learning programmes are good. Learners' interest is engaged and sustained. Sessions are clearly linked to NVQ and work practices. Learners participate well and teachers use appropriate teaching methods to promote and extend learning. The pace of learning meets individual needs. Assessment practices are satisfactory and sampling of assessment activity is regular.
- Progress reviews in employer responsive provision have insufficient clear targets to measure learners' progress and achievement. Insufficient detail is recorded on the review form. Some comments are vague and describe the discussion or activity rather than identify what the learner realistically needs to complete to progress through their award. Monitoring of learners' progress within the learner responsive provision is satisfactory.
- The provision is very responsive to the needs and interests of learners. The college offers a range of programmes in health and social care from foundation level to advanced level. In addition, the college has developed its flagship 'Real Impact Skills for Employment' programme to help those who have lost their jobs in recession-hit industries to find work in the care sector.

- The college engages well with a vast array of local employers, community groups, schools and nurseries to determine their needs and to raise their interest in learning. It uses its links with employers well to promote learning and employability skills. Learners are recruited and assessed for the appropriate level of programme at induction.
- Care, guidance and support for learners in helping them to reach their learning goals are good. Tutors and assessors have good current occupational experience and skills, provide sensitive support to learners to overcome barriers to learning, are available to meet learners' needs and visit learners regularly.
- Tutors also provide useful information about opportunities for future development for learners who wish to progress to higher levels of education and career paths. Learners value the support that they receive and recognise that it helps them to stay on programme and achieve.
- Leadership and management are good. Both employer and learner responsive provision curriculum leaders and staff have had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning by introducing effective processes to develop the skills of teachers. Outcomes for learners are improving following revisions to the delivery model. Managers communicate well with staff, who feel well supported and have good access to staff development opportunities.
- Sharing of good practice across the provision is insufficient. No formal meetings or discussions take place between all staff. Opportunities to integrate work in areas such as sharing provider placements and standardising recording documents, are insufficient.
- The promotion of equality and diversity and procedures for safeguarding and their coverage within the curriculum are good. The culture of the college is one of mutual respect and tolerance and it celebrates diversity and safeguarding well. However, staff do not explore adequately equality and diversity, or safeguarding with learners, at their progress reviews.

What does City of Sunderland College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of the employer responsive review process to ensure that learner targets are realistic, progress is appropriately evaluated and that equality and diversity and safeguarding are explored effectively in order to develop further learners' understanding of these areas.
- Develop communication channels and systems to share practice across the employer and learner responsive provision.

Construction, planning and the built environment

Grade 2

Context

37. At the time of the inspection, this subject area had 821 learners, 583 of whom were full time, 147 were adults and 120 were aged 14 to 16. There were 104 Train to Gain learners and a further 13 learners on work-based programmes. The college offers a wide range of construction diplomas and relevant qualifications covering the major vocational areas and skills. It also offers 14 to 19 diplomas in construction and the built environment.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are high on most courses. However, for a small number of learners on the advanced construction award, the success rate is significantly below the national average. Timely completion rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are improving and are now high. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are also high.
- The standard of learners' work is good. Learners develop good vocational skills. They make good progress in lessons. Practical work done in the college is mostly good and realistic. For example, bricklaying learners at the time of inspection were constructing an industry-standard bungalow on the college site using facing bricks.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use a good variety of methods to interest and engage learners. Learning technologies, including the use of interactive whiteboards and the college's virtual learning environment, effectively support teaching and learning. Teachers set realistic learning outcomes in their lessons and share them with learners.
- Some teachers do not use sufficiently focused and probing questions to engage all learners. There is insufficient attention on health and safety issues in some practical sessions and, in a small number of classes, health and safety issues are insufficiently reinforced.
- The quality of delivery on the Train to Gain programmes and the extent to which the college is successful in identifying individual employers' and learners' needs are good.
- Assessment and internal verification are good. Teachers' feedback on learners' written work is mostly detailed and constructive and identifies the ways in which learners can make progress. For Train to Gain learners, on-site teaching and training are good. Systems for internal verification are clear and record keeping is good.
- The range of enrichment activities is good. For example, learners visit companies specialising in solar panels.

- Support and guidance provided for learners are good. Learners are well supported by teachers and specialist additional learning support staff who inspire and motivate them to do their best.
- Leadership and management are good, ensuring courses meet local labour market needs. Teachers are set challenging targets for success, retention, achievement and attendance for each class. Communication is improving and team meetings are productive. Managers seek the views of learners to improve the provision. The self-assessment report is sufficiently evaluative; however, it overstated some of the strengths.
- The college has established excellent and productive links with schools. A significant number of learners aged 14 to 16 from 15 schools are enrolled on construction courses. Progression to college provision is good. Partnerships and sponsorships are very strong, particularly in renewable energy and the provision of specialist visiting speakers.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Despite managers' strategies to recruit from the under-represented groups, the participation rate of female learners is low.
- Resources are satisfactory but are particularly good in bricklaying and renewable energy.

