Learning and Skills inspection report

Date published: 09 November 2012 Inspection Number: Insert 399017

URN: Insert 130817



City of Stoke-on-Trent

Sixth form college

Inspection dates	2-5 October 2012			
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3		
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement-3			
Quality of teaching, learning and as	Requires improvement-3			
Effectiveness of leadership and management		management Requires improvement-3		

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- The majority of students do not make good progress relative to their starting points.
- Teaching and learning does not consistently address the individual needs of students and does not always stretch the more able students.
- Despite much good teaching, some aspects of teaching and learning including the use of questioning techniques which challenge students, ways of engaging students more effectively in debate, and the encouragement of students' critical thinking skills are underutilised.
- There is still too much variability in the quality of provision across, and within, subject areas with some areas continuing to underperform.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Well qualified teachers, good resources and excellent accommodation provide a welcoming and supportive learning environment.
- Overall success rates have increased substantially over the past year, particularly in vocational programmes.
- College actions have successfully closed achievement gaps that existed between different groups of learners in the past year.
- Academic tutorials provide very good support for students to develop their knowledge and help them to monitor their progress.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress that students make relative to their starting points and increase the achievement of high grades.
- Ensure that teachers are better able to assess the prior learning and skills of students in order to address their individual needs in lesson planning.
- Improve learning in some subjects by ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to develop their own views rather than replicate those of the teacher.
- Decide on the standards of grammar and spelling expected in students' work so that they can be applied consistently in marking.
- Improve the quality of provision within those subject areas which are underperforming by identifying the reasons why previous support and intervention strategies have had insufficient impact and providing well targeted support.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of staff development activity to ensure that its provision has a lasting impact on practice within lessons.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners

- The college's overall success rates have fluctuated around national averages over the three years to 2010/11. College data indicate a significant improvement to success rates in 2011/12, particularly for vocational programmes at advanced level, which increased markedly, and are well above averages. Improvements are underpinned by higher retention rates.. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.
- Most students aged 16 to 18 enter the college with lower than average qualifications at GCSE. Nevertheless the majority of students on advanced courses do not make the progress expected of them given their prior attainment. Despite rising success rates on advanced courses, high grade achievements remained the same in 2011/12 and are low and below college targets. High grade rates for vocational programmes are satisfactory.
- Success rates declined for learners aged 16 to 18 on GCE AS levels between 2009/10 and 2010/11 and were low. College data indicates an increase in 2011/12 to rates in line with comparable colleges. Success rates for students on A2 programmes improved slightly over the three years up to, and including 2011/12, and are in line with similar colleges.
- The college has successfully closed the gaps in success rates between different groups of learners. Male students now succeed in line with female students and students with learning disabilities/difficulties succeed as well as other students. Considerable improvements in the success rates of British Pakistani students and Black British African students in 2011/12 have led to rates which are better than both the college average and the groups' national average.
- Student progression between different levels of study within the college is broadly satisfactory. The proportion of students progressing from the first year to the second year of advanced programmes has increased steadily over the last three years with no significant variation between different groups of learners in 2011/12. The vast majority of students enter higher education or employment when they complete their studies.
- Learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. In business studies much classroom work such as group and team work usefully develops students' abilities to work collaboratively and value each other's opinion. Students in performing arts have good

opportunities to perform in public and work with a number of external groups. They also have good access to professional practitioners and are introduced to the latest industry standards. However, students in social sciences and psychology lack some of the independent studying skills, which will enable them to excel when they progress.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

