

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130672

Name of lead inspector: Lindsay Hebditch HMI

Last day of inspection: 03 February 2012

Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Luker Road
Southend-on-Sea
Essex
SS1 1ND

Telephone number: 0845 5212345

Information about the provider

1. South Essex College of Further and Higher Education is a large general further education (FE) college which was formed as a result of the merger of South East Essex College and Thurrock and Basildon College in 2010. The main campuses are in Southend, Basildon and Thurrock but there are another nine smaller sites in the south Essex region.
2. The college provides courses at all levels from entry to higher education (HE) and in all subject areas but with more than one third of learners following programmes in preparation for life and work. More than two thirds of learners follow courses at intermediate and advanced levels. Approximately two thirds of learners are aged 16 to 18. Pupils aged 14 to 16 attend the college as part of their school Key Stage 4 programme and follow courses in early years, land-based studies, motor vehicles, construction, salon services, catering and sport.
3. The College is the lead partner in the NOVA partnership which delivers work-based learning programmes throughout south Essex and the Thames gateway. The provision of the NOVA partnership was included in this inspection.
4. Levels of deprivation are low in south Essex and the number of Year 11 pupils who achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics is above the national average, although this is not the case in all areas that the college serves. The local unemployment rate is above average. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups at the college is 10%, well above the figures in each of the local authority areas in which the college works. The Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency fund the majority of the college's provision.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - JTL
 - Remit
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Academy of Music and Sound
 - Badgehurst Training Limited
 - Brentwood Academy
 - Central Training Academy
 - Crown College
 - Debut Nails and Beauty
 - Eden Training
 - Explicit Skills & Training Academy
 - ITEC Learning Technologies

- Jet Training
- Lifeskills
- M2 Training
- Palmers College
- Prospects Learning Foundation
- SLIC Training
- Southend Adult Community College
- Southend YMCA
- Vocational Training Services (VTS)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 Further education (16 to 18) Foundation learning	193 part-time learners 6,822 full-time learners 659 part-time learners 4,123 full-time learners 913 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	478 full-time learners 2,077 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	967 learners 4,359 apprentices
Adult and community learning	1,035 learners

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
---	----------------

Capacity to improve	Grade 3
----------------------------	----------------

	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Health and social care	2
Engineering	3
Information and communication technology (ICT)	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3
Business management	2

Overall effectiveness

- Learners are happy at the college and feel safe there. Outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates in the college are below average because retention rates are low. Success rates in the NOVA partnership are above average. There are no significant differences in the outcomes of different groups of learners according to their gender or ethnicity and those who receive additional help with their learning achieve at least as well as other learners. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The most effective lessons are planned well to take account of learners' starting points and provide learners with plenty of interesting learning activities to participate in. However, a significant minority of lessons are too teacher-centred, depriving learners of the chance to think for themselves and work at their own pace. Assessment is satisfactory but good in

the NOVA partnership, although individual learning plans and targets frequently fail to make clear to learners what they need to do to improve, or by when.

8. Provision meets the needs of learners well and partnerships are outstanding. Excellent working arrangements with partners are helping the college to develop courses to cater for employers' requirements and help fill regional skills gaps. The NOVA partnership is well-managed and offers good provision. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Recent changes to support procedures have helped improve the retention of current learners but have not yet been effective in improving attendance, which is low.
9. The merger was managed well and ably led by the Acting Principal, with strong support from governors. However, actions for improvement in the first year of the new college did not have as much impact as leaders had anticipated. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive but have yet to secure consistent and good quality provision in all aspects of the college's business. Safeguarding arrangements are good. There are appropriate policies and plans to address equality and diversity issues in the college but lessons do not provide sufficient coverage of equality and diversity topics. The views of learners and employers are gathered and used effectively and the college provides satisfactory value for money.

Main findings

- The college provides a safe and welcoming environment for learners. The vast majority of learners say that they enjoy coming to college and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. Work-based learning provision in the NOVA partnership is good; leaders have been successful in improving learners' success rates, which are now above average. Learners make good progress in the development of their specific vocational skills.
- Success rates are below national averages in the college's learner responsive provision and well below average for learners aged 16 to 18 who follow AS/A-level programmes. Achievement rates are mostly above average but retention is low. The college's own data indicate that retention has improved on the majority of courses in the current year.
- There are no significant differences in performance between learners according to their gender or ethnic heritage. Learners who require additional help with their learning receive good support which enables them to achieve success rates which are at least as high as those learners who do not require it.
- The quality of lessons varies within and between subject areas. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of initial assessment and a good variety of creative approaches to learning to make their lessons interesting and relevant. In less effective lessons teachers do not take sufficient account of learners' prior attainment in their planning and provide insufficient opportunities for learners to solve problems for themselves. These lessons provide insufficient challenge, particularly for more able learners.

