

The Sixth Form College, Solihull

16–19 academy

Inspection dates

30 January–2 February 2018

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		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- In 2016/17, leaders and managers placed insufficient importance on the progress that A-level students made. As a result, students in the vast majority of subjects made slow progress.
- Senior leaders and managers do not have a comprehensive or accurate assessment of the quality of provision. Actions to address underperformance have not been consistently applied across the college.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet of a consistently high standard. A-level teachers do not have high enough expectations for students. They do not routinely provide the challenge in lessons to ensure that students achieve the grades of which they are capable.
- Assessment strategies and practices are not yet developed enough to accurately assess students' progress. As a result, teachers do not consistently support students in correcting their mistakes and consolidating their learning, which prevents them from making rapid and sustained progress.
- Managers have not ensured that the variations in the achievements of different groups have closed sufficiently.
- The reinforcement of fundamental British values is weak and not well integrated in lessons. As a result, students have a weak understanding of the importance of these values in their daily lives and future careers.

The provider has the following strengths

- The majority of students taking the BTEC National Diploma make good progress from their starting points and achieve high grades.
- The new trustees, academy councillors and trust leaders have a clear vision of how the new academy structure can improve the quality of provision through sharing good practice. They have set challenging targets for college managers, which focus on the progress of students and improving teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders have developed effective partnerships with local schools and universities, which have led to students progressing well to university.
- Senior managers' highly effective approach to keeping students safe has created a secure and harmonious learning environment. Students have a good understanding of the importance of equality, and they value the diverse community in which they learn.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Sixth Form College, Solihull, became part of the Ninestiles Academy Trust on 1 August 2017. The college is now under the governance of the Ninestiles Academy Trust and, locally, the Ninestiles and Sixth Form College Solihull Academy Council.
- Three quarters of students are enrolled on A-level courses and the remainder undertake level 3 vocational qualifications. More than half of all students travel to the college from Birmingham. The majority of students have a minority ethnic background. Solihull is an area of relative affluence. However, some students from Birmingham live in areas of high social, economic and educational deprivation. Nearly all students in 2016/17 entered the college with GCSEs in English and mathematics at A* to C grades or equivalent.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan and use activities that take account of students' starting points and prior learning, and challenge students so that they make rapid progress and achieve their full potential
 - develop effective in-class assessment strategies that quickly identify the depth of students' understanding, and enable immediate interventions to correct errors and close gaps in students' knowledge
 - set consistently high expectations of what students can achieve, and support all students to make good or better progress
 - share the better practice that exists in the few more successful subjects to ensure that students experience the same high quality of learning in all subjects.
- Leaders should ensure that their self-assessment is self-critical and accurately identifies areas for improvement. They should ensure that managers fully and consistently implement actions to address identified weaknesses.
- Leaders should ensure that curriculum managers take effective actions to address the achievement gaps between different groups of students.
- Managers should ensure that teachers reinforce fundamental British values in lessons and tutorials so that students' understanding of how these relate to their daily lives is improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders have not fully implemented the recommendations from the previous inspection. In particular, they have not improved the quality of teaching and learning to meet the capabilities of all students, nor have they closed the achievement gaps between different groups of students. Students' progress, as demonstrated by value-added data, has deteriorated and the number of subjects that are underperforming has increased.
- During 2016/17, leaders and managers were too generous in their assessment of outcomes for students. They did not place enough importance on the progress that A-level students were making. Leaders did not set a target for the progress A-level students should achieve from their starting points. Observers of teaching did not report enough on the progress students were making in lessons. As a result, leaders and managers did not identify that the large majority of students on A-level courses were not making the progress of which they were capable. They did not take the necessary actions for improvement.
- For the period 2016/17, leaders and managers acknowledge that their assessment of teaching, learning and assessment was overgenerous. For the current academic year, managers have revised the observation system. They have recently provided training for the college's observation team. Observers now focus more on students' progress, the pace of learning and the degree of challenge provided for students. Due to the small sample of assessments currently completed, the change is not yet showing a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the college.
- Following the 2017 results, and the formation of the new governance structure, senior leaders identified curriculum areas that require improvement and immediate remedial action. Senior leaders and managers took decisive action to improve progress and the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics, biology, chemistry and art. Leaders monitored the performance of these areas closely and changed the managers in mathematics and chemistry. Leaders can now show a positive impact on students' progress and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics, biology, chemistry and art.
- Leaders and managers have improved the systems for monitoring the progress of current students. Leaders and managers now collect a progress grade for each student, drawing on students' current work, at five times in the two-year course. They compare this grade with the students' aspirational target grades. Teachers give students who are performing below the aspirational target appropriate support. As a result, managers have halted the previous decline in students' progress in a few key subjects.
- Senior managers provide a wide range of professional development activities. Leaders and managers provide teachers with regular opportunities to share good practice. Teachers' attendance is high and feedback is positive. This has led to an improvement in the development of students' English skills but has yet to lead to consistently good teaching, learning and assessment.
- Senior leaders have introduced more rigorous systems for monitoring and supporting the performance of staff. This has helped new staff to improve their teaching practice. Managers support and challenge staff who are not working at the expected standard to

improve. In a small number of cases, this has led to staff leaving the college.