- The college has successfully eliminated the vast majority of inadequate teaching. However, more than one third of lessons observed by inspectors required improvement and they observed few lessons that were outstanding. Variations in the quality of learning mean that in some subjects students are not making as much progress as they should. There are no significant differences in the quality of teaching and learning between courses of different types.
- Teachers are well qualified and resources to support learning are good. The design of the college's smart new building is successful in providing a good variety of different types of specialist and open-access accommodation to support learning. The learning resource centres are equipped well with computers and students make good use of them to develop their learning within and outside of lessons.
- The quality of lesson planning varies considerably. The best examples demonstrate that teachers have used the evidence from previous assessments to identify the most appropriate strategies for developing new learning and match these strategies well to the needs and interests of students. However, in a significant minority of lessons planning is not so effective because it concentrates on what students should achieve by the end of the lesson without taking sufficient account of what their starting points are.
- Students sometimes undertake learning tasks that are too difficult, or more frequently, too easy for them. As a result, the more able students in particular are not challenged sufficiently by their lessons and do not make as much progress as they should.
- In the best lessons teachers develop interesting learning activities which encourage students to think for themselves and challenge the views of their peers through discussion. In these lessons students make good progress. Less effective lessons are dominated by the teacher with few opportunities for students to suggest their own views or share them with others.
- The college is well aware of the wide range of incoming qualifications held by and prior educational experience of its students and provides thorough and helpful advice on their transition from school. Students are matched carefully to courses which are consistent with their future intentions but on some courses the skills and knowledge they possess are not identified in sufficient detail to plan their individual learning.
- Assessment procedures are fair and contribute to the college's robust procedures for monitoring students' academic progress. Many teachers are experienced external examiners and use this experience to develop effective assessment practices. Students are fully aware of the current standards of their work and how it relates to their learning targets.
- The college's academic tutorials, ably supported by the work of the achievement coaches, provide good opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and help them to monitor their progress. Teachers set and mark homework regularly and return it promptly to students. The approach to correcting errors in spelling and grammar between, and sometimes within, subjects is inconsistent so that students are not always clear what standards are expected of them.
- Students have good opportunities to develop their skills in using English and Mathematics. They have a good understanding of the technical vocabulary required in their subjects and use this knowledge well to produce accurate written work.

- Students receive very good, impartial advice and guidance to help them with their applications to Higher Education, progression to higher level courses within the college, other local education providers or employment.
- Teachers are encouraged to identify through their planning how their lessons promote equality and diversity. Inspectors observed some outstanding examples where lessons were used successfully to reflect the different cultures represented in the local area but also found that opportunities to promote equality and diversity were too often missed. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support in lessons which enables them to achieve similar outcomes to those of other students.

Science

Learning programmes for 16-18

- Teaching, learning and assessment in science require improvement, which reflects the low proportion of students who achieve their qualifications. Over the past three years, up to, and including 2010/11, success rates have been low for advanced courses with the exception of A2 physics and BTEC science courses. College data for 2011/12 indicates an improvement in overall success rates to around national averages although high grade achievements remain low.
- Staff have a sound knowledge of their subject, which they use well in exposition and explanations. They support students well when introducing new topics and continuously reinforce learning when teaching challenging topics, such as homeostatic control of blood sugar, newton's laws of motion, and photosynthesis. A number of teachers who are examiners use their expertise well to help students with exam question work in lessons.
- Initial assessment is much improved. In biology, teachers used students' GCSE results as the basis for assessing what students could do and for giving them clear targets to progress rapidly. In other subjects, appropriately levelled exam questions are used effectively to identify what students can do followed by feedback to help them build rapidly on their existing knowledge.
- Students enjoy their learning and the majority make the progress expected of them. However, there is little evidence of students being challenged or supported to make better than average progress.
- Students are beginning to benefit from the newly structured academic tutorials. In one session, prospective A2 biology students who are to re-sit their AS papers in Jan 2013, were given individually personalised exam questions in topics where they had underperformed in the June 2012 exams. Staff are positive about the new whole-college approach to formative and summative assessments, but it is too early to gauge its impact.
- Planning to meet the individual needs of students in lessons is underdeveloped. Teachers sometimes make a cursory attempt at planning for differentiation, usually in the form of extension questions from a book. However, they do not routinely use learner profiles to ensure that students' learning is maximised in lessons. Students without a pass in GCSE English and/or Maths receive little numeracy or literacy support from teachers during science lessons. However teachers do address their need for such support in academic tutorials.
- Teachers use a limited range of teaching and learning strategies. A large proportion of lessons are too teacher led with very little collaborative learning taking place. Collaborative group work is often limited to students, in pairs, reading a text guietly and completing tables.
- Science topics, such as homeostasis, photosynthesis, hormones, formulae and leaf structure, which lend themselves well to collaborative learning activities are not enlivened by its use. Students are generally inactive for the whole of the class and teachers make little use of peer assessment, questioning and active group work.