- The use of information learning technology (ILT) varies between subjects; some teachers are more confident about using it than others but do not always use it to its full advantage, for example in encouraging learners to explore topics in greater depth. The virtual learning environment (VLE) needs to be simpler for learners to use if it is to be fully effective.
- The assessment of learners' progress is satisfactory. Most teachers and trainers provide regular and encouraging feedback to learners on their work to help them improve. However, a small minority of teachers do not check or consolidate learners' understanding sufficiently during lessons. Learners in the college and in the NOVA partnership receive good feedback about their progress but individual learning plans are not always used effectively and the targets they contain are sometimes too vague to be of value.
- Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. The college provides courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in nearly all subject areas whilst continuing to provide specialist provision on particular campuses. Subject-based enrichment activities and additional qualifications provide useful ways for learners to develop their studies but participation in cross-college enrichment activities is low, particularly amongst women.
- Partnerships are outstanding. The college has very strong links with an extensive range of relevant partners and uses them to good effect to develop provision which helps close regional skills gaps.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners with sensory impairments and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive very good support. Learners who require extra help with literacy and numeracy receive prompt and effective help.
- Tutorial arrangements are satisfactory but group tutorials are not always used for their intended purpose and there is too much variation in the quality of progress reviews conducted during individual support sessions. Although there are encouraging signs that retention is improving, attendance monitoring and the rigour of subsequent remedial actions have yet to have sufficient impact on attendance, which remains low.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The Acting Principal provided strong leadership throughout a complex and difficult merger. Initiatives to implement a wide range of new procedures are now proving increasingly effective. However, learners' attendance and outcomes have not yet improved sufficiently. Governors provide good oversight of the college's financial position but do not monitor the curriculum and standards with sufficient rigour.
- Most quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive but have not secured consistent quality across all aspects of the college's work. Arrangements for observing and improving the quality of teaching and learning are good. Self-assessment varies in accuracy and rigour; many subject reports are accurate but summary reports are less so. Improvement targets are not always specific or challenging enough.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Equality and diversity are well supported by sound policies and an inclusive ethos but are not promoted sufficiently

strongly in lessons. Learners' and employers' views are used fully to inform developments. Financial and human resource management is good.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates by providing learners with clearer and more challenging targets, and checking their progress more frequently and effectively in lessons.
- Help learners make better progress by ensuring that teachers use information about learners' prior attainment when planning lessons so that tasks are better matched to learners' interests and abilities.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by encouraging teachers to make better use of ILT to consolidate learning and by making the VLE easier to use.
- Improve attendance by reviewing the effectiveness of attendance monitoring and following up absence more vigorously.
- Implement quality assurance arrangements consistently across all aspects of the college's work and make the moderation of self-assessment reports more rigorous so that all grades are supported by accurate judgements.
- Sharpen the focus of governors on monitoring the curriculum and standards in the college and make sure that targets to support the drive for improvement are consistently realistic and challenging.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the opportunities to make new friends
- being treated like an adult
- the friendly and helpful teachers who know their subjects well
- the good general resources and technical equipment which help you learn
- the safe and welcoming college sites.

What learners would like to see improved:

- access to computers at busy times
- some noisy open-plan areas at the Southend campus
- the inadequate temperature control which sometimes makes the Southend campus an uncomfortable place to study
- the amount of challenge that college work provides, particularly at the start of the course
- the planning of lessons and assignment schedules.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the good communication with the college
- the high standard of the college's service
- the flexible approach to training which helps meet the needs of individual learners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the frequency of reports on learners' progress.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

10. In the relatively short time in which the new college has been established, considerable progress has been made in stabilising the staffing structure, improving staff morale, securing financial stability and improving the learning environment. Managers at all levels, with governors' support, are tackling the challenges of the merger capably and ensuring a sound basis from which to move forward. However, actions for improvement did not have sufficient impact in the first full year of the new college and college-based learners' outcomes declined, although outcomes for learners across the NOVA partnership continued to improve. The college's data and inspectors' own evidence indicate that management interventions are beginning to have a more positive impact on standards but the capacity of middle managers to implement change is not yet fully developed. Quality assurance arrangements are beginning to be used effectively across the college although some aspects require strengthening and more consistent implementation. Self-assessment is not always accurate but the resulting action plans provide a secure basis for bringing about improvement. The views of learners and employers are gathered and used effectively.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

11. Success rates are below national averages in the college's learner responsive provision but above national averages for the work-based learning provision in the NOVA partnership. For learners aged 16 to 18 based in the college, success rates on intermediate courses in 2010/11 were close to the most recent national averages but they were below average on foundation and advanced level courses. Success rates in AS/A levels were well below average. Success rates for adult learners at the college are well below the most recent national averages at all levels. Success rates for learners of all ages and at all levels are depressed by retention, for although the proportion of students who pass their course is above average, retention is well below average. The college's own data for the current year indicate that retention has improved recently, particularly for learners on AS/A-level programmes where retention was poor. The majority of learners make satisfactory progress and on most courses achieve a similar proportion of high grades to that indicated by their starting points. However, in GCE AS/A-level subjects the proportion of high grades is well below average. Pupils aged 14 to 16 do well and the majority progress to full-time courses at the college. Success rates in the NOVA partnership, including those for learners completing their qualifications within the planned time period, are above average; apprentices make good progress in terms of developing new workplace skills. Success rates on short courses are above average.
12. The college has been successful in ensuring that there are no significant differences in the performance of different groups of learners. Learners of

minority ethnic heritage achieve success rates that are at least similar, and often higher than those of other learners. The difference in success rates between male and female learners has narrowed significantly so that they now achieve similar outcomes. Learners who find learning difficult achieve at least as well as other learners and those who require additional support with literacy and numeracy achieve similar success rates to the college average.

