

Bolton Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 131867

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Type of provider: Sixth form college

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Information about the provider

1. Bolton Sixth Form College was created in 1998 as a result of the merger of the town's two sixth-form colleges. It continued to operate on these sites until it was relocated from the South campus to the new Farnworth campus in July 2008 and from the North campus to the Town Centre campus in August 2010. There is a further education college in the town and the two colleges share some facilities at the Farnworth and Town Centre sites. There are other colleges in the surrounding areas and a number of schools with sixth-form provision.

2. The town of Bolton has many areas with high levels of disadvantage, but there are pockets of relative prosperity. The minority ethnic population accounts for 13% of the total population. Many of the college's students are from areas of high disadvantage. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is high, at more than 50% over the last few years. Achievements at GCSE in Bolton schools are mixed, with an overall five A* to C pass rate, including English and mathematics in 2010, of 53.2%, just below the national figure. The vast majority of students at the college are aged 16 to 18 and most of them follow full-time AS and A-level courses. The college has grown significantly in numbers over the last few years.

3. The college's mission is:

"To provide educational excellence which releases potential and promotes individual achievement in an environment where diversity is valued and students and staff are supported, challenged and encouraged to reach for their best in everything they do."

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to 18)	1,697 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	9 full-time learners

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	Grade
Arts, media and publishing	3
Languages, literature and culture	3
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

4. The college is providing a satisfactory standard of education. A declining trend in success rates, with a significant decline in 2009/10, has been reversed with modest improvements in 2010/11. Although success rates, particularly those for AS provision, remain well below the national rate, they have improved, with significant progress made in certain subjects. The college is acutely aware that further improvements are needed, especially in subject areas such as science, and is working hard on improvement strategies. Although it is too early to see their full impact, signs to date this year are positive; for example, retention data and half-termly assessments show improvements on those of last year.
5. Students are making satisfactory progress in their studies, when comparing their results with their prior attainment on entry. There are wide variations between subjects and more work is needed to raise levels of student progress significantly in weaker subjects. As observed in lessons and by their standard of work, students are making improving progress. Students are very well behaved and are keen to do well. Teaching and learning are good. Students receive high levels of personal support. More work is needed, however, to ensure that, when

choosing their programmes of courses initially, students are fully supported in all subjects and that subsequently their language and literacy skills are developed appropriately. Students receive good advice about entry to higher education, but the college acknowledges that employer and industry links to help develop students' understanding of the world of work, and their entry to it, are less strong.

6. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has gone through a major period of change, with increasing student numbers, a move to new buildings and significant staff changes. Although targets for improvement have been met in some areas, this is not universally the case. There is a strong commitment at all levels to raising attainment. Quality improvement processes are clear and involve all staff. Most departments know their strengths and areas for improvement, but further work is needed to embed critical evaluation and sharply focused improvement plans in all subjects. Students feel very safe in college and comment positively on the friendly atmosphere.

Main findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates are below national rates, but those in 2010/11 reversed a declining trend, with significant improvements in some subjects. Success rates on vocational courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels are high. Success rates on AS courses are well below national rates, but showed a marked improvement in 2010/11.
- Students make satisfactory progress. There are wide variations between subjects when comparing students' results with their prior attainment on entry, with students making better than expected progress in some subjects and less than expected in others. Currently, students are making satisfactory and improving progress, as observed in lessons and the standard of work they produce, developing good levels of skills.
- Students' awareness of health and well-being is promoted effectively through the tutorial programme, links with other agencies and a series of one day events. Students take part in a variety of charity fund raising events and a number are involved in mentoring activities and acting as ambassadors for the college with secondary schools.
- Teaching and learning are good. In most sessions, there is a strong focus on developing and extending students' understanding, a brisk pace and good use of information and learning technology (ILT). Assessment and feedback to students on advanced level programmes are good, with detailed information on how to improve. Feedback on intermediate and foundation programmes is less strong.
- The college provides a good and developing range of courses to meet students' needs and aspirations. Where students are not yet ready for advanced level study, there are courses at intermediate and foundation levels with well structured progression routes. Enrichment activities cover a wide range of activities, with an increasing number of students taking part.