Equality and diversity are not readily promoted in lessons. Teachers do not indicate how they will promote it in lesson plans or in schemes of work. They do not use opportunities to explore and discuss culture and diversity through topics such as dieting, health, diabetes and Pascal's triangle.

Performing arts, media and communications Learning programmes for 16-18 Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and contribute well to the skills students gain, their progress and improvements in success rates. Success rates improved greatly in 2011/12 and were mostly at or above the national rate. The number of students achieving high grades is low but increasing.
- Students benefit from learning methods that inspire and challenge them. Teachers and 'achievement coaches' nurture, support and motivate them to aim for higher grades. Many teachers are practitioners and use their subject knowledge well to encourage students to develop the confidence to work independently and apply good practical skills.
- Many students are purposefully engaged through well planned and managed learning activities that cater for the needs of students with a range of abilities. Teachers make good use of sharply focused questions that encourage students to develop oral skills and to show their grasp of technical language. They also make skilful use of interactive technology to demonstrate techniques and illustrate the work of artists.
- A minority of teaching is less successful in energising students and questioning techniques, although targeted at individuals, do not encourage debate. Too much activity is channelled through the teacher and the students remain passive. The pace is too slow, particularly for students who require greater challenge.
- Teachers carefully assess and record students' prior knowledge and attainment in a detailed profile of their individual learning needs and preferred ways of learning. Students know how well they are performing and talk positively about how feedback shows them what they need to do to improve. Teachers monitor their progress stringently and take action swiftly where there are any concerns.
- Various assessment methods are used well to enable students to benefit from self-evaluation, as well as feedback from teachers and their peers. Particularly successful peer assessment was used in a Street Dance lesson on 'waacking' where students were asked to address three specific questions while observing their partner. The feedback they gave resulted in a demonstrable improvement in their partner's dance performance technique.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for all students to improve their functional skills through planned writing and numeracy tasks. Written work is marked with good guidance on how to improve and meet assessment criteria. Students with dyslexia receive good help in structuring and writing essays and assignments. Media and art and design students are able to use technical language convincingly and show a good understanding of meaning.
- Teachers refer to equality and diversity issues in most lessons but not all of them explore opportunities to extend students' knowledge and understanding. Inspectors observed a few examples of highly successful promotion. In a Photoshop session a photography teacher posed a question about the ethics of manipulating images. The teacher showed an image of an American soldier pointing a rifle at an Iraqi civilian holding a baby, produced by bringing parts of two separate photographs together to alter the intended meaning. This enabled students to debate fully and discover the moral dilemmas of image manipulation and its use in publications and other media.

Students receive detailed advice to ensure they select the right course. Students speak positively about the detailed support they receive with UCAS applications and in particular the guidance on writing personal statements.

Social science and psychology

Learning programmes for 16-18

- Overall success rates improved in 2011/12 and are broadly in line with national averages. In some subjects, such as AS-level sociology, the success rate increased substantially to slightly above the national average. However, most students do not make enough progress to achieve their expected target grades. Increasing numbers of students are progressing into higher education or employment.
- Teachers are experienced and well qualified in their subjects and a number of them are external examiners. They use technology well to promote learning and provide good quality learning resources such as psychology topic work books that have a good range of exercises and activities to develop and apply concepts. Teachers give timely and effective academic support to students during weekly tutorials. In one session they provided students with effective support materials to improve their essay writing skills.
- The quality of teaching and learning varies considerably. In the best lessons students are encouraged to develop independent learning skills and take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers plan activities to engage all students and to ensure that they make and exceed expected progress. In one lesson, very effective use of an electronic voting quiz engaged all students to review the topic of childhood covered in the previous lesson.
- The weaker lessons are too teacher-led and do not encourage students to develop their independent learning skills. For example, in some lessons students listen to long verbal explanations of theory delivered by the teacher and passively write notes. Teachers make too much use of closed questions at individual students and do not use open questions to develop students' thinking skills through discussions sufficiently.
- Planned activities do not always meet the learning needs of all students in lessons. In one lesson a planned activity was not sufficiently differentiated resulting in some students completing the task quickly whilst others had difficulty in keeping up with the pace of the lesson and risked falling behind in their learning.
- Teachers do not always provide sufficient challenge to students in lessons. Lesson learning objectives, and teaching, are sometimes aimed at the whole class without enough additional activities to stretch and challenge the more able students to help them make and exceed expected progress.
- Marking is consistently of a high standard. It is thorough and detailed and provides students with clear targets, so they know exactly what to do to improve the standard of their work. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by setting their own improvement targets.
- Students' English and mathematics skills are developed effectively in social sciences. For example, at the start of their studies, AS level students develop their understanding of sociology concepts particularly well by writing a first essay about 'What is sociology' using a list of 20 technical words.
- Students speak positively about the advice they receive at the start of their studies. They really liked the half-day taster sessions in subjects that they are interested in, so they can make informed choices about their choice of subjects.