13. Most learners enjoy their time at college and benefit from the broad range of opportunities to develop academically, personally and socially. The development of learners' economic and social well-being is satisfactory; learners make satisfactory improvements to their standards of literacy and numeracy and their progression onto higher level courses, into HE and into employment is satisfactory. Success rates in functional skills are above the most recent national averages. The vast majority of learners say they feel safe in the college. Learners adopt safe working practices in lessons, including the safe use of the internet, and behave appropriately whilst on campus.
14. The college provides a good range of information and additional services on health and well-being and offers good opportunities for learners to eat healthily on all sites, although insufficient learners take advantage of healthy options such as the 'Meal for a pound' initiative. There are good opportunities for students to engage in sporting and recreational activities at the Basildon campus and a significant minority of learners participate. However, there are few opportunities at Southend and participation rates are very low. Learners make a satisfactory contribution to the community, particularly through fundraising for local and national charities, but are insufficiently involved in projects to conserve and improve the local environment.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers are well-qualified and many have extensive professional experience in their subject areas which helps them provide greater relevance to their teaching. Teachers know their learners well and build positive relationships with them. Resources to support learning are good, and equipment in vocational areas meets appropriate industry standards.
16. The quality of teaching varies within and between subject areas. In the most effective lessons, teachers use initial assessment well to plan activities which are suited to learners' individual needs. These lessons are well structured, lively and maintain learners' interest throughout. In less successful lessons, teachers give insufficient attention to learners' starting points and lessons fail to provide sufficient challenge, particularly for more able learners. These lessons are often dominated by the teacher and learners have insufficient opportunities to form their own opinions or solve problems for themselves. Teachers make satisfactory use of ILT to support learning but there are significant variations in practice. In the best examples, teachers use ILT effectively in order to extend learners' understanding of their subject. However, too many teachers fail to use

ILT creatively to capture learners' interest and stimulate them to research topics more deeply. The VLE is used well in some subject areas but the college recognises that it needs to be simpler to operate if it is to be used more frequently.

17. The monitoring and assessment of learners' progress is satisfactory. Most teachers and trainers provide regular and encouraging feedback to learners on their progress. However, a significant minority of teachers do not assess learners' progress during lessons sufficiently thoroughly; opportunities to check and consolidate learners' understanding at critical stages in lessons are often missed. Feedback on learners' written work generally identifies clear and pertinent points for development which help learners to improve. In vocational settings, teachers and trainers monitor individual learners' progress closely and give good practical advice which helps them to develop their skills and gain additional confidence. Progress reviews in tutorials vary in quality and sometimes lack focus on what it is that they are reviewing. In work-based learning, progress reviews are held regularly and trainers and assessors respond very flexibly to individual learners' needs. Although learners in the NOVA partnership receive good feedback on their progress, individual learning plans are not always used effectively to record progress or to set clear and specific targets to help learners improve.
18. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. The college has taken significant steps to harmonise the curriculum across its three sites since merger, enabling it to continue to provide areas of specialist provision at particular campuses while still providing a coherent offer and clearer progression routes throughout the college. Highly experienced college managers have a good knowledge of the needs of the local and regional economies and use it well to develop courses to meet employers' needs and tackle skills gaps. Summer schools and in-year recruitment initiatives are highly effective in increasing enrolments. The NOVA partnership provides a good range of apprenticeships and progression routes for learners.
19. Additional short courses for all learners aged 16 to 18 successfully increase their awareness of safety, environmental sustainability and managing their personal finances. Enrichment is satisfactory. Enterprise activities and other work-related initiatives encourage students in most subject areas to develop their commercial awareness but the choice of general cross-college enrichment activities is insufficient and participation is low, particularly by women.
20. Partnership working is outstanding. The college has developed outstanding links with schools, HE providers, employers, community groups and other stakeholders to help further its commitment to educational and social inclusion. The college is represented on a wide range of strategic partnerships which assist in medium and long-term curriculum planning. Partnerships with employers are particularly effective and bring significant benefits to learners, although some learners would welcome more opportunities to undertake work experience. The NOVA partnership, in which the college plays a key strategic

role, is very successful. Partners hold the college in high regard and value its commitment to improving chances for young people.

21. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The college has made significant recent improvements, in particular to the information, advice and guidance at the Thurrock and Basildon campuses. All potential learners now receive accurate and detailed advice about possible courses from the well co-ordinated and managed central teams. Learners' development needs in literacy and numeracy are identified through a well-established and effective initial assessment process and additional support is provided promptly. The college provides very good support for learners with sensory impairments and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
22. The college has introduced new procedures aimed at improving retention. A targeted approach to inviting the parents and carers of 'at risk' students to the college for discussions about progress is starting to improve retention. Learner coaches have begun to have a significant impact on reducing withdrawals and the arrangements to monitor learners at risk of leaving the college are now satisfactory. However, the college's procedures for monitoring attendance have not had a significant impact and follow-up actions for non-attenders have lacked rigour so that current attendance is low. Support for learners wishing to progress to HE is good. Tutorial provision is satisfactory; individual tutorials are more effective than group tutorials, which are often used by learners to catch up with work.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

23. The Acting Principal, well supported by governors, provided strong leadership and a clear vision during merger and the establishment of the new college. The rationale for merger was based soundly on improving the effectiveness of provision for learners in the Thurrock and Basildon areas and the potential risks associated with the merger were considered extremely carefully. A considerable amount of managers' time was devoted to supporting staff through the process; good communication and the use of an open and honest management style across the college were given high priority. As a result, the morale of staff, many of whom found the process unsettling, improved and there is now a strong sense of unity and common purpose in the college.
24. During the merger period, managers' actions to raise standards were not effective enough; long course success rates and attendance failed to improve and retention was particularly low. Although arrangements were in place to bring together procedures to support learners' achievement across the two former colleges, a number of difficulties emerged, such as the unanticipated need to review aspects of the curriculum, resolve data inaccuracies and put in place substantial training and support for staff. The implementation of a revised management structure, changes to staff contracts and a reduction in staff numbers were managed very well but the changes have taken some time to

- become embedded. A number of managers are relatively new to their roles and have yet to have a significant impact on raising standards. However, their skills are developing well and their ability to drive improvement is increasing.
25. Governors' expertise and support were very important during the merger and their oversight of financial management and influence on the college's strategic direction are good. However, governors now need to focus more sharply on monitoring the curriculum and standards in the college.
 26. The strategic plan is aspirational and contains clearly stated priorities but progress towards meeting all of the priorities in the plan has not yet gathered sufficient pace. Targets and key performance indicators are reviewed frequently but some of them are too general or insufficiently challenging. A minority of targets were not met in the first full year of merger.
 27. In the NOVA partnership, managers provide clear strategic leadership and direction which are well understood and supported by partners. The NOVA managers and partners provide excellent support for one another, helping small 'niche' providers who might otherwise struggle to develop processes and provision to participate successfully in the partnership. However, partnership targets do not identify clearly the subject areas or providers to which they refer.
 28. Most quality assurance arrangements for college-based provision are comprehensive and actions to improve the provision of previously poorly performing courses are having a positive early effect on learners' retention. The improved lesson observation procedures are contributing increasingly to reducing the variability in the quality of lessons and the recently appointed team of advanced practitioners works very effectively with teachers across the college to support their individual development. However, arrangements are not always as successful in ensuring consistent quality in other aspects of provision, for example the continuing variable quality of tutorials and individual learning plans. Self-assessment reports vary in quality. Subject self-assessment reports are often accurate and effective in identifying areas for improvement but in a few cases strengths are overstated and grades awarded are too generous. In the NOVA partnership, quality monitoring arrangements have continued to improve. Comprehensive quality standards are used to good effect and provide managers with a detailed assessment of the quality of provision. The moderation of partners' self-assessment is evaluative and constructive but the evaluation of the impact of action plans is not always completed fully.
 29. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Detailed policies which meet legislative requirements are in place and staff training is comprehensive. Gaps in achievement between different groups of learners have been narrowed. The promotion of equality and diversity themes through the curriculum is underdeveloped; equality and diversity are given insufficient prominence in schemes of work and lesson plans. In the NOVA partnership, careful attention is paid to the promotion of equality and diversity among partners. However, assessors do not always make sufficient use of reviews to question learners'

knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity. Arrangements to safeguard learners are good. Safety in college is promoted well, for example by increased security measures at entrances and exits and a requirement for all staff and learners to display identity badges with colour-coded lanyards. There is a large team of staff with specific safeguarding responsibilities who are well-trained and have high levels of expertise. Security checks on staff are completed appropriately. Safeguarding is promoted well in the NOVA partnership.