What does City of Sunderland College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates for advanced level courses by ensuring that learners are retained on the courses.
- Develop staff's use and understanding of a wider range of questioning techniques to check learners' understanding and knowledge of the topics that they cover in lessons.
- Consistently apply appropriate health and safety measures in every lesson, particularly in practical and workshop areas.

Information and communication technology

Grade 2

Context

38. The subject area has 780 learners aged 16 to 18 enrolled on full-time programmes; these include introductory, first and national diplomas in ICT and GCE AS- and A-level in applied ICT and computing. In addition, 80 adult learners are on part-time courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Qualifications for these learners include Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT), European Computer Driving License (ECDL) and national certificate in ICT. Around 160 learners take distance-learning courses leading to qualifications at all levels.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall with improvements in success rates at all levels in 2008/09, but also some variation between qualifications. Success rates are well above national average for learners taking distance learning and on many courses for learners aged over 19. Success rates are high, being well above national average on advanced vocational courses and GCE A-level and AS applied ICT.
- Learners' progress on most advanced level courses is above the levels predicted from their GCSE results, and a much greater proportion than the national average achieve high grades. On GCE A-level computing, success rates have improved and are satisfactory, but on GCE A-level and AS computing learners make less progress than predicted by their GCSE results.
- On vocational courses, individual target grades are used effectively to raise aspirations and performance. An electronic monitoring system, which is accessible to staff and learners, gives the current progress of learners towards their target grade. This facility is used more on some sites than on others. Most learners are aware of their targets and their progress toward them.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In better lessons, focused questions extend and check learning. However, there is insufficient planning of activities to stretch learners that are more able and limited checking of understanding. In workshop-type sessions, where learners are working on the computers, they are not set individual targets for the session and proceed at a slower pace.
- The college's virtual learning environment is used extensively to support learners in the college and for those on distance learning courses. Learners make appropriate use of it to support and extend their learning. Learners are given instructions on safe use of the internet and in lessons learners use it with skill, and appropriately, to research and obtain information.
- The college offers a wide range of qualifications for 16 to 18-year-old learners at the three sixth form centres. The college plans to develop distance-learning opportunities further to meet the individual needs of learners and employers, with support tailored for the individual.

- The 16 to 18-year old learners on vocational courses have limited opportunities to gain understanding of the information technology (IT) industry. Work experience is not available and employers are not involved with the development or delivery of the curriculum. Tutors create and use assessment scenarios based on industry case studies to provide a realistic experience for learners.
- Learners are very positive about group and individual tutorials. They enjoy the group activities and appreciate the good personal support that encourages and enables them to achieve. In-class support is structured and extra support provided by tutors out of class. Learners on distance-learning courses are provided with additional learning support where appropriate.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers in each centre are taking action to improve performance and promote sharing of good practice sessions and the development of common resources across centres. The impact of this cross-centre working is not yet visible in results.
- Cross-centre meetings and professional development on teaching and learning are addressing the achievement gap, difference in high grades and learners' progress on qualifications. However, there is still a strong focus on centre performance, which does not always address the difference in progress made by learners on the same qualification at different centres.
- The self-assessment and quality improvement plan focus on centres and do not identify or plan to address differences in performance between sites. The standard of the improvement plans varies between the different centres and provision. The overall summary self-assessment report is accurate.

What does City of Sunderland College need to do to improve further?

- Introduce strategies and action plans to reduce the achievement gap between learners studying the same qualifications at different centres.
- Develop strategies to improve success rates, achievement of high grades and progress relative to their starting point, for learners on the programmes performing less well.
- Promote the use of individual learners' targets for each workshop style session so that teaching staff can monitor the progress against these targets throughout the session.
- Develop relationships with employers to increase the opportunities for learners to understand the IT industry.

Social sciences

Grade 2

Context

39. The subject area offers courses at advanced level in GCE AS- and A-level geography, government and politics and sociology. Most of the 235 enrolments are learners aged 16 to 18, and only two are adult students. Nearly 64% of learners are female and approximately 5% are learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

- Success rates on most courses are high and above national average, except on GCE AS-level sociology. Learners' progress relative to their starting point has improved on GCE AS courses and geography A level, and is now good. However, on GCE A-level government, politics, and sociology, progress is below the national average. Progression from GCE AS to A level is low.
- The standard of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and focus on student-centred learning. Teachers use a variety of activities and resources to stimulate learning and engage learners, who enjoy their work. Attendance in lessons is high and punctuality is good. Assessment is good and learners receive effective feedback with clear guidance that enables them to improve.
- The monitoring of learners' progress is highly effective and contributes to improvements in success rates. Learners are set, and achieve, stretching targets at the start of their course. Regular reviews successfully identify and support learners at risk, as well as reward learners' success.
- Learning resources are good. Classrooms and learning areas are generally well equipped and celebrate learners' work with displays that stimulate and promote achievement. Effective use is made of ILT in many social science classes and learners are adept at using the intranet and internet to carry out research and produce assignments.
- The college provides a good range of subject-focused texts and guidance for electronic resources and appropriate websites at the Individual Learning Centres.
- Learners take part in a wide range of enrichment activities that extend and enhance their learning experience. These include frequent motivational visits from subject-related guest speakers, field trips, college-based conferences and collaborative work with local universities.
- The support for learners is good. Application of the college's 'right student, right course' strategy has led to good initial advice and guidance, placement of students on appropriate courses and improved achievement for learners in social sciences. Learners receive effective curriculum support, both in and outside lessons.