Equality and diversity are integrated well into teaching and learning. For example, where appropriate, teachers use opportunities to promote diversity in religious beliefs through discussions and debate. Students enjoy their studies and have positive attitudes to learning.

Business studies, accountancy and finance

Learning programmes for 16-18

- Overall success rates improved markedly in 2011/12 from below national averages to well above them. However, most students do not make sufficient progress in achieving the grades expected given their qualifications on entry into the college.
- Students develop good personal, social and employability skills working productively and collaboratively during group tasks. They express ideas confidently, respect the views of others and work effectively as members of a team. In an AS level Business studies lesson students were involved in group assessment tasks using grade criteria and provided very constructive feedback to other students.
- Students work on personal learning tasks with high levels of concentration producing work of a good standard. However, punctuality for a minority of students is poor.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, motivated and committed to improving all aspects of their practice with effective use of learner feedback. Students recognise that teaching methods have improved and teachers work hard to make lessons interesting by relating tasks directly to industry. In business studies lessons, case study material reflects high profile companies such as Virgin that students can easily relate to and may well have personal experience of.
- Most lessons are well planned and structured to provide a good range of interesting learning activities at the appropriate level. In the better lessons these activities are supported by a variety of imaginative tutor and peer led assessment methods. Teachers use their expertise to make direct links between lesson content and course assessment requirements so that students are adequately prepared for final assessment. In a minority of lessons teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to accurately assess levels of understanding.
- In the weaker lessons teachers dominate discussion and intervene prematurely denying students time to develop their ideas and answers fully. Their lessons lack variety and their use of resources does not meet the individual needs of students. In these lessons, teachers do not challenge more able students sufficiently to work at a higher level and make faster progress and they do not always provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Students benefit from a high level of personal and academic support with a strong emphasis on monitoring progress and achievement. Academic tutorials are very effective in providing additional subject related support. Teachers help students to develop a clear understanding of their progress and how to improve their grades.
- The development of literacy and numeracy skills in lessons is not focused sufficiently on the specific needs of individual students. Initial assessment information is not always used effectively to inform the planning of subsequent learning, especially when development needs emerge after the start of the programme. In some lessons the standard of oracy and communication skills when giving feedback presentations is underdeveloped and does not reflect the requirements of a business and commercial setting. Students are able to use technical language accurately and confidently in most lessons, especially in law.
- Students receive good information advice and guidance to choose the most suitable programme of study, matching career aspirations and levels of ability. Programmes of study are sufficiently flexible to allow students to combine academic and vocational courses with clearly defined progression routes.

Opportunities to consider important equality and diversity issues occur in the majority of lessons but are not fully exploited to enhance learning. Students do not develop an appropriate understanding of these issues in preparation for the roles and responsibilities they may hold in the workplace, particularly as managers and professional practitioners such as solicitors and lawyers.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