30. The views of learners, employers and other stakeholders are used constructively to inform the development of provision. Users' views are gathered by a wide range of methods including discussions with class representatives and academy, faculty and student council meetings. A web-based forum is used widely and highly effectively to canvass learners' views. Financial management is good. Capital funds are used wisely to make improvements to accommodation and resources, particularly in improving the Basildon and Thurrock campuses. Funds are managed carefully and efficiency measures are well-developed. However, taking account of satisfactory outcomes and low attendance, the college's value for money is satisfactory.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 2

Context

31. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in health and social care at Southend, Thurrock and Basildon. Of the 482 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 277 are aged 16 to 18 and 205 are adults. Some 419 learners follow full-time courses and 63 follow part-time courses. In total 80 learners are at foundation level, 144 learners at intermediate level, 222 learners at advanced level and 36 learners at higher level. The college also offers courses in early years but these were not included in this inspection. In employer responsive provision, the NOVA partnership provides apprenticeships for 251 learners in health and social care and 371 learners in child development and well-being.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on the majority of college courses and in the provision of the NOVA partnership are high. Learners make good progress and produce work of a high standard, particularly on advanced level courses.
- Learners develop a good range of skills and gain confidence. They demonstrate good standards of research and communication skills and know how to work effectively with others. Learners are fully aware of the appropriate procedures to adopt within care settings and know how to keep themselves, their colleagues and their clients safe, particularly when faced with challenging circumstances in the workplace.
- Teaching and learning are good. The majority of lessons focus strongly on the context of care settings and are planned well to include a good variety of relevant tasks. Learners appreciate this approach and enjoy their lessons. In the minority of less successful lessons, teachers dominate so that learners are not challenged sufficiently and lack opportunities to develop their own ideas. The use of ILT to make lessons more interesting is underdeveloped.
- Assessment is good in the NOVA partnership. Learners receive clear and helpful assessment plans which contain targets that are specific and challenging, and their progress reviews are good. Assessment is more variable in the college. Although it sometimes matches this same good standard, on intermediate and advanced courses assessment does not identify learners' progress sufficiently clearly and targets are neither specific nor challenging enough.
- The range of provision meets the needs and interests of learners well. Learners benefit from a broad range of courses and training opportunities which reflect local and national care needs. Learners have good opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy through key skills and functional skills and achieve well in the external tests.

- Partnership working is good. Strong links with a broad range of partners enables the college to provide placement opportunities in a variety of settings. All partners within the NOVA partnership are involved fully in the training of their learners and are well-informed about the progress they are making.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Tutorials are used well and learners know how their learning is progressing in relation to their qualification framework. Learners who require extra help with their learning receive effective additional support in lessons and individual support sessions which help them make similar progress to that of other learners.
- Leadership and management are good. New managers enjoy the confidence of their colleagues and have put in place a broad range of initiatives to further improve standards. There is some evidence, for example in improved attendance, retention and teaching and learning that their efforts are beginning to have an impact. Staff are well-qualified and deployed effectively; accommodation and resources are mostly good.
- Equality and diversity are promoted well. All staff undergo regular training to ensure that they are up-to-date with current equality practice and give equality issues a high priority in their lesson planning. Learners develop a good understanding of equality and diversity and show respect for each other.
- Self-assessment is good and provides a broadly accurate summary of strengths and areas for improvement, both in the college and in the NOVA partnership. Managers have identified key areas for improvement, particularly in relation to teaching and learning, and have taken appropriate steps to remedy them through detailed quality improvement planning.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning in the minority of less effective lessons by providing learners with more opportunities to take control of their own learning and by making better use of ILT.
- Improve assessment on intermediate and advanced level courses by providing more detail about learners' progress on completed assignments and clearer targets for learners.

Engineering

Grade 3

Context

32. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in engineering from foundation level to advanced level at Southend and Thurrock. Of the 304 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 262 are aged 16 to 18 and 42 are adults. Some 220 learners follow full-time courses and 84 follow part-time courses. In total 27 learners are at foundation level, 153 learners at intermediate level and 124 learners at advanced level. The NOVA partnership provides apprenticeships for 188 learners in engineering but the provision was not inspected.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory, but with significant variations between courses. There are high success rates on the majority of electrical installation and part-time advanced level courses, but low success rates on national diploma courses. Attendance is good; learners arrive punctually and well prepared for learning.
- Learners demonstrate high standards of practical skills, including soldering circuit boards, fabrication of metal and electrical wiring. Success rates in functional skills examinations are high, showing that learners are making good progress with improving their literacy and numeracy. Progression rates within the college and into HE and apprenticeships are good. Learners feel safe and demonstrate high standards of health and safety practice in practical skills sessions.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Practical lessons are planned well and provide learners with a wide range of activities which encourage them both to think for themselves and to co-operate with their peers to solve engineering problems. Teachers receive good support from their knowledgeable technicians and learning support workers and workshops are orderly, calm and productive.
- In the majority of less successful theory lessons, teachers do not vary the activities enough or check learners' understanding sufficiently. In these lessons teachers make insufficient use of ILT to help illustrate points and make learning more enjoyable.
- Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Accommodation at Thurrock and the East Street site in Southend is dated, but provides sufficient resources for learning. Equipment is of a good industry standard and workshops are generally well equipped.
- Provision meets learners' needs well. There is a good range of courses which has been developed in conjunction with local employers who specialise in petro-chemical, pharmaceutical and food production. Partnership working is good. Many learners progress from full-time courses at the college to apprenticeships with one of a group of companies that have longstanding links with the college.

- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Although individual tutorials are effective and provide sufficient opportunities for tutors to monitor and record learners' progress, group tutorials have no clear purpose and are often used merely to catch-up with work. Learners say, and inspectors agree, that this does not represent a good use of their time.
- The additional support which learners need to help them with their literacy and numeracy is identified accurately and support is provided promptly. However, teachers are provided with insufficient information from initial assessment to help them plan their lessons to meet the needs of individual learners.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. New managers provide a strong focus on improving teaching and learning and teachers welcome this. At this inspection, progress towards improvement was variable, but learners' views indicate that learners are much happier with the quality of their experience at college than previously.
- Self-assessment is mostly accurate but some of the resulting action plans include targets, for example in relation to improving the recruitment of female learners, which are over-ambitious and unlikely to be met.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by providing a greater variety of learning activities which can be matched to the needs of individual learners. Make better use of ILT, both to assist in explanations and, where appropriate, to make lessons more enjoyable.
- Provide teachers with more detail from learners' initial assessment so that they are able to match their lessons to the different literacy and numeracy skills of learners.
- Increase the number of female students by promoting engineering more effectively in schools, taster days, summer schools and day-release courses.

ICT

Grade 2

Context

33. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in ICT from foundation level to advanced level at Southend, Thurrock and Basildon. Of the 473 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 220 are aged 16 to 18 and 253 are adults. Some 316 learners follow full-time courses and 157 follow part-time courses. In total 145 learners are at foundation level, 148 learners at intermediate level and 180 learners at advanced level. In addition, two pupils aged 14 to 16 follow courses in ICT as part of their Key Stage 4 programme at school. In employer responsive provision, the NOVA partnership provides apprenticeships for 65 learners in ICT but this was not inspected.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on the majority of courses for full-time learners are above national averages and are well above average on the national diploma and intermediate level information technology (IT) practitioners course. Success rates on AS/A-level information and communication technology are well below average. Success rates are high on the majority of courses for part-time learners.
- Learners work hard, make good progress and acquire good levels of technical skills, supported by appropriate standards of literacy and numeracy. Learners know how to work safely and understand well the risks associated with inappropriate use of the internet.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the majority of lessons which are good or better, teachers plan well and incorporate a good range of learning activities which encourages learners to work independently. In less successful lessons the more able learners receive insufficient challenge and do not make as much progress as they should.
- Assessment is good. Teachers are skilled at providing individual coaching and provide clear written feedback on assignments to indicate how learners could improve their work still further. However, individual learning plans do not always provide sufficient accurate or relevant targets to help learners make more rapid progress.
- Accommodation and resources to support learning are good. The Southend campus has excellent facilities for learners to build and configure their own computer networks and specialist workrooms where learners are able to learn how to build computers. Staff use the IT equipment available in classrooms appropriately to support learning and make satisfactory use of the college's VLE.
- The range of provision is good. Courses from foundation level to advanced level are available at all three sites and enable most learners to progress once they have completed a course. Provision for adults is good; they appreciate the

flexible attendance pattern and the ability to work at their own pace. Partnership working is satisfactory. Although some good links exist, there are insufficient links with employers and community groups to help learners find appropriate work-placements.

- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners receive good initial guidance to make sure that they are on the correct level of course and their subsequent progress is monitored carefully. Additional learning support is offered to those who require extra help with literacy and numeracy and the majority of learners who are identified as requiring support choose to receive it and make good progress.
- Leadership and management are good. New leaders are providing a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and there is some evidence, for example in the improved retention of current learners, that their efforts are being successful. There are good opportunities for teachers to keep their own skills up-to-date and course planning is generally good, although equality and diversity are not yet fully embedded in the curriculum.
- Quality assurance procedures are applied rigorously across all sites. Self-assessment is thorough and includes a detailed analysis of a wide range of statistical information. Judgements are accurate and provide a reliable basis for the current quality improvement plan. The college makes good use of the views of learners in planning improvements.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Help learners, particularly those on AS/A-level courses, to make better progress by providing them with more challenging work and setting them clear, measurable targets in their individual learning plans.
- Improve links with employers and community groups so that more learners are able to undertake work experience.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

34. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy from foundation level to advanced level at Southend, Thurrock and Basildon. Of the 576 students currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 434 are aged 16 to 18 and 142 are adults. Some 456 students follow full-time courses and 120 follow part-time courses. In total 48 students are at foundation level, 294 students at intermediate level and 234 students at advanced level. An additional 31 pupils aged 14 to 16 follow courses in hairdressing as part of their Key Stage 4 programme at school. In employer responsive provision, the NOVA partnership provides apprenticeships for 594 students in hairdressing and barbering.

