

Strode's College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

6–8 December 2016

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders, managers and governors have pursued improvement with energy and have communicated this very successfully to staff. As a result, staff across the college are enthusiastic and apply the improvement strategies effectively to their work.
- Since the previous inspection students' outcomes have improved and are now good in almost all areas, the proportion of high grades has risen across the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now good.
- Students behave well, respect each other and develop good teamworking and communication skills.
- College staff are bold and ambitious in the ways they help students understand and debate British values. Students receive outstanding support to contribute to, debate about, and influence college life.
- Almost all learners who complete their studies progress to positive destinations.
- A very high proportion of students who resit GCSE mathematics and English successfully achieve A* to C grades. In GCSE mathematics, achievement of A* to C grades is outstanding.
- In a minority of subjects, actions to improve achievement and progress are taking longer to have an impact, and as a result learners do not yet make the progress expected of them.
- A small minority of teachers do not always provide sufficiently demanding activities to ensure that the most able students make good progress.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Strode's College is a small sixth form college on a single site in Egham, north-west Surrey. The vast majority of its students are aged between 16 and 19 years and are on full-time study programmes at level 2 or level 3. The college also provides adult learning programmes for a small number of part-time adult students.
- The college draws students from a range of areas with different socio-economic circumstances in and around Egham, Berkshire and the London Boroughs of Richmond and Twickenham. The student population contains a greater proportion of minority ethnic students than is the case in the local population.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the minority of subjects where students make insufficiently rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide sufficient challenge to the most able students so that they make rapid progress and achieve or exceed their expected grades
 - teachers robustly check the progress of all students and give written feedback on assessed work which is sufficiently detailed to help students make improvements to their work and gain higher grades
 - teachers support students to better organise their folders of written work in order to help students' revision and review activities prior to examinations.
- Managers should increase the numbers of external work experience placements for vocational students, particularly for those at level 2, so that these students benefit from external work experience as a way of learning about and experiencing work in their vocational area.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, governors and senior leaders have a clear vision for the college, which they communicate well to staff and students. Leaders have been energetic in their pursuit of improvement since the previous inspection, and communicate this very successfully to staff. Consequently, staff have effectively embraced and applied the improvement strategies to their work.
- Since the previous inspection, the new principal and senior leaders have worked hard and largely successfully to deal with the areas for improvement: declining enrolments; low achievements on AS- and A-level courses; the insufficient progress students made relative to their starting points; and what were significant weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders and managers have put in place effective improvement strategies that have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, which is now good. As a result students' outcomes have improved and are now good, in almost all areas. However, aspects of teaching, learning and assessment still require improvement. These include the quality of feedback teachers provide on assessments, and ineffective questioning in a minority of lessons. In a small minority of subject areas, most notably chemistry and statistics, students still do not make the progress from their starting points that they make in other subjects. Managers have worked hard to deal with students' slow progress from their starting points in these subject areas, but have yet to effect sufficient improvement.
- Leaders and managers are well informed about the college's performance and know its key strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessment reports are accurate and evaluative, based on a good range of evidence, and include good consideration of students' views. Leaders use self-assessment reports well to create a college improvement plan; however, because it is over-long it loses a clear focus on key areas for improvement by attempting to deal with too many minor concerns.
- Measures to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through observations and frequent, themed walk-throughs of lessons, are effective. Observers' reports are succinct and evaluative, and focus well on learning. Managers effectively target annual staff development activities on key areas for improvement, and respond quickly to more pressing development needs by using weekly staff team meetings for training and discussion.
- Managers use comprehensive data analysis and robust quality assurance measures to identify quickly underperforming courses, subjects or teachers. They thoroughly investigate any underperformance and, in most cases, bring about rapid improvement through supportive staff development.
- Leaders and managers provide a peaceful and supportive environment for students. Frequent college-wide events and themed tutorial activities broaden students' understanding of their society and their responsibilities and contributions to it. Managers monitor performance data very carefully to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- Management of the curriculum is good, leading to good outcomes for most students. Progression levels to university, apprenticeships, further study or sustained employment are high. Leaders work successfully with employers, higher education institutions and

local authorities to enrich students' learning experience, although they have yet to secure a good range of work placements for all students.

