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Mr Ian MacNaughton
Principal
The Sixth Form College Colchester
North Hill
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Dear Mr MacNaughton

Short inspection of The Sixth Form College Colchester

Following the short inspection on 14 and 15 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the college was judged to be good in February 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection you have continued to provide good-quality academic education for young people, predominantly school leavers, in Colchester and the surrounding area.

You, with your governors and managers, have established a strong vision for the college. You provide 16- to 18-year-old students with a supportive learning environment in which the majority achieve their qualifications. Managers have planned the curriculum well to provide students with broad programmes of study. These provide them with a comprehensive range of subject choices and support them to progress effectively to their next steps. Your staff provide very good pastoral support which enables students, particularly those who have achieved less well at school, to remain on their courses and overcome issues that have prevented them from learning in the past.

Managers have worked collaboratively with partners in the local area, including local schools and colleges, to provide an appropriate curriculum offer that meets the needs of the locality. The vast majority of students study GCE A levels and AS levels, with a minority studying applied general certificates within their study programme. Students attend the college well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have put into place comprehensive training for all staff and

governors. The designated safeguarding lead and the lead safeguarding governor have received relevant training for their roles. Managers provide staff with frequent safeguarding updates, including on the 'Prevent' duty. They use the online safeguarding site well to share information.

Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism so that students are aware of potential dangers and know how to report any concerns. Staff identify any well-being concerns early in students' programmes and use this knowledge effectively to support students to remain in education. Students feel safe and are safe.

Managers have established very good working relationships with external agencies. For example, they attend local authority 'Prevent' meetings and liaise with multi-agency groups to provide support for more-vulnerable students.

Managers check appropriately that staff are safe to work with students. Governors have a good oversight of safeguarding through an annual safeguarding report and managers keep them informed of any issues.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have established a thorough process for assessing strengths and areas for development within the college, which includes managers at all levels of the organisation. Managers identify, through the self-assessment process, those areas that they have successfully improved and where they need to sustain improvements, but they do not routinely pinpoint weaknesses. As a result, leaders, managers and governors are not able to monitor accurately progress in the areas that would benefit from improvement.
- Leaders and managers have robust arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers have established a broad range of strategies to support teachers to improve their practice, including an observation process and peer observations. As a result, teachers reflect well on and improve the progress learners make in lessons. Managers have put in place a comprehensive staff development programme that ensures that teachers improve their practice swiftly. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good in most lessons.
- Most students remain on their courses, and the large majority achieve their qualifications at the end of their course. In a minority of courses, for example the International Baccalaureate, the proportion of students achieving their qualifications has declined and is low. Students achieve their GCSE English and mathematics qualifications well, with the majority achieving high grades, particularly in English, where achievement is good.
- Although most students achieve their qualifications and make good progress, a minority do not make the progress of which they are capable. The proportion of students on advanced-level courses who achieve high grades is low.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and, as a result, the large majority of students participate well in their learning. They encourage students to work

independently. Students use the online virtual learning environment well to carry out activities outside of the classroom, such as researching topics in preparation for their subsequent lessons. Students' attendance is good; most arrive at their lessons punctually and ready to learn.

- Most students enjoy their lessons; they develop their confidence well through stimulating and interesting learning activities. Teachers set students challenging targets at the beginning of their course. They monitor students' progress regularly against these targets and identify and intervene quickly if students fall behind with their studies. Students know their target grades; they understand the progress that they are making towards achieving them and what they need to do to improve. Consequently the majority of students make good progress.
- Leaders and managers have implemented good arrangements, including training to support students to develop their English and mathematics skills. Consequently, most students have a good understanding of the importance of mathematics to their future careers, they develop their knowledge well in vocational contexts and are able to complete tasks which are relevant to their intended careers. For example, in a business studies lesson students were able to use data effectively to calculate market share and business growth.
- Teachers improve students' English skills well in academic and vocational lessons. They encourage students to use technical language and they check that students understand and use relevant terms and concepts related to the subjects that they are studying. For example, students in AS-level biology are able to explain the role of antigens and pathogens in the immune system. Teachers encourage students to develop higher-level skills, such as comparing and contrasting documents, to challenge concepts and determine their own ideas. Students work collaboratively to critique and challenge each other's work, for example in developing their essay-writing skills. As a result, the standard of most students' written work is high.
- Managers provide students with good advice and guidance to progress onto the next level of education. Consequently, a large majority progress onto higher education or apprenticeships. However, the students who do not plan to go onto higher education or apprenticeships do not receive comprehensive information, advice and guidance on employment routes and opportunities. Not enough students experience work-related learning to ensure that they can make informed choices about their next steps into employment.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they routinely identify key areas of weakness and monitor effectively the planned actions to secure improvement
- they monitor the achievement rates of students on different courses to ensure that all students achieve their qualifications and make good progress from their starting points, including those on the International Baccalaureate
- all students benefit from meaningful work-related learning and effective advice

and guidance to ensure that they are well prepared for future employment.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lynda Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector, assisted by the assistant principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with staff, carried out observations of lessons and scrutinised students' work. Inspectors reviewed key documents, including minutes of meetings, lesson observation documentation and relevant policies and procedures.