Key findings

- Outcomes are good overall but better in hairdressing than in beauty therapy. Success rates on most hairdressing programmes in the college are high. Success rates in the NOVA provision and the college's sub-contracted provision vary considerably but are close to the national average overall. Success rates on most beauty therapy courses are below average.
- Learners who follow hairdressing courses achieve high success rates in their functional skills but learners on beauty therapy courses achieve low success rates, particularly in English where many learners are enrolled at a level which is too difficult for them. Attendance is above average in hairdressing but below average in beauty therapy.
- Current learners are making good progress. Learners develop good practical salon skills in hairdressing and demonstrate high professional standards in highlighting, blow drying and hair colouring. Beauty therapy learners work confidently when undertaking make-up application or spa treatments and develop their skills quickly. All learners have a good awareness of hazards in the workplace and work safely.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, teachers plan and use effective strategies to motivate learners. The pace of learning is good and learners are keen to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. In the minority of less successful lessons teachers neither plan for nor meet the individual learning needs of learners and the pace of learning is too slow. In these lessons teachers make insufficient use of questions to make sure that learners understand their work.
- Assessment is good. Teachers provide feedback on college learners' work quickly, and with helpful comments on how to improve it. The VLE is used well to help learners identify the work they need to complete in order to achieve their qualification. The majority of apprentices in the NOVA partnership benefit

from practical assessment in their own salons and the partners' training academies.

- There is a good range of courses and good opportunities for students to progress, including the specialist beauty therapy and theatrical and media make-up course at Thurrock. Learners have good opportunities to participate in curriculum enrichment such as demonstrations from leading cosmetic manufacturers and overseas visits. The theatrical and media make-up learners have the opportunity to undertake work experience with the Royal Opera Company.
- Partnership working is good. The NOVA partnership provides excellent opportunities for learners to choose training and assessment patterns to match their own needs. All hairdressing partners have good links with schools and provide good information prior to enrolment.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners receive excellent formal and informal support from their teachers, helping them to make better progress and ensuring that their personal targets are met. Learners who receive additional support with their learning achieve at least as well, and often better than their peers.
- Leadership and management are good. Hairdressing and beauty therapy are managed separately in the college and until recently standards had been much higher in hairdressing. However, inspectors found that managers in both areas have taken swift action to improve teaching, learning and success rates, and although it is too early to observe the full impact of these changes, there are indications that the gap in performance between hairdressing and beauty therapy is closing.
- Leadership and management are particularly strong in the NOVA partnership. Staff make excellent role models and participate in a good range of professional development activities to keep their skills up-to-date. Regular partnership meetings encourage the sharing of good practice and ensure that apprentices receive the support they need to meet their challenging targets.
- Safeguarding is generally good but the recording of electrical testing on students' equipment in hairdressing is insufficiently thorough. Equality and diversity are promoted well in the NOVA partnership but in the college teachers do not plan sufficiently to promote, or take advantage of opportunities to develop, learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
- Accommodation and resources are mostly satisfactory in the college but are good for beauty therapy in Southend. A new spa facility has recently been opened in Basildon which allows learners to gain first-hand experience of a modern spa environment. Accommodation and resources in the NOVA partnership are good overall but outstanding at the J&E Training Academy in Basildon.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance on beauty therapy courses in the college and in sub-contracted provision so that learners find it easier to keep up with their work and meet their targets.
- Share good practice in teaching, learning and assessment more effectively so that all learners are provided with similar good opportunities to make progress.

Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Grade 3

Context

35. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in supported learning at Southend, Thurrock and Basildon. Courses are focused on personal and social development, employability skills and a range of vocational programmes. All learners work towards nationally accredited qualifications, including functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT. Of the 157 learners currently enrolled, 101 are aged 16 to 18 and 56 are adults. Some 71 learners follow full-time courses and 86 follow part-time courses. An additional 20 pupils aged 14 to 16 follow courses in supported learning as part of their Key Stage 4 programme at school.

Key findings

- Outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates are close to or slightly above the national average and learners make satisfactory progress. Attendance at Southend is good but at Thurrock and Basildon it is unsatisfactory, reducing the progress that learners are making and teachers' ability to implement effective lesson plans.
- Learners feel safe. They are confident that they can tell their teachers of any incidents which make them feel unsafe and know that such incidents will be handled appropriately. Learner safety and well-being are consistently high priorities in the college. Younger learners are taught separately so that their different social and personal development needs can be met appropriately.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons teachers' expectations are high and learners gain confidence as they are helped to meet challenging targets. However, in too many lessons the individual needs of learners are not fully met and lessons are uninspiring because teachers focus on occupying learners rather than encouraging them to solve problems.
- Lesson plans contain insufficient references to how teachers intend to promote equality and diversity. There are appropriate posters displayed in some common areas but learners have insufficient opportunities to discuss equality issues amongst themselves, or with their teachers.
- Literacy and numeracy are taught well in most lessons and learners take pride in their handwriting. Teachers constantly reinforce verbal communication skills, helping to build confidence and self-esteem. However, there is insufficient use of ILT to add variety to lessons and introduce learners to the IT skills essential for their future employment. IT resources in classrooms are inadequate.
- Accommodation and resources are satisfactory but classrooms lack facilities and equipment to support learners with motor control difficulties or perceptual difficulties. Teaching at Southend takes place in a small suite of rooms which helps learners feel comfortable and safe. Learners with more complex

difficulties and lower confidence levels largely remain within their own social groupings when using common college facilities.