The governance of the provider

- The governing body has been appropriately refreshed following changes in the senior leadership and management structure over the past two years. Governors have highly relevant skills, which they use well to set strategic direction. Board members analyse and review their skills at frequent intervals to make sure that they provide good support and challenge to the principal and senior leaders. Attendance at meetings is good, and governors attend college events frequently.
- Governors receive a good range of clear and comprehensive reports from senior leaders; as a result they understand the college's curriculum and its strengths and weaknesses well. Particularly thorough and robust analysis of each year's outcomes gives leaders and governors a reliable and comprehensive view of annual improvements.
- Students make a full contribution to the work of the governing body through their presence as governors, and their participation in a vibrant student parliament and a very effective student liaison committee.

Safeguarding

- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and managers provide a safe and tranquil environment for learning. Managers are diligent in ensuring that the college meets its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding. A good number of safeguarding officers provide well-known points of contact around the college. Students are safe at the college, and know they can talk to staff, should they have trouble with their work or in their personal lives.
- Senior leaders have developed an outstanding set of arrangements to promote British values and meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' legislation. All staff and students took part in wide-ranging discussions which successfully increased students' understanding of the meaning of British values and how they aligned to college values.
- Students have a very clear understanding of how to stay safe online. They know how to protect themselves and their peers from radicalisation and extremism. Students have been involved in a number of inclusive events to raise awareness of the dangers of radicalisation. Managers reinforce messages relating to radicalisation and extremism and British values every day, for example through frequent tutorial events and eye-catching and thought-provoking posters designed by students.
- Teachers ensure the health and safety of students in practical lessons, for example in sport and science subjects and in performance and dance classes.
- Managers and governors observe safer recruitment policies well. All staff and governors receive appropriate training on safeguarding and in matters relating to students' care and welfare.
- Managers maintain a detailed and effective 'at-risk' register that informs teaching and other staff, as appropriate, about any students encountering serious problems. Managers and staff work closely with external agencies, including the police, the local safeguarding board, mental health, counselling and other specialists.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection and as a result teaching now better prepares students for their examinations. Students are clear about what is expected of them, and in the vast majority of lessons they enjoy their learning, work hard on the tasks set and make good progress.
- Students behave well, respect each other and develop good teamworking and communication skills by collaborating on shared tasks. This is a particular strength within the teaching of mathematics, where students solve problems in small groups working on whiteboards all around the room. Students are comfortable undertaking peer assessment in subjects such as history and performing arts, where they provide written feedback on areas for development in each other's work. Students act on this feedback to improve their work.
- Students develop their independent learning skills well through the frequently set and marked homework. Students have a high regard for, and make good use of, online resources both in class and outside of lessons. In an A-level biology lesson, students recalled previous learning well by using mobile technology to undertake quizzes.
- Students develop technical vocabulary well, which equips them to be successful in their exams and prepares them well for work. For example, students in media classes effectively explore key technical language associated with cinematography and in evaluating the presentation of the role of women in contemporary British films.
- Students develop good practical skills in art, graphic products, drama and dance and, because of effective support, they explore innovative and creative ideas. Art students are confident in their use of a variety of art techniques, including painting, etching, and clay work, and media students are able to edit films confidently using professional editing software.
- Staff record and review students' progress very thoroughly. Students frequently review their own progress in each subject with their teachers and take the opportunity to reflect and comment on their own progress. As a result, most students gain a good awareness of their target grades and know what they need to do to achieve them.
- Students value highly the considerable support given by their teachers that helps them to move successfully from GCSE to A-level study. Staff provide particularly effective personal and academic support for students, offering additional sessions and making themselves accessible outside lessons.
- Teachers, in a small minority of cases, do not provide sufficiently demanding activities or check students' learning thoroughly enough. They do not ensure that the most able students make good progress, and, at times, repetition of activities makes learning dull and provides students with insufficient challenge to ensure rapid progress. In addition, the written feedback students receive on assessed work does not always guide them sufficiently on how they can improve their work further to gain higher grades.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students are well behaved and self assured. They speak to other students, staff and visitors in an open and respectful manner. College staff create a highly supportive environment in which students develop good social skills and grow in confidence. For example, one student felt strongly that the positive culture of the college had helped her become a friendlier person.

- Students are proud to be at the college and care about it and one another. Bullying is not evident, and the estates staff are particularly skilled at working with students to create a welcoming and respectful culture. Students feel that staff care for them. Students are very aware of the risks associated with radicalisation and know how to protect themselves online.
- Students value and benefit from the good-quality careers advice they receive, both at enrolment and during their time at college. Frequent employment-related trips, college activities and visiting speakers help students to think about their careers. Careers events, including impartial careers interviews, are very well publicised and well attended by students.
- Staff help students understand and discuss British values in ways that are bold and ambitious. A well-prepared programme of tutorial activities encourages an open and mature debate about the nature of democracy and the difference between expressing an opinion and an extremist or offensive view.
- Attendance at lessons and tutorials is good. Students understand and respond well to the expectations of staff for them to maintain consistently high standards of behaviour and be properly prepared for lessons. Students work diligently in lessons, but in too many cases their folders of written work are poorly organised.
- Services to support the health and welfare needs of students are comprehensive, well known and well used. These include regular sexual health clinics, extensive counselling support and enrichment activities. The many posters and leaflets detailing the values of the college and the routes for students to access support are imaginative, informative and of high quality. However, opportunities for students to take part in physical activity are underdeveloped.
- The work that leaders and staff undertake to encourage students to contribute to, debate about, and influence, college life is outstanding. College staff listen carefully to, and clearly value, students' views, gathered through a variety of means including class forums and the governors' student liaison committee. The regular student parliament is particularly effective in gathering and responding to students' views in a way that also promotes students' understanding of democracy.
- Students on vocational courses take part in well-considered, focused work-related activity, for example visits from industry speakers and additional trips, as a core element of their course. However not all vocational learners, particularly the small number at level 2, benefit from external placements as a way of learning about and experiencing work in their vocational area.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The majority of students on 16 to 19 study programmes make at least the progress expected of them and achieve well. Actions taken to increase the progress and achievement of students on A-level and vocational courses resulted in improved outcomes for students in 2015/16, building on the improving picture in 2014/15. For example, managers and staff brought about good levels of improvement in sciences and economics, both of which now have achievement rates significantly above those in similar colleges.
- Over the past three years, achievement rates in a large number of subjects have steadily improved. These are now good in a range of A-level and vocational subjects, including further mathematics, photography, biology, economics and media. A large number of

study programme students at level 3 undertake the extended project, in which they make excellent progress and achieve well.

- There is no significant variation in the performance of different groups of students on study programmes. Students formerly in receipt of free school meals progress well and exceed the achievement of those in similar providers in areas of provision such as GCSE and functional skills mathematics and English, on level 2 certificate programmes and on level 3 diploma programmes.
- A high proportion of students on study programmes who resit GCSE mathematics or English qualifications successfully achieve A* to C grades. Achievement rates are higher than in similar providers, and significantly so for GCSE mathematics, where achievement is outstanding. In addition, achievement for students on study programmes in functional skills English and preparatory mathematics is good.
- Student progression continues to be a strength of the college. A high proportion of level 3 students on study programmes progress to positive destinations. Rates of progression to university are higher than in similar providers. Level 3 students who do not progress to university are supported well in a range of ways to make an appropriate decision about their next steps. Many move to an apprenticeship or into employment in a wide range of sectors. Students on level 2 study programmes progress well within the college and into employment, traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Adult students' achievement on GCSE mathematics and science courses is very good; achievement for adults in GCSE English is better than the low rate nationally, and for those in other similar providers. Adult students progress well from functional skills mathematics courses to GCSEs, and from English for speakers of other languages courses to functional skills English courses. Progression from functional skills English to GCSE courses is low.
- Although the number of AS- and A-level subjects where students make slow progress has reduced, there is still too much variation across different subject areas in the quality of the student experience and in student progress.
- Managers' actions to improve achievement and progress are taking longer to have an impact in a minority of subjects and, as a result, students do not yet make the progress expected of them. This is particularly the case in A-level chemistry, mathematics (statistics) and textiles, AS-level physical education and in the vocational diploma in information technology. Nevertheless, the great majority of students on these programmes in 2015 successfully progressed to higher education, into employment or to an apprenticeship.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130833
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,200
Principal/CEO	Rowan Cookson
Telephone number	01784 437 506
Website	www.strodes.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 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	62	53	82	965	2	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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