

The Sixth Form College, Colchester

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		5–8 February 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding-1
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Outcomes for learners are good on many courses and are excellent for the relatively small number of learners on the International Baccalaureate (IB) course. These IB learners make very good progress and achieve high success rates.
- Most learners are highly motivated and very keen to learn. Consequently, they make good or better progress, develop good personal and social skills and enjoy their learning and college life.
- The curriculum offering is very rich and most learners undertake a wide range of subjects, additional studies and enrichment activities. These features enhance learners' experiences and knowledge and facilitate their high levels of progression to higher education and employment.
- The vast majority of teaching and learning is good and in a minority of lessons is outstanding.
- Feedback is good and detailed; it helps learners to improve. The quality of their work is high.
- Enthusiastic and skilled staff provide very good academic and pastoral support for learners.
- Leaders, managers and governors are committed to providing a high standard of education in order to increase learners' skills and to enable progression.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Learners' success rates and the progress they make are average in too many subjects.
- In a minority of lessons, the different needs of individual learners are not met because the pace for the less able learners is too fast or the challenge for the more able learners is insufficient.
- In a minority of lessons, the emphasis given to improving learners' literacy and numeracy skills, to promoting equality and diversity and to using the virtual learning environment (VLE) to aid learning is insufficient.
- The space available to learners in many classrooms, independent learning areas and social areas is insufficient. Corridors and stairs are overcrowded at busy times and this presents a potential safety hazard.
- The college self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical and many action plans are not precise or measurable enough to drive improvement.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Through staff development and the internal lesson observation process, focus on enabling learners of different abilities to progress in all lessons according to their potential. Ensure that learners who work at a slower pace have sufficient support to help them make good progress and not be left behind by a fast pace of learning. Provide more challenging activities to extend the more able learners who have completed their learning activities and who are ready to further their learning.
- Increase the priority given in lessons to developing learners' English and mathematics skills in a wide variety of contexts.
- Disseminate the good practice evident in certain areas of the college in promoting equality and diversity appropriately in lessons to teachers in other areas of the college. Ensure that all teachers have the skills and understanding of a wide range of matters related to equality and diversity so that they can, with confidence, address issues raised during lessons and increase learners' awareness and understanding of such issues.
- Ensure that teachers in all areas of the college develop the population, interactivity and use of their VLEs to support and enliven learning to match the high standards of the best practice exhibited in other parts of the college.
- Address the issue of overcrowding in many of the college spaces so that staff and learners can work in areas more conducive to study and learning and that they are enabled to move more safely.
- Improve the self-critical nature of the self-assessment report. Ensure the thorough analysis of the full range of college-wide data to inform key areas for improvement and required actions. Prioritise the key areas for improvement identified at all levels in the college.
- Improve the quality of the action plans and targets which emanate from the self-assessment process. Establish a set of key performance indicators that enable governors and senior managers to monitor and drive improvements throughout the academic year.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Long course success rates are lower than in 2009/10 but improved in 2011/12 and are close to the high sixth form college average. Success rates at advanced level are approximately average for learners aged 16 to 18 but are high for adult learners. The overall success rates of the relatively few learners at intermediate level have increased in the last three years and are above average.
- A key policy of the college is to advocate that learners study a large number of AS and GCE A-level qualifications in order to broaden their experience and knowledge of a wide range of subjects. For many learners, this is most appropriate, but for others the extra demands incurred cause them to drop these subjects before completion. This affects success rates adversely. Those learners who complete their wide range of subjects, however, gain more qualifications than would be expected and so their outcomes indicate that they have made very good progress compared with their prior attainment.
- Success rates for the relatively small number of learners on the IB course are the highest for three years and are very high. AS success rates are just above average. GCE A-level success rates are below average for learners aged 16 to 18 but are above average for adults.