- The college has well developed school partnerships. There are effective links with other further education providers and higher education institutions. However, only a few departments have appropriate links with industry.
- Individual support for students and support for those with specific needs is strong. However, only a small number of departments provide specific structured support pre-course and at induction to help prepare students for the demands of their course. Further developments in language and literacy support are needed to support those with weak language skills.
- Students are well informed about their progress and value the one-to-one support they receive. There are high levels of advice and guidance for students applying to higher education. More structured advice and guidance are needed for those taking other career routes.
- The college has a strong, inclusive mission which is very well understood throughout the organisation. There are effective strategies to raise expectations and promote ambition and a clear understanding of the college's role within the local community. Although improvement strategies have not yet had sufficient impact in all departments, success rates improved in 2010/11 and a continued positive impact is being seen this academic year in retention and half-termly assessments.
- College staff promote safeguarding strongly; it has a high priority in the college. Students feel very safe, behave very well and use health and safety procedures effectively. Equality and diversity are well embedded: students respect, and are supportive of, each other. Gaps in achievement between different groups are identified and strategies are put in place to tackle them, which have a positive impact.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory. Detailed quality assurance procedures are in place and all staff are involved in the process. However, not all subject areas use self-assessment effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths are overstated and some weaknesses are not followed through rigorously enough to inform improvement plans.

What does Bolton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates which are below national rates, particularly those on AS courses and in science, by thoroughly embedding improvement strategies in all areas.
- Further improve the progress students are making, with a focus on those areas currently underperforming, by ensuring that rigorous student monitoring and intervention strategies, such as the attendance strategy, are applied consistently across all subjects.
- Develop a structured support programme, for pre-entry and induction, in order to support students to develop the skills needed to be successful in their programmes, including a strong focus on developing language and literacy skills.

- Further develop business and employer links, including those within subject areas, to help develop students' understanding of the world of work and the integration of employers' views into planning and development.
- Ensure that departmental self-assessment leads to critical evaluation of provision and subsequent improvement plans, with sharply focused actions which are rigorously monitored.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the good teaching they receive
- the helpful, friendly and approachable staff
- the harmonious environment, with students from many different backgrounds all getting on well together
- the very good resources and facilities with excellent access to computers
- how there is always someone who can help you if you need it
- that they are made to feel important and as if they really matter
- the very good support they get and how much staff want them to achieve the very best
- how safe they feel in college.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the number of trips they are able to go on
- the availability of free water at the Town Centre site
- the congestion in the dining area and social spaces
- access to car parking and discounted car parking at the Town Centre site
- the timetable, where some gaps between lessons are too long and some breaks too short
- the system of payment for printing and printing credits.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

7. The college has made significant progress in the areas for improvement noted at the last inspection, such as the accommodation, the use of information and learning technologies and the consistency of standards on advanced level vocational courses. However, some areas which were strengths, have declined. The effectiveness of the middle management team has been strengthened and this has led to improvements in some areas, but not all. Senior leaders have established clear systems and procedures which give greater accountability and responsibility to curriculum leaders.
8. Although outcomes have not improved across all subjects, the governors and leaders have accurately identified their priorities and begun to implement initiatives which have reversed a declining trend. It is too early to judge the full impact of all strategies, but there are signs that departments are building on and consolidating the improvements seen last year.
9. Governors are well informed and provide an appropriate challenge to managers. Students' views are systematically gathered and lead to developments and improvements across the college. In some curriculum areas, the effective use of data is underdeveloped. There are inconsistencies in the quality of self-assessment reports and the accurate identification of areas for improvement, which the college is working to rectify.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Outcomes for students are satisfactory. There has been a declining trend in success rates over the three years to 2009/10, with a significant decline in that year when the overall success rate was well below the national rate. The major cause of this decline was poor retention. For 2010/11, college data show that the success rate has improved, with improving retention, although it is still below the national rate.
11. There are very wide variations in success rates for different subjects at advanced level, with some performing well and some poorly. Success rates on AS courses have been the weakest aspect of provision, particularly in certain subjects, such as science, with success rates well below national rates for a number of years. The success rate on A-level courses is high, although below the national rate. Success rates for vocational courses at all levels are strong. At intermediate level, large numbers of students re-sit GCSE English and mathematics. The A* to C success rate for English rose markedly in 2010/11; for GCSE mathematics, the success rate remained around the national rate, with success rates on numeracy courses increasing, but below the national rate. Success rates on literacy courses were weak in 2010/11.

12. There is a complex picture when comparing the achievement of different groups. In terms of gender on AS courses, females achieve better than males, but on A-level courses males achieve better than females. Students receiving additional learning support achieve as well as their peers. There are mixed trends when comparing students from different ethnic groups. The college has a clear view of the performance of different groups and specific strategies are put in place at subject level to narrow identified gaps, which are having a positive impact.
13. Prior attainment on entry at this college is much lower than that usually found for students on AS and A-level provision. Value added data for previous years show that students who completed their course made good progress in their studies. Progress declined in 2009/10, but indicators available to date for 2010/11 show strong progress for a number of subjects, but weaker for others. Overall, students are currently making satisfactory progress and this is improving. The progress students are making in lessons is strong. Even in those subjects where value added data were poor for the 2010/11 results, progress seen in lessons was satisfactory. The standard of work produced is satisfactory and better, with strong development of practical skills. Students' attendance improved in 2010/11 and is well monitored. The college is aware that further work is needed to consolidate improvements made last year.
14. Students show good development of social skills, exhibiting high standards of behaviour. They work well in teams and enjoy their studies. Opportunities to gain a greater understanding of the world of work are limited in a number of subjects. Students feel very safe in college and know that there is always someone to talk to if they have a problem. Students feel that all are welcome in college and that there is no bullying. Health and safety have a high priority and students demonstrate a keen awareness of safe practices in practical sessions. The college promotes the health and well-being of students very well through the tutorial programme, and through good links with other agencies, providing a range of services and a series of one day promotional events. Students make a satisfactory contribution to the community.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Teaching, learning and assessment are good. A wide range of activities, good pace of delivery and a strong focus on developing and extending students' understanding are key features in the better lessons. Students are active and engaged throughout, apply good thinking and analytical skills, and enjoy learning. ILT is used well to enhance learning. Equality and diversity are promoted well in some sessions, with religious and moral themes explored sensitively and stereotypical views challenged appropriately. Tutors effectively identify individual development needs with a diagnostic subject assessment at the start of the course, but not all tutors incorporate these findings into their planning to meet individual needs effectively.

16. In the small number of less successful sessions, students are passive, and, whilst attentive, they are less involved in activities to reinforce and extend their understanding and enjoyment. Teachers' expectations of students are too low and activities do not provide sufficient differentiation to challenge and stretch all students, particularly the most able. Assessment of students' learning and progress on advanced courses, which cover the vast majority of students, is good and provides detailed information on how students can improve. Teachers' feedback on foundation and intermediate courses can be too general and does not always contribute to improving students' literacy skills.
17. An effective teaching and learning improvement strategy has had a significant impact on improving the skills of staff. Many tutors have successfully applied new approaches gained from focused staff development activities. Lesson observers identify key strengths and areas for improvement accurately, with an appropriate focus on both teaching and learning. Teachers know when they will be observed, so the lessons observed do not always reflect students' typical experiences.
18. The college provides an extensive range of subjects at AS and A-level, with the vast majority operating on both campuses. These are very well planned to meet local needs and support student aspirations. Targeted vocational courses are offered as an alternative in a number of subject areas, with increasing levels of take up. For those students not yet ready for advanced level study, the college offers a range of courses at intermediate and foundation levels, with clear progression pathways to higher levels. Progression rates from foundation to intermediate level and intermediate to advanced level are strong. Progression from the first year of an advanced level course to the second year is satisfactory, and improving, although this has been adversely affected by the weak success rate at AS. Around 75% of students completing advanced level studies progress to higher education. The college provides a wide range of enrichment activities, both cross college and subject specific. The number of students participating in these activities is low, but increasing.
19. The college has effective links with the local further education college, with a strong focus on the sharing of resources. There is a strong partnership with secondary schools, particularly in the area south of the city, supporting post-16 progression. The college has developed an innovative partnership with a local Muslim girls' school, enabling these students to access post-16 education and reducing the number not in education, employment or training. Although industry and business links are effective in some departments, this aspect requires further development at departmental and whole college level.
20. The range of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Specific support needs, such as dyslexia, are well supported. Transition arrangements for school pupils with learning needs are good. Language and literacy support for students who have impoverished language skills is poor and impedes their progress. Teachers provide a wide range of additional curriculum support for students, which is valued highly. However, insufficient formal records are kept of the progress students make in these sessions to measure their improvement or inform their

targets. Support sessions sometimes clash with group tutorial sessions, limiting attendance at either session, and the timing of tutorials does not allow for students to attend promptly when changing sessions.

21. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to provide students with impartial information, advice and guidance to ensure that they are placed on an appropriate course. For those students entering courses with low GCSE grades, good pre-course activities are set up in art and design and performing arts to help new students prepare for the requirements of higher level programmes. This good practice has not yet been adopted by other curriculum areas. Guidance for those progressing to higher education is thorough and effective, but support for those wishing to progress to alternative destinations is less helpful. Students are well informed about their progress at regular individual tutorials. Parents and carers have good access to their child's performance records through an on-line parental portal, paper reports and regular parent evenings.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

22. The college has gone through significant changes over the last few years. Throughout this time, senior managers have established a strong sense of community and inclusion. College staff foster high aspirations for students' achievements and behaviour which students respond to positively. Leaders are well trained and work well together to ensure that individual teachers understand their responsibility to secure successful outcomes for students. Success rates in 2010/11 reversed a declining trend; further work is ongoing to build on these improvements, with positive signs to date this year. There is an effective strategic plan based on a thorough understanding of the local, national and economic priorities for the regeneration of Bolton.
23. Governors closely reflect the diversity of the college and the local community. They meet their general legal responsibilities, but have been slow to appoint two student governors this year. Governors are proud of their vision for an inclusive college. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the college and, in challenging college leaders to focus on areas of underperformance, have supported the delivery of improvement in some, but not all, aspects.
24. Safeguarding arrangements are good. There is a very strong focus on safeguarding in all stages of the recruitment process, with required records kept centrally. Regular, well monitored training is carried out for staff and governors. Health and safety have a very high profile in the college and risk management is comprehensive. A good range of policies and procedures outline appropriate safety measures. Two senior managers, one for each site, take responsibility for safeguarding across the college. There are particularly strong processes to support the most vulnerable students.
25. The promotion of equality and diversity is thoroughly embedded in all aspects of the college and is reflected in the respectful relationships between

individuals. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance. A wide range of events, activities, partnerships and the positive recognition for equality and diversity in the local community support developments in this area. The diversity across the staff in terms of age, gender and ethnicity reflects that of the college and serves to provide positive and inspirational role models for students. Aspects of teaching practice, resource content and the design of learning tasks are adapted to ensure that they reflect the diversity of the student body and that of their local community. The analysis of performance data is thorough and is enabling the college to close gaps in achievement for different groups of students.

26. Student views are sought mainly through evaluative questionnaires and their recommendations are largely acted upon. The college uses students' and employers' views in evaluating the quality of provision, but the mechanisms are largely informal and do not secure effectively the involvement of students and employers in the decision making of the college.
27. College quality assurance processes are well embedded, with a clearly defined timetable for implementation. All staff are actively involved in the process. Curriculum managers are clear about what is expected of them and are beginning to work well together to implement improvements. However, despite the clear procedures, some curriculum areas fail to identify key areas for development, which results in a lack of rigour in improvement planning. Curriculum targets are not always sufficiently clear, nor actions sufficiently focused, to secure timely improvement. The effectiveness of the use of performance and progress data to improve outcomes for students is variable.
28. Value for money is satisfactory. Resources on both campuses are of a high standard and there is good consideration of value for money when selecting their format and appropriateness. Financial management and control are good and financial health is satisfactory. Success rates have improved, but remain below the national average; students' progress is satisfactory.

Subject areas

Arts, media and publishing

Grade 3

Context

29. Currently 492 students attend full-time courses in media, visual and performing arts at two college sites, 86% at the town centre site. Of those, 63% are female, 17% are from minority ethnic groups and 17% have declared a learning difficulty or disability. Almost all courses are at advanced level, with a small number of students taking an intermediate level course in art and design. AS and A-level courses are available in a wide range of visual and performing arts subjects as well as film and media studies. Extended diplomas are available in art and design and musical theatre.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates across the area are very mixed. In 2009/10, most courses experienced a significant drop in success rates. Many improved in 2010/11, but remained below national rates. The college is aware of the reasons for previous poor performance and has implemented measures to address them. Although the impact of these measures is not fully reflected in success rates, the progress and achievement of current students indicate further improvements.
- Students enjoy learning and make strong progress in their work, which meets qualification standards. They talk with confidence about their work in group presentations and peer reviews, using appropriate language and terminology. They develop technical skills and knowledge which enable them to progress to higher education or employment. Students also acquire interpersonal skills, such as self-discipline, respect and responsibility, enhancing their employability prospects.
- Students feel safe. They enjoy the environment and respectful atmosphere around the college, and feel that they can discuss problems with staff. They appreciate the presence of friendly security staff and other security measures such as CCTV in open plan areas. Students can identify key potential hazards in their specific learning environment and observe safe working practices, including warm up exercises and correct posture.
- An increasing number of activities enable students to make a positive contribution within college and externally, such as working on a joint project for an Arts Festival. 'Friday Foyer' creates an opportunity for students to exhibit their work. Staff and students take examples of their work to local schools and provide taster workshops in college to increase interest and recruitment levels.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned, contain a variety of activities and maintain a good pace. In the best sessions, good use is made of ILT to enhance learning by showing films, video clips and examples of work. These motivate students to achieve at high levels. Teachers make good use of peer reviews to reinforce learning and develop skills of critical analysis.

- Assessment of students' work is good. It is fair, thorough, timely and recorded using a variety of methods. Constructive feedback and clear guidance are provided on how to improve students' work. In many cases, this includes references to reflective recording and contextual understanding, which have been identified as areas where improvement can lead to the achievement of higher grades.
- The range of courses meets the needs and interests of students effectively. At present the majority of provision is at advanced level. A-level study remains the predominant offer, although two extended diplomas have recently been introduced. Only one course is available at intermediate level. Although more courses are planned, this currently limits the opportunities for internal progression. Enrichment opportunities are satisfactory.
- Support for students is good. Prospective students of visual and performing arts are invited to present examples of their work or attend an audition to enable a more informed choice of course. Students receive good oncourse one-to-one support. Teachers freely give up time to provide additional support on request. Some students receive additional learning support and have performed above their predicted grades.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The area has experienced significant changes to personnel. Two new heads of department and many teaching staff have recently been appointed. Departments are now clear about their future direction and ambitions. Managers provide clear direction and good support to teachers, who have autonomy to lead in their individual areas.
- At regular team meetings, the curriculum is planned, joint projects developed, progress against action plan targets monitored and good practice shared. Teachers have been encouraged to become external examiners as a means of achieving continuous improvement in their practice.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and has identified major concerns that need to be resolved to improve students' performance and outcomes, particularly at higher grades. Systems and procedures have been introduced to address these. Although improvements have been made in the areas of increasing students' understanding and use of contextual and theoretical concepts, it is too early to assess their full impact.
- Accommodation and resources are generally good and meet course requirements. Most learning environments are clean, light and well equipped, although some spaces for students to complete written work are inappropriate. There is good access to information and communication technology. In music and media, equipment and computer software are of industry standard.

What does Bolton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?

- Increase retention and achievement by focusing on areas of curriculum delivery and design that will enable students to achieve their potential and improve higher grade success rates.
- Broaden the range of provision to include more intermediate level and vocational courses in order to increase enrolment opportunities and progression routes.
- Review the use and layout of specialist accommodation for general classroom activities in music technology to provide appropriate facilities for students to carry out essential written coursework.

Languages, literature and culture

Grade 3

Context

30. The subject area has 672 students aged 16 to 19, including 307 enrolled on GCSE English, and 365 on advanced level courses in English and modern foreign languages. English language, English literature, English language and literature, and GCSE English are taught at both college campuses. French, Spanish, German and Urdu are taught at the Town Centre campus only.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates for a high proportion of students are close to or above national rates. However, success rates are below national rates in Spanish and have declined sharply in AS French, which is now significantly below the national rate. The proportion of high grades fell significantly in 2010/11 in English literature and French.
- Outcomes for the large cohort of GCSE English students, which had been poor, improved significantly in 2010/11 to around national rates. In particular, the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C rose from 45% in 2009/10 to 68% in 2010/11, just above the national rate.
- Students generally make good progress. Most students make the progress expected of them, with a minority achieving much higher results than expected in relation to their grades on entry. Students enjoy their lessons and feel that they have a positive experience. The standard of work in lessons is generally good and, in some cases, outstanding; many students make valuable contributions to discussion, using subject specific terminology confidently.
- There is much good teaching. The better lessons are characterised by lively and dynamic teaching; teachers challenge students to extend and develop their learning, students are enthusiastic, collaborate well and support each other's learning. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to inspire and motivate students. Several members of staff in English are external examiners or moderators and use this experience well to improve provision.
- In a minority of lessons, teaching is satisfactory. Students remain relatively passive and are not challenged sufficiently; they demonstrate sound subject knowledge, but this is often limited to recall or description. Attendance is below the college target at 85% for the current period, with GCSE English being particularly low. Staff are developing a number of strategies to improve this.
- Assessment is sound. Students' work is marked regularly to examination standards and teachers give helpful comments and advice to support students to improve. Teachers ensure a clear focus on examination technique and assessment criteria in lessons and incorporate specific examination practice into their teaching. Students are aware of what they need to do to succeed and are motivated and keen to do well.

- The department offers a wide range of courses that meet the needs and interests of students very well. For example, AS and A-level Urdu are offered in response to local needs. The college has a strong commitment to maintaining the range of courses in modern foreign languages, despite low numbers of students, and is working on ways to increase enrolments.
- Students speak warmly of the care and support they receive from staff. They appreciate the lunchtime curriculum support sessions and the fact that teachers are always available and willing to meet with them outside lesson times. The college email system is well used by staff and students, especially where cross campus working means that teachers are not always on the same campus as students.
- Curriculum management in the department is positive and productive. The head of department and the GCSE English course leader provide good guidance and support, especially to new and part-time staff. They set specific targets for improvement, including performance targets for teachers; these form part of the annual performance review for staff which is subject to regular review and evaluation.
- New monitoring procedures and an increased emphasis on examination preparation have been implemented to address disappointing outcomes on some courses in 2009/10 and 2010/11, but it is too soon to judge the full impact of these measures. Intervention strategies to address poor performance in GCSE English have had a positive impact on the A* to C success rate. Training and development are well planned to support strategic initiatives and the professional development of staff.
- Managers and teaching staff have worked proactively to increase recruitment in modern foreign languages, engaging with students and staff in secondary schools, and liaising with the college marketing team on a number of initiatives. It is not yet clear what the full impact of this will be, but enrolments in 2011 showed some improvement in French and Spanish.
- Resources are used well to promote and enhance learning. Teachers make extensive use of interactive whiteboards and, in some cases, these are used imaginatively by students, for example to report back on group work in a plenary session. Foreign language students use language laboratory facilities to work on listening activities at their own pace and can also access support or extension work in class.

What does Bolton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates and the progress students make on underperforming courses by sharing good practice to improve the small minority of 'satisfactory' teaching in the subject area.
- Continue to identify students with the potential to achieve grades A or B at an early stage and support them in order to reverse the decline in high grade achievement on some courses.

- Further improve the achievement rate at grade C or above in GCSE English by consolidating recent successful strategies and further developing measures to improve poor attendance.
- Further improve recruitment to modern foreign languages courses by building on current initiatives and further developing liaison work with schools.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

31. Around 584 students follow AS and A-level courses in business studies, economics, law and accounting. A further 169 are enrolled on BTEC diploma courses. The majority are aged 16 to 18 and they all attend full-time. Over half the students are male and a similar number are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students vary considerably between courses, but are satisfactory overall. Success rates on A-level accounts are excellent, but they are low on a significant number of courses. Pass rates on some courses are excellent. Retention is close to national rates on most courses. However, despite close monitoring to reduce absenteeism, attendance is low and below the college target.
- Students who complete their course make good progress and, in many cases, achieve grades above those predicted. Students enjoy their learning and work effectively together, developing enterprise skills, knowledge of current affairs, and lifeskills, such as budgeting. They also enhance their independent learning skills and many progress to higher education.
- Students feel safe. Behaviour is very good in the classroom and in social spaces and students treat each other and staff with respect. Students respond well to the high expectations teachers have of them. Some students act as volunteers in local care homes and schools, and many take part in fund raising activities.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, teachers use ILT effectively in the classroom to enhance learning and use questions well to check learning and challenge students. Teachers make good links to current topics and use a wide range of activities to engage students. In one class, students enthusiastically discussed the fate of the euro and its implications for the European Union.
- In the less effective lessons, planning for individual needs is not sufficiently detailed, the pace of learning is too slow and students are not fully engaged. Teachers ask questions frequently, but many are too general and fail to provide an effective check on understanding for all the group.
- Assessment is good. Students receive constructive verbal and written feedback so they are clear about what has been achieved and what needs to be done to improve their grade. The feedback form includes a useful section for setting targets for the next assignment. Spelling and grammar are corrected to support literacy skills.
- A good range of courses is available, providing progression for students from intermediate to advanced levels. The department organises a range of visits and trips related to businesses which develop students' knowledge of both local

and national organisations. For example, students performed well in the recent Bank of England competition. Students benefit from guest speakers and visits to regional universities.

- Partnerships are good. Teachers regularly visit schools to raise aspirations and teach business topics. International links have been forged with a school in India and students have researched local businesses and the community in order to prepare presentations to be shared with the students in India.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Initial assessment includes subject diagnostic testing to ensure that students are on the right course. Students value the individual support they get from teachers. Effective additional subject specific support and examination preparation are provided in curriculum support sessions. Teachers and students make good use of the college's virtual learning environment to monitor and review progress.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. A strong culture of raising aspirations exists and staff use former students effectively as role models and mentors to raise achievement. Staff work well together and share good practice in their department and across the college. Staff development needs are identified following lesson observations and the monitoring of success rates.
- Self-assessment is broadly accurate, although some strengths are overstated and national rates are not used systematically to make judgements. Areas for improvement are not always included in the action plan and the targets are not specific enough to monitor the impact of actions.
- Resources and accommodation are very good. Teachers use their experience as examiners well when preparing students for examinations. Students develop independent learning skills from the high quality learning materials, many of which are available on the college's virtual learning environment.

What does Bolton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?

- Increase the success rates of students by sharing the best practice in teaching and learning and continuing to monitor progress closely.
- Improve attendance by continuing to set and monitor targets for students with persistently low attendance.
- Further improve teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers check the learning of all students and use a range of activities to stretch and challenge.
- Ensure that targets in quality improvement plans are specific and challenging enough to be monitored closely to secure timely improvements.

Information about the inspection

32. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's vice principal (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 body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

33. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of students and employers. They also looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed for the college. They 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)
Bolton Sixth Form 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	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive		
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	1,852	1,786	66		
Part-time learners	0	0	0		
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3		
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3		
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	4				
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>	2				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3				
Quality of provision	3			3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
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?	3				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
Leadership and management	3	3	3		
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
<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?	2				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3				
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

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