- Senior managers and governors have a very clear view of the college's role within the community and a good emphasis is placed on the contribution which the college is making to the economic regeneration of the city. The college works well in partnership with other providers of education and training in the city, including the general further education college and the nearby university, as well as schools, and it seeks to ensure that it contributes to the raising of aspirations amongst young people in the area. Good progress has been made in recent years to ensure that staff share this vision.
- Governors monitor the college's academic performance closely and are well aware of underperforming areas and the actions managers are taking to bring about improvement. College targets for success, retention and achievement of learners were mostly met at advanced level, but the retention of the much smaller group of intermediate level learners did not match the target and this meant that the success rate target was not met.
- Success rates on advanced courses improved significantly in 2011/12, but it is too early to be confident that this level of performance will be sustained in the light of overall success rates in earlier years which were at or below national averages. In addition, there is insufficient evidence to indicate that actions to ensure that learners make the progress expected of them, on the basis of their entry qualifications, have been effective.
- A well-developed system for assessing the quality of teaching and learning ensures that each teacher is observed twice each year and any member of staff with a grade which is less than good will receive support and be re-observed. A useful analysis of strengths and areas for improvement provides a clear agenda for staff development activity.
- Although staff development is well organised, inspectors found examples of insufficient impact on teaching and learning. For example, too many lessons failed adequately to meet the needs of the whole ability range. The performance of teachers is assessed adequately with reference to factors such as lesson observations and learners' outcomes.
- Self-assessment enables the college to identify key strengths and areas that require improvement. Subsequent quality improvement planning has been more effective in 2011/12 than in earlier years as outcomes have begun to improve. Managers initiate a programme of 'support and intervention visits' to areas which are underperforming. These have been only partially effective as some areas remain in need of significant improvement. Inspectors judged self-assessment within most subject areas to be fairly accurate.
- The college meets the needs of learners well, with a wide range of academic and vocational courses, particularly at advanced level, which complement the courses offered by other post-16 providers. Good attention is paid to local and national priorities in shaping and developing the curriculum. Since the last inspection the college has moved to a newly built site which provides an attractive learning environment within the city's designated 'university quarter'. Enrolment targets at the start of this academic year have been exceeded.
- The college has made much progress in providing clear vocational and academic pathways which involve coherent groupings of subjects and, in many cases, learners have access to work experience opportunities.
- Good monitoring of the performance of different groups of learners enables the college to take timely actions to address identified areas of concern. This has proved successful in closing a

number of achievement gaps. For example, differences in achievement by gender at advanced level have been reduced and achievement gaps between advanced learners with or without a learning difficulty have been narrowed. The performance of Pakistani learners, the largest minority ethnic group, has improved significantly over the three years to 2011/12. Some gaps remain and these are closely monitored.

- The college provides a safe environment for learners. The move to the new building two years ago enabled much more effective site security arrangements to be introduced and these are implemented well and are now embedded. Strict adherence to the wearing of identity lanyards is enforced.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Staff and governors are appropriately trained and receive accreditation. The frequency of cases of bullying, harassment or racist behaviour is low but all incidents are carefully investigated and action plans follow.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College									
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 Learning programmes	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Other work- based learning	Employability	Foundation Learning	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3		3						
Outcomes for learners	3		3						
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3		3						
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3		3						

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	3
Performing arts	2
Media and communication	2
Social Sciences	3
Psychology	3
Business Studies	3
Accounting and finance	3

Provider details

City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College					
Type of provider	Sixth form college				
Age range of learners	16-18				
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1660				
	Part-time: 0				
Principal/CEO	Mr Paul Mangnall				
Date of previous inspection	March 2009				
Website address	www.stokesfc.co.uk				

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or Level 2 below		evel 2	Level 3		Level 4 and above			
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	3 19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
Full-time	N/A	N/A	138	N/A	1487	30	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	0	0	N/A	N/A	
	•								
Number of apprentices by	Inte	Intermediate		Adva	nced		Higher		
Apprenticeship level and age	16-18) +	16-18	19+	16-	-18	19+	
	N/A N/A		/A	N/A N/A		N,	N/A N,		
Number of learners and 14.15	-								
Number of learners aged 14-16	5								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	rs N/A Education Funding Agency (EFA)								
Funding received from	Educat	tion Fu	naing .	Agency (EFA)				
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:									

Additional socio-economic information

The City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College is a medium-sized college. It relocated to a new building near to the city centre and railway station in August 2010 as part of the city's University quarter regeneration scheme. The college serves an area of considerable deprivation. A higher proportion of the local population has no qualifications than the national average and a lower proportion have intermediate qualifications or above. Unemployment is two percentage points above the national average. The proportion of pupils aged 16 in Stoke-on-Trent who achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, in 2011, was well below the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

William Baidoe-Ansah HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of operations as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012

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