- Learners enjoy college life and their work greatly and this is exemplified by their high levels of attendance and punctuality. Current in-year retention is very high. Opportunities to develop learners' personal and social skills are very good, given the wide range of learning opportunities available, such as group tutorials, enrichment activities, foreign exchange travel, visits and guest speakers. The promotion of suitable work experience for most learners is underdeveloped.
- Most learners make good progress in their studies, compared with their prior attainment, which is slightly below average for the sixth form college sector. Learners on the IB course make excellent progress. The proportions of high grade passes gained by AS, GCE A-level and GCSE learners are average.
- Outcomes for learners from different groups by age, gender, learning difficulty and/or disability and ethnicity are generally similar, except for the very few learners from a Bangladeshi background, whose success rates have not improved and are low compared with learners from a White British background and their own national average.
- The overall standard of learners' work is good, but a few learners in many lessons produce outstanding work and contribute at very high levels. Learners develop very good independent learning skills and also work very effectively in small groups. Learners act maturely and their behaviour is exemplary.
- Progression from GCE A-level and IB to apprenticeships, employment and higher education is high and many learners progress to, and achieve highly at, prestigious universities. Although teachers are successful in supporting learners to complete their AS studies, the progression rate between AS and GCE A-level provision is low.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment reflects the good outcomes for learners. The college sets a high priority on improving teaching and learning and has eliminated all inadequate and most satisfactory teaching. However, while the vast majority of lessons are good, a relatively small proportion of lessons is outstanding.
- Most learners are highly motivated and demonstrate a keen appetite for learning. They benefit greatly from teachers who have high expectations of them and who encourage them to work independently. Teachers are very well qualified and use their experience and expertise well to engage and challenge learners.
- In the majority of good lessons, learners are focused and productive; they help each other learn effectively and create a lively and engaging learning environment. They enjoy a good rapport with their teachers who take good account of their needs when they plan lessons. Lessons are challenging, contain interesting activities and have a good pace with teachers using directed questioning to deepen learners' understanding of relevant concepts and technical terms.
- In addition, in the few outstanding lessons, teachers use technology exceptionally well, integrate equality and diversity seamlessly and use coaching and skilled questioning to support excellent learner progress.
- The less successful lessons do not engage learners fully, because tasks are too easy or too difficult for them. Teachers do not plan well to meet learners' differing needs and abilities. Teachers dominate these lessons and do not encourage learners' independent and collaborative learning.
- The quality of accommodation and resources varies considerably. The college has new and well-resourced accommodation, but also has cramped accommodation, identified at the previous inspection, which impacts adversely on learning. The college does not have sufficient learning or social spaces to support its drive to promote independent learning.

- Learners’ use of the VLE varies with nearly half of subject areas having achieved the college’s basic requirements for a VLE. Nevertheless, learners value their access to the VLE and use it and other electronic means to maintain good communication with their teachers. Other resources to support learning, such as learning materials, the library and learning resource centre are good.
- Learners benefit significantly from very good support. They receive good advice on entry and those who need extra help are identified early and offered appropriate assistance. About half of all learners with a declared need receive additional learning support. Learners in receipt of support generally achieve in line with other learners. Managers do not monitor the differences in outcomes between those who accept the support offered and those who don’t.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the individual needs of their learners, but this does not always lead to lessons that take good account of these different needs. Teachers provide extensive support for learners outside lessons which they value highly. Learners receive very good advice and guidance for progression to higher education.
- Although learners do not take functional skills, many take an advanced level English- or mathematics-based qualification. Teachers’ marking of learners’ work is very effective in improving the standards of learners’ literacy and numeracy skills, but the planning and implementation of lesson activities to increase learners’ abilities in these areas is less effective.
- Teachers provide detailed feedback on assignments which gives learners specific prompts and targets to achieve their grades. Most learners have a good awareness of their progress towards achieving their goals and precisely what they need to do to attain them.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is inconsistent. In modern foreign languages, learners discuss migration patterns and different dialects which broaden their understanding of how different groups of people use language. However, teachers often miss opportunities in lessons in other subjects to develop a wider appreciation of equality and diversity.

<p>Science</p> <p>Learning programmes for 16-18</p> <p>Learning programmes for 19+</p>	<p>Good</p>
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- The good quality of teaching learning and assessment correlates with the good outcomes for learners. Overall success rates have risen and are slightly above average. IB and AS success rates are high, but GCE A-level physics success rates are low and IB physics outcomes are below average. Most learners make good progress compared with their prior attainment and achieve a good proportion of high grades.
- Learners benefit from working with enthusiastic teachers who motivate them to perform well in assessments. Teachers support learners’ development of their independent learning skills by guiding them to use the VLE and ensuring that it contains a rich variety of learning and assessment materials.
- In the best lessons, the planning of learning activities is good. Teachers set clearly defined aims which they review throughout the lesson. They use information learning technology most appropriately to aid learning. Teachers use a wide range of learning activities which enable learners of all abilities to make good progress.
- Resources are used and shared effectively. Learners use the VLE as an extension to learning in class. They can access information from any missed lessons, hand in assignments, obtain feedback and communicate with their tutors. Technicians work well with teachers to support learning. Teachers stress the importance of health and safety in laboratory work and learners are reminded to wear the relevant clothes and goggles.

- All learners benefit from good initial advice and guidance which helps them to make well-informed choices for study at the college. Science staff interview or meet all learners prior to enrolment to ensure they understand the nature of the academic and workload demands that will be made of them. Learners are appreciative of the guidance they received prior to enrolling. The college offers a very wide range of science subjects.
- Learners benefit from regular, detailed feedback on their written work. Teachers ensure learners have access to model solutions and receive clear learning objectives for their assessed work. Feedback on written work is sufficiently detailed and enables learners to improve their assignments. Staff review learners’ progress against their targets regularly. The quality of the work produced by learners is of a high standard.
- Teachers help learners to develop their English and mathematics skills well in lessons and through assessments. In many lessons, they assist them in improving their communication and presentation skills.
- Learners are prepared well to progress beyond college. Support for learners is very good and helps them to develop the skills to move on to employment or higher education. For example, potential medical students benefit from an additional session each week to help them with their preparation for, and application to, university. The proportion of learners who progress to higher education is high.
- Opportunities to promote equality and diversity are not utilised fully in lessons when they arise. Staff use good teaching materials, but do not always take advantage of naturally occurring openings in lessons to develop and discuss relevant equality and diversity issues.

<p>Mathematics and statistics</p> <p>Learning programmes for 16-18</p> <p>Learning programmes for 19+</p>	<p>Outstanding</p>
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding, whereas outcomes for learners are good. The judgement for teaching, learning and assessment reflects the improvements in them which have been made over the last few years and are coming to fruition. Most learners achieve their qualifications and develop excellent mathematical, communication and employability skills. Most learners make excellent progress in lessons.
- Learners benefit from working with highly qualified and experienced teachers who ensure that learners are busy and productive throughout their lessons, often developing high levels of mathematical understanding and thinking. Teachers have very high expectations and most ensure that learners benefit from challenging activities which help them learn. Learners enjoy collaborative learning through group work, which generates lively discussions and allows them to develop their confidence and knowledge.
- Teachers make very good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote learning. For example one teacher e-mailed a video clip on algebraic long division to help learners prepare for a lesson on factorising cubic equations. Most learners worked through this before the lesson and so made outstanding progress during the lesson. Learning activities include excellent one-to-one coaching and well-planned and executed group activities.
- Teachers deliver very good explanations and examples of concepts and mathematical methods and then enable learners to practise the skills and knowledge they have developed. In a minority of lessons, however, teachers choose to use the traditional lecture as a means of promoting learning. The pace is dictated by the teacher rather than the learner and often this is very fast and not suitable for all learners.

- Resources to support learning are good. Learning materials are well designed and teachers use them effectively in lessons. They make good use of electronic whiteboards to produce back-up materials of classroom activities. The VLE contains many assignment materials but is less well populated with interactive learning materials. Teachers make the most of the classroom accommodation by creating excellent wall displays. However, space is tight and classrooms are often congested.
- Assessment practice is outstanding. Teachers scrutinise learners’ work carefully and give very helpful feedback. Where necessary, model answers are provided such as when learners are being assessed on algebra where the content and layout are critical to understanding. All teachers use questioning techniques very effectively to test learners’ understanding. Regularly assessed homework makes a significant contribution to learning.
- Support for learners is outstanding. Initial assessment is well planned and advice and guidance are particularly good. The tracking of learners’ progress is highly effective and teachers monitor learners’ targets very carefully. Timetables are adjusted to ensure that staff are available when learning support is most needed. This has contributed to improvements in learners’ outcomes on the higher performing courses.
- Learners demonstrate an acceptable awareness of equality and diversity. Learners’ opinions are valued and differences respected. However, teachers do not always take advantage of the opportunities that arise naturally in lessons to promote learners’ understanding of equality and diversity and to reinforce their importance.

Social sciences	
Learning programmes for 16-18	Good
Learning programmes for 19+	

- Learners benefit from good teaching, learning and assessment which relate closely to the high success rates in AS social anthropology and psychology. However, success rates for the embedded AS citizenship and economics are low. Most learners make good progress relative to their starting points and very good progress in GCE A-level subjects. Learners gain a high proportion of high grades in many subjects, but the proportions in AS and GCE A-level politics are low.
- Teaching and learning are good, and a small minority is outstanding. Lessons are well planned, with learners benefiting from activities that require them to engage with complex ideas and to develop their analytical skills. The best tasks are learner-centred, imaginative and demanding and learners respond well. In the best lessons, web-based resources, games, learners’ presentations and video clips are used to enhance learning. Learners make good progress during lessons.
- Teachers use good questioning techniques to check learning. Teaching and learning in geography, psychology and sociology often provide learners with high levels of stretch and challenge. Teachers attend diligently to the learning needs of individual learners. In lessons, teachers monitor the progress of individuals, clarify understanding and check learning, whilst other learners are completing learning activities.
- Assessment and feedback are good and learners have a well-developed understanding of their progress and what they need to do in order to improve. Teachers set challenging targets for learners and monitor and review their progress against these targets regularly.
- Teachers use an effective initial induction to assess the ability of learners to cope with the demands of advanced level study. Numeracy and literacy skill development is embedded into subjects and effective learning support is available for those identified as having specific learning needs.

- Teachers and learners use email effectively to improve communication and to help learners progress. The use of ILT in lessons to enhance learning is an area for development. Learners make increasingly good use of good learning resources on the VLE and teachers are developing improved, and more challenging, learning materials. In sociology lessons, learners use mini-whiteboards to check the understanding of terms and ideas and this allows the teacher to share answers with learners and to identify and correct mistakes.
- Learners receive outstanding support from their teachers. Workshop and revision support sessions are highly valued by learners and help them to improve their attainment. Many learners participate in the excellent enrichment opportunities. Learners receive very good advice, guidance and support from teachers and a high proportion progresses to higher education or employment.
- Opportunities to promote equality and diversity are sometimes missed in lessons. However, classroom displays celebrate equality and diversity and teachers ensure that sensitive issues are handled carefully.

English and modern foreign languages	
Learning programmes for 16-18	Good
Learning programmes for 19+	

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and matches the good outcomes for learners. Overall success rates have risen and are just above average. Many AS success rates are high, but modern foreign language GCE A-level rates are low. Success rates for the relatively small numbers of learners on AS and GCE A-level Italian are low. All learners develop good language skills while improving their personal skills. All learners are very motivated by their courses and are keen to continue their studies at a higher level.
- Learners benefit from the high expectations of staff. Teachers set them challenging tasks in class and expect them to produce written work of a high standard to meet exam requirements. In one lesson, learners analysed three texts of their choice very effectively, to identify writers' techniques and their effect in relation to genre, audience and purpose before writing a model answer. Teachers make effective use of directed questioning techniques. They review previous learning very thoroughly, monitor learners' performance and progress in lessons and provide very targeted feedback. In the less effective lessons, however, learners do not have sufficient opportunities to explore ideas in groups or learn from each other. These lessons are too teacher-centred and do not engage all learners.
- Teachers use a wide range of interesting texts to stimulate discussion. In modern foreign language (MFL) lessons they make good use of ILT to support learning by providing helpful video clips. They use foreign news programmes to develop learners' listening skills. MFL learners, for example, used very good pronunciation when discussing the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall. All learners engage very enthusiastically in independent learning activities by using the VLE, blogs, the library and online services. Classroom displays are stimulating.
- Staff are very well qualified and experienced, with many of the language teachers being native speakers. Courses are very well planned and provide learners with a wide range of opportunities to study English language and/or literature and European languages. In additional study sessions, learners can also study Japanese, Mandarin or Latin. Lessons are well planned to ensure learners understand the exam requirements, produce good written work and increase their fluency of expression.
- The care and support for learners is very good. Teachers know their learners very well and are available outside lessons to discuss specific issues. Teachers and learning support staff work

well together to plan a learning support programme which is specifically designed to help learners achieve their targets. MFL learners can also receive support from a mentor.

- The initial assessment of learners is good. Learners receive a very detailed induction which fully informs them about the demands of the subjects. Learners have realistic grade targets which teachers review regularly. The feedback on assessed work is very detailed and effective, and occasionally is outstanding. Teachers track learners' progress very rigorously on the departments' database or the VLE.
- Learners receive good initial information on courses and much good support on planning their progression. Teachers give learners considerable help in completing applications for higher education and former learners return to provide invaluable advice and guidance sessions.
- Equality and diversity issues are well promoted in the curriculum. For example, learners considered texts and discussed topics which challenged stereotypes and ideas about North African migration to France and looked at how different groups use language differently.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The college's clear mission and strategic priorities are well embedded throughout the college. Consistent with its mission, managers have increased the number of learners aged 16 to 18 accessing a broad, high quality, general academic education in response to local need. After a decrease in 2010/11, managers increased success rates in 2011/12 to close to average.
- Management structures and responsibilities are clearly defined and authority is appropriately devolved to heads of department who are well supported by senior managers. Departmental and individual staff targets build on strategic priorities and progress is reviewed at regular intervals throughout the year. However, at all levels of management, too many performance targets and action plans lack milestones and measurable outcomes. Managers do not set cross-college key performance targets against which they and governors can monitor progress during the year and take appropriate action to drive improvement.
- Curriculum management to meet the needs of learners is good and in mathematics is outstanding. An extensive range of AS and GCE A-level subjects is available with additional opportunities for personal development, together with mixed intermediate and advanced provision for learners not ready to progress to a full advanced-level programme. Tight central management of resources facilitates the greatest choice of subjects, and timetabling operates without constraint. The college's financial health is good with outstanding financial management and control arrangements.
- Governors are passionate about the college. They are well-qualified, skilled and challenge managers appropriately. They take a keen interest in the work of their individual link departments and understand the curriculum well. This informs their contribution to the overall strategic direction. However, student survey results and teaching and learning reports are not presented to governors routinely. Although governors receive detailed reports on a range of outcome measures, their discussions emphasise measures of learners' progress and they give insufficient consideration to success rates.
- Leaders and managers have improved the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Each tutor is currently observed twice a year with a strong emphasis on peer observation and developmental feedback and support. Evaluations of jointly observed lessons by inspectors and college observers were similar, although college observers focused less on differentiation, English and mathematics and the promotion of equality and diversity. While inspectors saw a very high proportion of good teaching, the proportion of outstanding teaching was lower than the college's own assessment.
- Performance management is strong. Annual staff appraisal, regular reviews and target setting contribute to improvements in teaching and learning and the achievement of strategic priorities.

Managers and tutors have good opportunities for professional development, both within the college and externally. A culture of sharing of good practice is effective.

- The self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical. Self-assessment is well informed by the views of learners to help identify areas where provision could be strengthened. Departmental self-assessment is detailed and analytical, but key issues identified by departmental managers are not always reflected in the overarching self-assessment. This contains many strengths, but too few major areas for improvement.
- Senior tutors implement strong policies and procedures on bullying, harassment and discrimination effectively as part of a broader pastoral role. The college provides a friendly and harmonious environment and such incidents are very rare. Learners know how to report incidents and are confident they will be resolved. Equality and diversity are promoted actively during induction, enrolment, and through tutorials. Managers do not analyse the full range of performance data available and consequently do not identify underperformance in the outcomes of different groups of learners.
- The college meets its statutory responsibility for safeguarding learners. The single central record is comprehensive and security checks on staff are completed appropriately. Tutorial programme, induction and special events increase learners' awareness of personal safety such as safe internet practice. The procedures to anticipate and minimise risks to learners, both in the college and on visits and trips, are good. The lack of social and independent study space, however, leads to overcrowding in corridors and constitutes a health and safety concern.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

The Sixth Form College, Colchester

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	2		2	2				
Outcomes for learners	2		2	2					
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2		2	2					
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2		2	2					

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	2
Mathematics and statistics	1
Social Sciences	2
English	2
Modern foreign languages	2

Provider details

The Sixth Form College, Colchester	
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 3,110
	Part-time: 0
Principal/CEO	Ian MacNaughton
Date of previous inspection	October 2007
Website address	www.colchsfc.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Full-time	0	0	63	0	3,036	11	0	0
Part-time	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ N/A 							

Additional socio-economic information

The college occupies a single site in the heart of Colchester. Colchester is a very rapidly growing town with an estimated population of 173,100. College learners travel significant distances. According to the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Colchester ranks 205 out of 326 authorities, placing it in the middle cohort of the least deprived authorities in England. Within Colchester there are two areas which are in the top 10% most deprived areas in England. The proportion of the working age population in Colchester claiming Job Seekers Allowance is below the national average, as is the proportion that has no qualifications. The proportion that has qualifications at advanced level or above is just above the national average. The main employment sectors in the area are public administration, education, health, distribution and hospitality and catering.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Shaun Dillon HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the assistant principal curriculum and quality assurance, 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 and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and parents; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed lessons, assessments and tutorials. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across most 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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