

Connell Sixth Form College

16–19 Academy

Inspection dates

21–23 November 2016

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too many current students do not make the progress that is expected of them. This is because too much teaching does not meet the individual needs of students, particularly the most able.
- Quality assurance is not effective in ensuring that the many new initiatives introduced by leaders are consistently improving the quality of provision across all subject areas.
- Too few students have meaningful external work experience that is linked clearly to their courses and career aspirations.
- Teachers do not set precise enough targets based on students' starting points. They do not provide students with sufficiently informative feedback to help them to improve their work. Consequently, too many students do not achieve the grades of which they are capable.
- Failure to recruit sufficient numbers of students over the last three years has led to serious financial concerns for the college.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of the local community. Consequently, too many students who want to study at the college are referred to alternative providers in the locality.

The provider has the following strengths

- A new culture of high expectations, introduced by the recently appointed senior leadership team, has led to improvements in student outcomes in the last year.
- Progression to further and higher education, employment and apprenticeships is high.
- There are high standards of student behaviour in an inclusive and respectful environment. Students successfully develop a good understanding of the values of living in modern Britain.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The college is part of the Bright Future Education Trust, a chain of academies in the North West of England. The college opened in September 2013 with a small cohort of students and relocated to purpose-built premises in September 2014. The college was established to provide high-quality academic provision for young people in East Manchester. The curriculum now includes BTEC level 3 qualifications in sport, business studies and science, in addition to A levels. The college currently has 314 students on roll and also provides academic programmes for Manchester City Football Club scholars who are funded by the Premier League.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that targets set for students are precise and based on their starting points so that they make good or better progress
 - providing students with informative feedback which helps them to identify what they need to do to improve in order for them to achieve the grades of which they are capable
 - ensuring that teachers take into account what students already know and can do, so that learning activities meet the needs and interests of students, including good levels of challenge for the most able.
- Ensure that students are able to benefit from meaningful work experience that is linked closely to their courses and career aspirations through good-quality careers advice and guidance.
- Strengthen quality-assurance arrangements to ensure that leaders closely and accurately monitor the impact of new initiatives in order for the quality of provision to be consistently high across all subject areas.
- Evaluate the curriculum and introduce courses that meet the needs of the local community, particularly school leavers.
- Improve the financial sustainability of the college.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders in the college are strongly committed to their collectively agreed mission to 'think big' for their students. A new culture of higher expectations introduced by the new senior college leaders, after a time of great turbulence, has led to significant improvements in student outcomes in the last year. In order to further improve outcomes and the student experience, the senior team have introduced many much-needed changes, including more accurate data capture and reporting, a new appraisal system and a revised management structure, including a head of upper and lower sixth form. As yet, too many students still do not make the progress expected of them based on their previous qualifications.
- Leaders have not met the recruitment targets on which college funding plans have been based. They have not taken action quickly enough to reduce costs, even though they implemented a restructure of the college for the start of the current academic year. Leaders have recognised the significant financial risk to the future viability of the college and are taking action to secure additional funding.
- The college offers a wide range of advanced academic courses and a much narrower range of vocational courses. Leaders are planning to expand the range of level 3 vocational courses in 2017/18. Students progress well from these advanced-level courses, particularly into higher education. Currently, leaders do not provide an appropriate curriculum for the many local school leavers who lack the necessary qualifications to start a level 3 course. College leaders are planning to introduce vocational level 2 provision in 2017/18.
- Leaders recognised that advice and guidance was inadequate in 2014. Many students were recruited onto inappropriate courses and a high proportion either left the college or failed their AS-level and A-level examinations. Since 2015, improved initial advice and guidance has led to more students staying on course and continuing to a second year of study. Leaders do not ensure that they receive important student information from all the local schools about the students that enrol at the college. This means that some students do not receive appropriate and prompt support.
- The college's restructure, implemented by the new principal, has resulted in clear accountability for all staff and has led to many poorly performing staff leaving the college. Leaders have not implemented the new appraisal system well enough and do not set clear targets for teachers to hold them to account for the quality of their teaching and their students' outcomes. Many teachers' targets do not relate sufficiently to the quality of learning and assessment in their classes, the previous outcomes of their students and the high expectations of leaders.
- The majority of the college's self-assessment report is clear, detailed and forms part of a clear quality cycle. Although strengths within the report are overstated, the quality improvement plan includes clear actions for the large majority of areas for improvement.
- Managers have not recognised the weak reporting and overgrading of the observations of teaching, learning and assessment. The observations focus too little on student learning and progress in lessons, with the result that areas for improvement identified in the last inspection remain, such as the variable quality of teaching, learning and assessment across different subjects and meeting of the needs of the most able students.