- Needs and interests of learners are met satisfactorily. The course offer has been revised to provide learners with clearer progression pathways. However, learners who are more confident have insufficient opportunities to participate in college enrichment activities which would help them progress to mainstream courses.
- Guidance and support are satisfactory. Pre-entry assessment provides appropriate information about learners' starting points. The information is contained in personal profiles which teachers use to identify the support strategies for individual learners. However, the level of detail they contain varies considerably; some profiles do not identify the strategies which have previously been successful, making it hard for teachers to build on effective practice.
- Learning support assistants provide good support to encourage the independence of learners and keep them engaged. Their positive feedback helps learners to complete their tasks on time. All learners have an individual learning plan but the level of detail the plans contain varies between campuses, making the setting of consistent and appropriate learning targets difficult.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers are aware that the curriculum is better in Southend than it is in Thurrock and Basildon and are taking appropriate steps to provide all learners with good teaching, learning and support. Good progress has been made in aligning the provision at the three campuses but attendance is low in Thurrock and Basildon, indicating that changes to the curriculum there are not yet fully meeting learners' needs.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the consistency of provision amongst different campuses by ensuring that teachers follow common practices in planning and course organisation.
- Share good practice in teaching and the use of assistive strategies to support learners' progress more effectively between campuses.
- Incorporate the use of ILT in more lessons and explore the creative use of software to motivate learners, broaden the portfolio of teaching strategies and prepare learners for employment.
- Foster inclusion and confidence building by encouraging more learners to participate in cross-college activities which help them demonstrate their strengths and explore their wider interests in preparation for their transition to adult life.

Business management

Grade 2

Context

36. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in business management at Southend, Thurrock and Basildon. Of the 480 learners currently enrolled on learner responsive provision, 361 are aged 16 to 18 and 119 are adults. Some 402 learners follow full-time courses and 78 follow part-time courses. In total 49 learners are at foundation level, 181 learners at intermediate level and 250 learners at advanced level. In employer responsive provision the NOVA partnership provides apprenticeships for 422 learners in business and management qualifications.

Key findings

- Outcomes are good. Success rates are above average on the majority of courses at the college and current learners are generally making good progress. However, learners following AS/A-level courses do not make as much progress as their starting points suggest and the success rate for AS level business studies is low.
- Success rates for apprentices in the NOVA partnership are high and the proportion of learners who complete their qualification within the planned time period is good. Learners make good progress and demonstrate high professional standards in their work. Learners are confident, happy and can articulate clearly how their training is preparing them for future employment.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are well-qualified and enthusiastic about their subjects. Most lessons are well-planned and take into account the needs of individual learners. However, inspectors observed a significant minority of lessons where teachers failed to provide sufficient challenge for the more able learners, which slowed their progress.
- Assessment is good. Learners in the college receive prompt feedback on completed assignments and understand what they need to do to improve. In the NOVA partnership, assessors frequently visit apprentices in the workplace and conduct regular progress reviews. Apprentices receive good, detailed feedback on their work. They say, and inspectors agree, that this is the key to them making good progress.
- Provision meets learners' needs well. Learners have good opportunities to participate in curriculum enrichment, although not all students have sufficient opportunities to participate in college enterprise activities. The good links within the NOVA partnership ensure that assessors and employers understand the learning needs of individual apprentices and how providers can help meet them.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners receive good pastoral support and those who require additional specialist support make good progress. Target setting is inadequate. Most learners are aware of what their

targets are but are unsure of what they need to do to achieve them. Teachers make insufficient use of learners' target grades when planning class activities.

- In the NOVA partnership target setting is satisfactory. Many assessors set detailed targets for learners which are sharply focused and specific. However, there are too many targets which are vague or lack sufficient detail for learners to understand fully what they need to do before the next assessor visit.
- Leadership and management are good, both in the college and in the NOVA partnership. Communication is good; the new managers and teachers are clear about their roles and take rigorous action when courses underperform. For example, the retention of current learners has improved significantly on AS/A-level courses.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall, although teachers do not give sufficient attention to equality issues when planning their lessons. In the best practice in the NOVA partnership, assessors regularly engage learners in appropriate discussions to challenge their perceptions and encourage a deeper understanding of equality and diversity issues. However, not all assessors integrate equality and diversity topics within learners' programmes.

What does South Essex College of Further and Higher Education need to do to improve further?

- Improve lesson planning so that more able learners are provided with sufficiently challenging work.
- Improve target setting by ensuring that targets are relevant and challenging so that learners have greater ownership of their targets and know what to do to achieve them.

Information about the inspection

37. Six of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the college's vice-principal responsible for the curriculum 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 funding bodies, the previous inspection reports, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspections.
38. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, training in the workplace, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
South Essex 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; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	6,641	0	6,163	478	0
Part-time learners	8,255	193	659	2,077	5,326
Overall effectiveness	3	n/a	3	3	2
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3	3	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3				
Quality of provision	3				
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
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?	3				
Leadership and management	3				
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
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?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

*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 assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 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.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk