

# Thomas Rotherham College

## Sixth form college

<b>Inspection dates</b>		14 – 17 January 2014
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
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:

- Students make good progress particularly on AS level and vocational courses.
- The standard of students' work is generally good.
- Teachers use their expertise and subject knowledge well to plan and deliver lessons which motivate students to attend well and make good progress.
- Exemplary tracking and monitoring of students' progress, with timely interventions, ensure that students progress well.
- Students benefit from an extensive range of enrichment and wider learning activities which support them effectively in their future careers.
- Highly effective and comprehensive support for students of all abilities helps them to learn independently, preparing students well for higher education.
- Decisive and swift action to redress weaknesses found at the previous inspection, including performance management, staff appraisal and quality systems have led to rapid improvements.
- Challenging targets at college management, departmental and individual level are set and monitored closely by governors and managers.

#### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Low success rates in a few subjects such as law, sociology and science, poor intermediate level performance and the proportion of students gaining high grades in some subjects need improving.
- Aspects of teaching and learning in a few lessons such as low expectations of students, the limited use of information and learning technologies (ILT) to enhance learning, some poor classroom management and the promotion of equality and diversity limit the progress that a few students make.
- The college self-assessment report does not cover some key aspects of provision nor support all judgements sufficiently.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve aspects of teaching and learning by:
  - consistently setting high expectations for all students, so that they make consistently good progress and achieve high grades
  - giving clear instructions to all students so that they know what they have to do to be successful
  - making better use of opportunities in lessons to develop mathematical skills appropriate to the subject they are studying
  - giving students time to discuss equality and diversity in lessons so that their knowledge and awareness increases.
  
- Improve the form and content of the college self-assessment report to ensure that there is adequate coverage of all aspects of the college's work supported by sound evidence. Ensure that the elements of areas for improvement are sufficiently detailed so that specific actions can be identified to support rapid improvement in provision.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- The proportion of students successfully completing their qualifications has improved steadily over the last three years and is around the national average for sixth form colleges. The large majority of students make better than expected progress based on their entry qualifications. This is particularly true for students studying GCE AS level and for those studying vocational courses. At A level, students make at least expected progress.
- Students achievement of high grades improved substantially in 2012/13 to around the average for AS and A levels and better than the average for vocational courses. The college has particularly high attainment in modern foreign languages, sport, art and history but low success rates in science, law and sociology.
- Success rates for the very small number of students taking intermediate level courses have declined in the last three years and their high grade achievements are lower than average.
- Students progress well within the college and a high proportion stay on to complete their studies in the second year. Nearly two-thirds of students progress to university, with an increasing number gaining places on highly competitive courses. Most other students progress into employment or to study in further education. Attendance is very good across the college.
- The college has successfully narrowed the gap in achievement between different groups of learners. Male and female learners, White British and minority ethnic learners and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed equally well.
- The standard of students' work is generally good. In English, students show very good subject knowledge and use this to make insightful and sophisticated observations in their work. In science, students carry out practical work with confidence and develop good investigative skills.
- Students develop good personal, social and employability skills. Science students develop good employability skills through easy access to work experience. Some students, who are aiming to enter apprenticeships, are involved in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) project which provides for an extended and realistic experience with local engineering companies. Students work well in groups, and where peer assessment is well established, their communication skills improve and their ability to challenge each other is well developed.

- Nearly a third of all students undertake some kind of work experience during their time at college. While some are required by the courses students undertake, the majority of work placements are a response to student requests. The college has good contacts with local businesses, many of whom have links with departments, and provide placements for learners and engage them in mock interviews to prepare them for work.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. As a result, the college has improved outcomes for students. Since the last inspection, teachers and managers have had a clear focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment.
- Teachers know their students very well and provide high levels of individual support. They use their expertise and subject knowledge well to plan lessons, paying close attention to students' abilities. They use a wide range of activities that enable students to collaborate effectively. In a music lesson students discussed and challenged each other's assessment of the characteristics of 16th century music and developed their analytical skills by comparing it to Baroque music.
- Students work hard in lessons and make good progress in developing their subject knowledge. In a geography lesson students confidently evaluated the sustainability of the Gansu water project in China. Teachers use targeted questions very well to assess progress and to provide stretch and challenge so that students achieve their potential. A range of different methods enable effective checking of students' learning, for example quizzes, directed questioning, 'traffic light' cards, peer and self-assessment.
- In a minority of lessons punctuality is poor, which disrupts learning at the beginning of the lesson. Some aspects of teaching in these lessons are not managed well, for example, instructions are not clear at the beginning of activities, and the ineffective use of directed questions allows a few students to dominate and means that the teacher is not certain that all students have understood the topic. In these lessons students do not make the progress expected of them.
- Students use the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) extensively to develop and extend their learning, carry out additional work and revise for examinations. A blog developed by the art department includes contributions from previous students, which helps to raise students' aspirations. For example, a student describes university life at Cambridge and recommends that students should not be nervous because the college prepares them well for university. Teachers do not always exploit technology to improve and enliven their lessons, to accelerate learning and progress.
- Students benefit from an extensive range of enrichment and wider learning activities. For example, fund-raising supports the education of deprived children living in a safe house in South Africa. Students value the two weeks they spend working with the children, which broadens their horizons and has a powerful impact on their view of the world.
- Support is very good. Staff use initial assessment effectively to assess students' needs for additional support. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are assessed promptly and support is quickly put in place. Weekly subject specific workshops support students' development of subject knowledge and the college's Centre for Learning and Study Skills (CLASS) is used extensively. As a consequence, students make good progress from their starting point.
- Assessment of students' work is good. Teachers mark work promptly and give detailed and constructive feedback to inform students of the progress they are making towards their target grade. The vast majority of teachers correct spelling and grammatical errors on students' written work. However, in a minority of cases, marking is cursory and does not identify what students need to do to improve.
- Teachers and managers use the electronic grade book to monitor students' progress closely so that students who are at risk of underperforming are directed to receive additional help.

However, there is less systematic focus on those students who need to be stretched and challenged to achieve higher grades.

- The development of English skills has a high priority in the college. A wide range of activities to engage students during the literacy week included giant Scrabble, crosswords and an essay competition based on 'word of the day'. The newspaper and blog produced by students include film and book reviews and debates. Teachers use word walls, glossaries and subject-specific terminology successfully to widen students' vocabulary. However, the development of students' mathematical skills is not as well developed.
- Students receive comprehensive advice and guidance prior to the start of their course which enables them to make informed choices. Guidance for students planning to progress to employment or higher education is very good.
- Teachers use resources well to support learning. Colourful and informative displays in classrooms and around the college display students' work, celebrate their successes and promote diversity.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary. They are respectful of each other and their teachers. The majority of teachers plan opportunities to raise awareness of equality and diversity. Examples include performing arts scripts which explore a range of social issues; media students research the representation of women by comparing two high-profile female singers. In a few lessons teachers do not promote equality and diversity sufficiently.

## Science 16-19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment, while improving, are not yet consistently good and as a result, outcomes have not improved sufficiently. Students who completed AS and A-level courses in 2013 made satisfactory progress overall. Success rates on AS courses declined and were low and not enough students achieved high grades. Students on the BTEC science course achieved well and made good progress. Outcomes on GCSE courses were weak. Data from performance monitoring this year show improved retention and progress made by students, but it is too soon to predict final outcomes.
- Well-focused staff development and new appointments this year have contributed to improvements and some teaching is now outstanding. Students attend well and are keen to learn. Assessment of their peers' work, and of their own, is a common feature of better lessons. Where teaching is most effective, teachers have high expectations of students and plan activities that provide challenge for all. In a physics lesson on superposition of waves and also in a biology lesson on health and disease, students responded very well, in skilfully structured group work, to tasks that required evaluation and higher-level thinking.
- Although teachers use questions frequently they are not always challenging enough. Their expectations for all students to engage in activities to develop their analytical skills are not consistently high. Some tasks do not allow for sufficient interaction and expectations in practical tasks are sometimes not clear enough.
- Teachers deploy resources effectively and make good use of ILT, for example to demonstrate mass movements in geology and refraction in physics. Students make frequent use of resources on the VLE but are not always sufficiently well informed about specific resources available, for example to help them prepare for assessments.
- Students speak highly of the help they receive from teachers. Where support workshops are well targeted they support students' learning well, although their effectiveness in supporting improvements in outcomes has not yet been evaluated fully. On occasion, some workshops are very full and students find it difficult to receive individual help, although teachers do make individual arrangements outside of workshops.
- Teachers have good information about individual students' needs following initial assessment. Their monitoring of students' progress, at individual, group and course level has improved

significantly. Students are aware of how well they are doing compared to their target grades. Individual performance reviews and other regular assessments such as 'mini tests' help staff to identify students at risk of not meeting target grades. The extent to which actions from individual performance reviews and assessments are used as a means to provide a clear indication of how to improve, and provide stretch and challenge is not consistently good.

- Assessment is frequent and regular. Much good practice exists, for example in biology, where the feedback to students on their work is comprehensive and provides them with good detail on how to improve. The extent to which marking identifies incorrect spellings or poor presentation is inconsistent.
- Students have frequent opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in the sciences and most tackle calculations and graphs with confidence. Teachers now provide a much greater focus on developing students' literacy skills; practising using key scientific terminology is a regular feature in more effective lessons. In these lessons, sensitive groupings of students and challenging tasks lead to good development of their communication and team-working skills.
- Revised entry requirements have ensured a more consistent approach to the recruitment of students. The information students receive before they start their course helps them to understand the demands of advanced-level qualifications, although some still find the transition from GCSE difficult. Students receive good careers and higher education advice, and are helped to arrange work experience, for example through a STEM project for those wishing to progress to advanced and higher apprenticeships.
- Students work well together and their behaviour is exemplary. Staff now have a much stronger focus on equality and diversity, particularly through attention to meeting individual learning needs. Lesson plans show some thoughtful attention to planning for different abilities, but the extent to which this is applied effectively in lessons is inconsistent. A good example of the promotion of diversity occurred in biology, where students' research into scientists from across the world resulted in vibrant displays.

## English 16-19 study programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good leading to good outcomes. Achievement, retention and success rates for AS and A2 English courses are similar to the high national averages. The progress students make has improved in the last two years. Changes to working practices and improvements in target-setting and monitoring are having a positive impact on the progress of current students. At GCSE, success rates are good.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They know their students well and encourage them to fulfil their potential. They use class profiles to tailor learning to meet individual needs. Teachers plan lessons well and manage learning effectively. In the better lessons, students work diligently and with interest and enjoyment. They collaborate well in group tasks, sharing ideas on the texts and topics and supporting each other. Teachers lead discussions skilfully, building on students' contributions and enabling them to extend and develop their learning. For example, in English language, students carefully evaluate the validity of linguistic research and, in English literature, students discuss gender stereotypes from different historical periods with insight and maturity.
- Where teaching is less effective, students remain passive for long periods, with no opportunity to explore or discuss information presented by the teachers, so that some activities progress too slowly. Teachers do not use ILT to best effect in lessons, and do not fully exploit resources such as interactive whiteboards and data projectors. As a result, a minority of students become disengaged and do not make sufficient progress in their learning.
- Teachers' initial assessment of students' starting points is thorough; they quickly identify students causing concern and refer them for additional support as appropriate. Teachers monitor students' progress carefully following intervention, and this demonstrates the positive



impact of support. Electronic recording systems allow teachers and managers to review students' progress, which they do assiduously.

- Students demonstrate good subject knowledge. They identify linguistic and literary terminology accurately; most show an excellent understanding of complex concepts, and many use this knowledge to make insightful, sophisticated and occasionally highly original observations. Teachers encourage students to explore and extend their ideas.
- Teachers assess learning through good use of questioning, student presentations in class and frequent checks on learning in lessons. Marking of written work is detailed, with useful advice to students on how to improve, and individual target-setting enables students to make good progress.
- Teachers emphasise the importance of correct grammar, spelling and punctuation, and correct errors meticulously. Students are also aware of more subtle implications of language use, such as tone and register. They develop good personal and social skills through, for example, collaborative working and peer support. Links with English departments in local universities, and with former students, help to raise aspirations and encourage students to look ahead and consider future career opportunities. Teachers exploit some opportunities to develop mathematical skills, but this could be further developed.
- Initial guidance is good. Students are well informed about course requirements and know what they need to do to succeed. They are very appreciative of the help, support and guidance they receive from teachers. Students of all abilities consider subject workshops very helpful in supporting them in pursuit of their learning goals.
- Equality and diversity are promoted very well. Students of English language discuss the use of gender-specific language thoughtfully, relating it to changing social norms. English literature students consider racial and gender stereotypes in relation to prescribed texts. GCSE English students reflect on society today and as it was in the time of the text they were studying, making pertinent comments. Staff and students invariably treat each other with courtesy and respect.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