- Senior leaders regularly review the range and type of courses that are available for students. They make careful decisions based on student demand, curriculum change and financial efficiency. For example, managers have introduced a wider range of vocational courses. Senior leaders have developed good links with local universities and schools, which have led to an increase in the number of students attending college and progressing to local universities.
- Senior leaders have a clear strategy for the development of students' skills in mathematics and English. Managers are supporting well the increasing number of students who are studying GCSE English and mathematics. The large majority of students benefit from participation in a wide range of enrichment activities. Vocational students benefit from high-quality work experience. All students benefit from impartial and high-quality careers guidance, which leads to positive destinations for the large majority of students.
- Leaders and managers place particular importance on equality. Senior leaders clearly set out expectations in terms of respect and non-discriminatory behaviour. They ensure that staff and students participate in appropriate training. Staff and students treat each other with respect. Leaders celebrate diversity through annual events, such as Black History Month. Other events raise students' awareness of mental health and age concerns, and acknowledge a diverse range of religious festivals. Leaders have supported well the development of the prayer room and lesbian, gay and bisexual student groups. As a result, leaders and managers have developed a safe and harmonious learning environment, which staff and students value.

The governance of the provider

- Trustees, working closely with the chief executive, have ensured that in a short time they understand well the strengths and weaknesses of the college. This enables them to support, challenge and set appropriate targets for improvement. Trustees make an important and positive contribution to the development of the college strategy and priorities.
- The new trustees and trust leaders have high aspirations for the college and the students. They have a clear vision of how the new academy can benefit staff and students through the sharing of good practice across the college. They understand the importance of monitoring students' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. They have set challenging and appropriate targets for college managers and are holding them to account well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have invested in additional staffing to support students and respond to an increase in mental health concerns. Students know to whom they should report concerns. When students report concerns, managers deal with them promptly and use external agencies appropriately.
- Senior managers ensure that staff and students understand the risks that are associated

with radicalisation and extremism, and how these relate to the students. Managers ensure appropriate training for staff and students. Managers share good practice across the college's partners. Students understand the risks to their safety and undertake safe working practices.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- In too many lessons, teachers do not provide students with enough challenge to make the progress of which they are capable. As a result, many students fail to reach their full potential. Teaching and learning are too variable across subject areas and between teachers within the same subject area. Teachers do not use information on students' starting points consistently enough to plan lessons which ensure that all students make good progress in classes. The pace of learning is too slow for many students and, as a result, they do not make sufficiently rapid progress.
- Teachers do not assess the depth of students' learning effectively in the majority of lessons. For example, questioning is too frequently to the whole class, which hinders the participation of some students, lacks direction and does not challenge students enough to expand their understanding of new material. Teachers do not check students' understanding sufficiently and, as a result, are not able to ensure that effective learning has taken place.
- Teachers and managers are not yet using assessment data consistently or effectively enough to inform intervention and develop learning. As a result, there is too much variability in the progress students make in different subjects. Managers have developed a new tracking system, but it is too soon to see a positive impact from this on students' progress. Teachers do not identify and target support quickly enough for students who underachieved in Year 12 for them to make better progress in Year 13.
- The majority of teachers do not plan effectively to meet the capabilities of students. Consequently, too many students do not fully engage in learning activities. In many lessons, teachers set students the same tasks and activities, regardless of their ability. As a result, too many students become disinterested, stray off task and fail to complete class activities to the level of which they are capable. The most able students do not achieve the grades of which they are capable and the least able students make slow progress.
- The majority of students are positive about their overall learning experience and the support they receive, and are motivated to learn. Students show positive attitudes to study, even when activities do not sufficiently challenge them. They work well together and benefit from both peer and teacher support. For example, A-level dance students encourage and support each other very well to develop complex choreography ready for their assessed group piece.
- The majority of students produce classwork to an appropriate standard and are proud of the work they produce. For example, Year 13 art students taking the BTEC National Diploma confidently discuss the development of portfolio pieces ahead of their university interviews. Music students are engrossed with refining their compositions and are enthusiastic about the development process.
- Students on vocational courses receive valuable feedback to help them improve their written work and achieve their qualifications. Students respond well to the feedback they

receive from teachers. They are keen to improve their grades and meet assessment criteria. However, in a small number of vocational lessons, there is an emphasis on completing tasks rather than on learning, and students are not always able to demonstrate the independent analytical skills they need to achieve the highest grades.

- In a few lessons, teachers create and use electronic resources to support learning well. For example, in modern foreign language lessons, students use headsets to work in pairs, confidently creating translations that are projected onto the whiteboard and discussed by the class. Teachers have a strong focus on speaking in the foreign language, which develops students' confidence and fluency in conversation. This is particularly noticeable in German.
- Teachers use the initial assessment of English and mathematics effectively to support students' progress in most lessons. As a result, students develop these skills well, particularly their English skills. Students use subject-specific language well and teachers frequently challenge students to explain their meaning within subject-specific contexts. For example, law students confidently discuss and apply the 'Res ipsa loquitur' doctrine, and students studying the work of Alfred Hitchcock use a wealth of rich, cinematic language to emphasise the technical skill of filming silent scenes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Students are well behaved, friendly and arrive in class ready to learn. They display a strong work ethic inside the classroom. However, despite these positive attitudes to learning, most students do not make the progress of which they are capable. Students from different communities work well with each other. In a few instances, low-level disruption and student inattention in classes hamper their progress. Although overall student attendance is in line with the college's target, attendance at academic coaching tutorials is too low.
- Students have access to a wide range of well-planned and organised enrichment activities. These include a variety of societies and academic forums to support higher education applications. Managers do not monitor or analyse students' uptake of enrichment sufficiently to ensure that all students are benefiting from these opportunities. Students in most lessons demonstrate fluent communication and speaking skills. They use advanced subject-specific terminology accurately and are confident to use these terms when making presentations or publicly speaking.
- The very large majority of BTEC students benefit from an external work experience placement, which has helped them to develop well personal, social and work-related skills, or example their timekeeping and teamwork. However, too many A-level students fail to develop their employability skills. They cannot explain how the skills they acquire through teaching and learning activities develop their wider study skills. Too few learning activities develop students' creativity or problem-solving skills.
- Students benefit from comprehensive and effective impartial careers guidance from experienced advisers. This enables them to make informed decisions about their immediate higher education choice. A minority of students have an insufficient understanding of their career options.
- Students feel safe and their safety is a high priority for the college. They can describe well

the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Students know how to keep themselves safe online and understand the potential dangers of social media. They know how to report any concerns. However, the discussions and development of fundamental British values in taught sessions are too basic. As a result, too few students can confidently articulate how these values impact on their daily lives or potential career paths. Teachers do not review periodically students' understanding of these topics following the mandatory academic coaching seminars at the beginning of the year.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Most students on A-level courses do not make the progress expected of them given their entry qualifications. This has worsened over the last year. In most subjects, students make poor progress and do not achieve in line with expectations. The proportion of students gaining high grades at A level is low. In a few subjects, such as geography, health and social care, and law, students make good progress.
- The proportion of students who successfully complete their programme is in line with the average for similar colleges. The standard of students' work is of an appropriate standard. A high proportion of students progress to positive destinations, with the majority going to university. Managers have taken actions to improve progress in key underperforming courses, which have halted the decline in the slow progress made by students in those subjects.
- Managers monitor the outcomes of different groups of students well. However, they have not been successful in closing achievement gaps between different groups of students. Only a few curriculum areas have clear actions in place to eliminate identified gaps. The achievement gap has varied over the last three years between male and female students. In 2016/17, male students achieved to a significantly lower standard than female students. Male students' progress from their starting points is worse than for female students.
- Over the last three years, students of mixed heritage have performed consistently less well than other students. In 2016/17, Black African students had significantly lower achievement rates than other students. Students from disadvantaged areas achieve in line with other students within the college.
- The significant minority of students undertaking vocational qualifications make good progress from their starting points and achieve high grades. The most able students achieve very well. Students taking courses in art and design, applied sciences, sports studies and health studies make very good progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	144887
Type of provider	The Sixth Form College, Solihull
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,290
Principal	Dr Martin Sullivan
Telephone number	0121 704 2581
Website	www.solihullsfca.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	2,275	-	-	-
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	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the interim vice-principal, 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, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; 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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Martin Ward	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ruth Szolkowska	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Parton	Ofsted Inspector

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