- The recently appointed senior leadership team has introduced many new initiatives. However, quality-assurance systems are not effective in ensuring that these initiatives are consistently improving the quality of provision across all subject areas.
- A culture of inclusivity permeates the college, where students from many different cultures and educational backgrounds demonstrate tolerance and respect. Students report that they feel safe. All parents responding to the college survey agree that their sons and daughters are safe at college. A 'no missed opportunities' strategy has led to effective learning about equality and diversity.
- The college has responded well to the 'Prevent' duty, with regular training for staff and students, clear policies and approaches and a strong approach to e-safety. Staff's and students' understanding of the threats of radicalisation and extremism is good and all are aware of how to report issues and concerns under the 'Prevent' duty guidance.

The governance of the provider

- Changes to the governing body mean there is now a skilled and experienced team of governors who have overseen the appointment of a new, committed senior leadership team.
- Governors are very well informed and receive regular performance reports. They offer good support, challenge and suggestions to the senior team.
- Governors are well aware that the college has serious financial concerns and will not continue to be viable without additional support from Bright Futures Education Trust (BFET) or another external source. They are taking action to secure the necessary financial support for the college.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A newly constituted safeguarding team is well qualified, has effective links with external agencies, and makes appropriate referrals.
- Staff have received comprehensive training on all aspects of the extensive safeguarding policy.
- An annual audit of safeguarding in the college ensures a detailed and current focus and all the recommended improvements have been acted on.
- College leaders have worked well with other members of BFET to share good practice in safeguarding across primary, secondary and post-16 sectors.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Too many teachers do not plan activities that provide challenge for students, particularly the most able, to ensure that students make good progress and achieve their full potential. They do not rigorously assess students' progress in class and fail to question students well enough in order to check their understanding of topics or challenge misconceptions. Teachers often answer questions before students have had a chance to answer for themselves. Too many teachers do not ask sufficiently challenging questions to extend students' learning or to develop their verbal skills.
- Teachers give too little attention to developing students' mathematical skills. Managers

recognise that they have concentrated on strategies to develop students' English skills to the detriment of mathematics.

- Targets set for students by their subject teachers do not always take account of students' starting points. Targets are too broad and do not support students to know what they need to do to achieve their goals. As a result, too few students, particularly the most able, make the progress expected of them and fail to achieve or exceed their targets.
- The monitoring and tracking of students' progress are not rigorous enough. Teachers' inconsistent use of individual learning plans to monitor students' progress means that records are often incomplete or comments and targets are too general. Individual learning plans are not routinely shared with students. Consequently, students are often unable to recall accurately their level of progress or know what they need to do to progress further. Teachers' feedback on students' work does not consistently indicate clearly what students need to do to improve.
- Most teachers use their good subject knowledge well in the majority of lessons. However, too few teachers use vocational examples, such as market research in business studies, to contextualise learning for students and to extend their understanding of the subject.
- In a minority of subject areas, teachers plan interesting and stimulating lessons based on students' starting points. Teachers skilfully pose questions to students depending on their abilities. In these lessons students develop good critical thinking skills, use technical vocabulary accurately and the most able are suitably challenged. For example, in geography, students discuss convincingly the erosion and weathering in glacial environments; in sociology, students identify accurately the academic achievement of different social groups. As a result, students in these lessons make rapid progress and meet and often exceed their target grades.
- Students benefit from a culture of respect and tolerance. They work well together in lessons and respect each other's views and opinions, entering into healthy debate on topical global issues such as the European Union referendum and the United States presidential elections to broaden students' understanding of the values of society.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Information, advice and guidance for students on entry to the college are generally good and ensure that most students enrol onto appropriate courses for their career aspirations. However, careers guidance during students' study programmes is limited. Teachers and careers advisers do not routinely review students' careers aspirations or their progress to ensure that their planned next steps in education, apprenticeships or employment are realistic and achievable. Careers advisers provide students with information about external careers events but do not routinely evaluate the take-up and impact. As a result, staff are unaware of the value of such events in helping students to make informed decisions about what to do after college.
- Too few students benefit from meaningful work experience that is linked to their courses or career aspirations. The planning and evaluation of work experience is weak. Too many students do not recognise the value of work experience in helping them to make informed decisions about their future learning or employment. For example, A-level students applying to university for teaching courses, or students on vocational programmes who

want to join the fire service, have not had a work experience placement in a school or fire station.

- The new tutorial system, which was introduced in September 2016, does not meet the aim of providing a whole-college coordinated approach to the development of students' personal, social and employability skills. Approximately half of students who completed the student survey in October 2016 reported that tutorial sessions are repetitive, often boring, and that their time could be better spent on alternative activities.
- Organised enrichment such as sports activities is well planned and well attended by students. Students also participate in activities such as volunteering, employability awards and charitable work in the community. They develop a wide range of personal and employability skills through these activities. For example, students are proud of their development of an application for mobile telephones for a charitable organisation.
- As a result of recently implemented strategies to improve behaviour and establish high expectations, students are now considerate and well-mannered. They demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, and behaviour around the college is exemplary.
- Successful interventions by managers to improve attendance have resulted in high levels of attendance in lessons. Punctuality is good, with only a few students arriving late for their lessons.
- Students are keen to participate in new initiatives to recognise their achievements such as The Resilience Challenge, Language Ambassador Programme and the Attendance Leader Board. Through initiatives such as these, students develop skills required for employment, improve their standards of behaviour and prepare for their future lives.
- Students demonstrate a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe and how to seek support should they have any concerns, including if they feel people are trying to influence their views.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The proportion of students who successfully achieved their A-level qualifications, at the grades expected of them, in 2015/16 was too low and varied significantly between subjects. For example, the proportion of students who met or exceeded their target grades in physics and biology was very low, yet in law and business studies it was high.
- Overall achievement on AS-level courses increased significantly in 2015/16, but considerable variation exists between different subjects. For example, the proportion of students who achieved or exceeded their targets grades in chemistry, English language, English literature and sociology was high, but in business studies, law, mathematics and physics it was low.
- Achievement rates on BTEC level 3 programmes are high and almost all students on extended diploma programmes achieve high grades. However, most students on subsidiary diploma programmes fail to achieve the grades expected of them.
- Achievement in English and mathematics GCSE is improving and is higher than similar colleges nationally. The proportion of students achieving English GCSE at grades A* to C is particularly high.

- Too few students, particularly the most able, make the progress expected of them. Too many current students are not achieving the in-year grades of which they are capable.
- Leaders track the destinations of students well. A high proportion of students progress to university. Two thirds of students are accepted at their first choice of university. Those students who do not go to university progress to apprenticeships, employment or further study. Students who do not return for the second year of their programmes progress to full-time employment, apprenticeships or level 3 courses at other colleges.
- Leaders have taken appropriate action to retain students and, as a result, the proportion of students who stay until the end of their two-year level 3 programmes has improved significantly.
- Leaders accurately identified achievement gaps between different groups of students and took positive action to reduce these gaps. There are now no significant achievement gaps.

Provider details

Unique reference number	139730
Type of provider	16–19 academy
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	321
Principal/CEO	Ms Jane Hopcroft
Telephone number	01612 319200
Website	www.connellsixthformcollege.com

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 0	19+ 0	16–18 0	19+ 0	
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher
	16–18 0	19+ 0	16–18 0	19+ 0	16–18 0
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total
	0		0		0
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	N/A				
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0				
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency				
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A				

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal, quality and curriculum, 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 questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and tutorials. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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