**Good**

- Leadership and management are good. Governors, managers and staff have made very good progress since the previous inspection in addressing the key issues identified by inspectors. In particular, there has been a significant improvement in performance management, target-setting and self-assessment.
- The college vision is ambitious. It aims to be outstanding by the end of 2014/15, with a high overall success rate. Expectations of students are high and both their progress and their achievement of high grades have improved. College and departmental plans include a good range of actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment. They provide a realistic foundation for improvement.
- Governance is good. Managers' reports give governors a detailed understanding of the standard of teaching and of students' achievements. They generate challenging discussions between governors and managers. Governors have been closely involved in curriculum strategy, planning and in validating departments' self-assessment reports. The new system of link governors is raising their profile in college and broadening their understanding of departments' work.
- Performance management has improved significantly. Senior managers rigorously tackle marginally performing staff and courses. Strong, half-termly performance monitoring meetings evaluate the overall progress of each department and the progress of individual students who give cause for concern.
- Heads of department are accountable for the standard of teaching in their department and for their students' outcomes. They monitor teachers' work closely, carry out learning walks and facilitate sharing good practice. They have clear targets and make good use of data. The electronic grade book monitoring system provides 'live' monitoring of key aspects of

performance such as assignment grades and attendance at individual, class and course level. This has contributed significantly to improvements in students' achievement.

- Following the last inspection, managers quickly introduced good, linked systems, for lesson observation and appraisal. Observations and appraisals are on schedule. Appraisal actions often deal with detailed aspects of teaching, for example how to improve students' note taking. A few appraisal actions are expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students rather than specific actions for teachers, so that next steps for teachers are not sufficiently clear. Professional development is good for managers and teachers.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory. Departmental reports are good, with adequate judgements about outcomes, teaching and learning. Action plans have an appropriate focus on improving courses and teaching. The use of data and action plans are good and the report does contribute to quality improvement. However, in the whole-college self-assessment report some claimed strengths are norms; areas for improvement are not supported by evidence; the only information about departments is a grade table and the leadership and management section does not refer to either governance or equality and diversity. Although the grading judgements are adequately self-critical, the overall tone and balance of the report overemphasise strengths.
- The college provides a good range of AS and A-level subjects and an appropriate range of intermediate and advanced vocational courses. In a few curriculum areas, for example sport, a shift in balance from A-level to vocational provision has contributed to improved outcomes. Students have good opportunities for work experience, sports, visits and other enrichment activities.
- Managers and staff respond well to students' views. Focus group meetings in each department enable students to comment on detailed aspects of teaching and assessment. Department staff take these findings into account when writing their action plans. They also incorporate outcomes from mid-year and year-end college surveys.
- The college is very inclusive and the promotion of equality and diversity is good. There are good examples in departments, for example, the additional English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) lessons for GCSE English students who do not speak English as their first language, and cookery lessons for some male sports students to support their nutrition module. The college held a 'Celebration of Diversity' week in October 2013 which successfully raised students' awareness and a recent approach to the local mosque encouraged parents of Muslim students to become more involved with the college.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of students. Strong external links enable the college to support learners whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Managers and staff have been well trained to recognise and respond to incidents. Sound judgements are made about what action to take and when to involve external agencies and parents. The college's mentors and counsellors have received specialised training including mental health issues. The college is very proactive in relation to 'on line' safeguarding, which is included in every student's induction programme. The college is a safe and welcoming environment.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Provider name

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Science</b>	3
<b>English</b>	2



## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Sixth form college							
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16-18							
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: 1386							
	Part-time: 82							
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Dr Richard Williams							
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	October 2012							
<b>Website address</b>	www.thomroth.ac.uk							
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A	N/A	55	N/A	1375	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	46	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>								
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							

## Contextual information

Rotherham has a population of 257,600 and 8.1% are of minority ethnic origin. Unemployment is three percentage points above the national average and the average wage in the area is 10 percentage points lower than the national average. Rotherham is ranked 53rd out of 326 English local authorities on the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation. The main employment in the area is public services, care, retail and hospitality services. A significant proportion of the local population have no qualifications and only two thirds have achieved intermediate-level qualifications; only 40% hold qualifications at advanced level or above, 13 percentage points below the national average. In 2012, the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C, including English and mathematics, was just above the national average.

## Information about this inspection

**Lead inspector**

William Baidoe-Ansah HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Assistant Principal for Quality 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 relevant 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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