- Leadership and management are good. Performance monitoring and effective quality improvement strategies have led to significant improvement over time. Self-assessment is accurate, although staff over-estimated a few strengths. Managers are highly effective in motivating and inspiring staff and students to achieve challenging targets.
- Staff development is good and focuses on teaching and learning. Staff receive regular and effective professional training that has significantly improved the standard of teaching and learning across the subject area. Learning support materials for staff are available on the college's Blackboard site.
- Promotion of equality and diversity across the area is good, being well mapped through schemes of work, lesson plans and teaching materials. Learners in lessons develop a good understanding of equality and diversity through positive discussion, debate and analysis of issues.

What does City of Sunderland College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates and high grades on courses performing less well by continuing to develop and apply improvement strategies.
- Develop strategies to challenge and stretch learners that are more able and ensure that learners achieve their full potential.
- Improve the numbers of learners progressing onto higher level courses, such as from GCE AS to A-level courses in all subjects.

Preparation for life and work

Grade 1

Context

40. This subject area has 6,000 enrolments, and is 44% of the college's provision. The college provides literacy, language and numeracy for a range of target groups including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, family learning, adults seeking to enter further training and education, as well as those young people not in education employment or training (NEET). The college offers qualifications in Skills for Life, preparation for life and work and personal development.

Key findings

- All qualifications have very high success rates. Skills for Working Life success rates for 2008/09 were 100%, literacy and numeracy at foundation and intermediate levels for both adults and 16 to 18-year-olds were all at least 6% above the national average. Retention and attendance are good and have improved in the last year, particularly for 16 to 18-year-old numeracy groups.
- Standards of work in basic and key skills are good. The introduction of a model using robust initial and diagnostic assessment ensures that the college places learners on an appropriate level of provision and that learners gain confidence and achieve well across all of their qualifications.
- The economic and social development of learners is outstanding. The college supports learners who are at a significant disadvantage to gain confidence, increase social contact, gain qualifications and move into further training.
- The college provides learners with opportunities to discuss and adopt healthy living practices; this is particularly true for those young people who are at risk of substance misuse or mental health problems.
- Learners make good contributions to the community through various activities to support charities, raise funds for equipment and participate in the wider community through work placements. Many influence others by their positive attitude to the college by actively encouraging others to take up opportunities.
- Teaching and learning are good and some lessons are outstanding. Good aspects include imaginative approaches to subjects, excellent relationships between staff and learners, use of innovative materials including the use of ICT and active involvement of the learners in the learning process. Most lessons are learner-centred, recognising and responding to different levels of attainment.
- Staff use initial and diagnostic assessments effectively to inform individual learning plans and monitoring of progress by teachers is good. However, individual learning plan targets are insufficiently specific and the development of more measurable targets for use in lessons is inconsistent. Differentiation of activities within some lessons is not sufficient, which leads to a lack of challenge for some learners.

- The college's response to the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The very wide range of provision for learners of all ages addresses the needs of young learners seeking higher education, disengaged young people, those not in education or employment, adults seeking to improve employment prospects, distance-learning learners, and families.
- Partnership working is outstanding. The college has instigated several innovative projects, one of which received the Queen's Anniversary Prize. Extensive formal partnerships are in place to improve transition between schools and college, improve teacher training and to develop work opportunities and innovative educational opportunities for people from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Thorough initial and diagnostic assessments identify support needs and lead to provision of suitable levels of additional learning support and learning mentors. Additional learning support staff are skilled, supportive and not overly intrusive. The college has recognised that some learners feel insecure about moving between centres.
- Strong management for continual improvement has led to significantly high success rates, which are well above national average across all courses. The focus of training has successfully enabled student enrolment for the right course.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Well-trained staff are active in supporting equality and diversity and ensuring high levels of safeguarding. The college has been active for several years in successfully engaging hard to reach populations and successfully improving their future aspects. There is a strong emphasis on safety when using the internet and social networking sites.
- The self-assessment report is accurate and detailed and provides a well-monitored appropriate quality action plan. Managers accurately evaluate strengths and areas for improvement and monitor appropriate quality improvement plans. However, self-assessment does not reflect the inconsistencies in the use of targets and individual planning for lessons.
- Resources are good. Equipment is available for those with disabilities including up-to-date equipment for visually impaired people.

What does City of Sunderland College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the setting of individual learners' targets to make them more specific and measurable for the learner, to enable learners to have a clear picture of their progress and further development needs.
- Incorporate individual learners' targets in lesson planning to differentiate more clearly the learning strategies for learners to enable them to achieve their own learning targets.

Information about the inspection

41. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's vice-principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local LSC or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
42. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
City of Sunderland College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; I2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; I4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	4601		4074	527	
Part-time learners	4677	120	241	2938	1378
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	1
Capacity to improve	1				
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	1	1	1	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk