

Varndean College

Sixth-form college

Inspection dates

30 October–1 November 2018

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			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors, leaders and managers have developed a highly inclusive culture that allows staff and students to thrive.
- Teachers know their students well. They have high expectations and use their own experiences and expertise to motivate students to achieve.
- Students benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their individual needs.
- Students enjoy their learning, maintain excellent behaviour and are highly cooperative.
- The vast majority of students produce work of a high standard. Students on the International Baccalaureate produce work of exceptional quality.
- Students with high needs receive very good support and make good progress. They achieve their qualifications and move to the next stage of learning or to employment.
- The vast majority of students make good progress and achieve well. Nearly all progress onto their first-choice university or to their chosen next step.
- A high proportion of students who resit GCSE English and mathematics qualifications successfully gain grades 4 to 9.
- Too few students on vocational programmes have external work placements to develop their understanding of the areas in which they wish to work.
- Careers guidance is insufficiently comprehensive for students who do not want to go to university.
- Too few students continue to develop their literacy and numeracy skills once they have achieved GCSE English and mathematics grade 4 to 9.
- A minority of students lack a secure understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Varndean College is an inclusive sixth-form college providing academic and general vocational study programmes at levels 2 and 3, for students aged 16 to 19. As part of its academic study programme, it also offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. The very large majority of students take academic study programmes, some with a mix of academic and vocational courses. A very small minority take purely vocational courses.
- The college is in the north of Brighton and Hove on a single campus shared with four schools. The college also provides adult education courses in the evening, as well as family and community learning at outreach centres in the local community. The college recruits from the immediate area and across East and West Sussex, as well as from independent schools and from overseas.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that:
 - all students have good access to effective impartial careers advice and guidance, regardless of where they are intending to progress, so that they can make informed decisions about their next steps
 - teachers develop students' literacy and numeracy skills across all academic and vocational areas, so that more students improve and refine these skills to a higher level
 - all students have a suitable range of work-related activities and work-experience placements appropriate to their career aims
 - all students have a comprehensive and secure understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and are confident about how to protect themselves from these risks
 - they improve processes for evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, making sure that managers can more clearly articulate the precise actions teachers must take to improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and leaders are ambitious for the college and for its students. They successfully serve a diverse community, promoting an ethos of inclusivity which they communicate well to staff and students and which permeates the college.
- Governors and leaders have been unyielding in their commitment to retaining the college's status as an independent sixth-form college. They recognise that the significant changes in leadership over the past two years have resulted in some loss of capacity within the senior leadership team. However, despite this, they have sustained the good quality of education, student experience and outcomes.
- Leaders and managers have made sure that they provide a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of the diverse range of students who attend the college effectively. Students studying at levels 2 and 3 benefit from a wide range of academic and vocational programmes that help them to progress to their next stage.
- Governors and leaders have focused on the need to provide GCSE English and mathematics qualifications for those students who do not have them. As a result, these students make good progress and the majority achieve grades that help them to move on to study at the next level. Not all teachers support students who have already achieved these qualifications to improve their skills during their academic or vocational courses.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have put in place effective steps to improve the progress that students on level 3 vocational programmes make from their starting points. As a result, more students on these programmes are now making good or better progress.
- Leaders and managers successfully support staff to share good practice from the research and the teaching and learning projects they carry out. Curriculum area teams explore a specific teaching and learning focus, the outcome of which they share with their peers at an annual conference. As a result, staff feel motivated and able to make positive changes to their own practice and to the student experience.
- Managers and staff value highly the professional development they get from inside and outside the college. Staff benefit from opportunities to take accredited qualifications and to take subject-specific training and updates. They feel valued and very well supported by their managers.
- Most managers know the quality of the provision and the student experience within their own areas of responsibility. They correctly identify the key areas for development. However, not all of them are able to articulate effectively the specific, measurable actions that they need to take to fix identified problems. As a result, it is not always clear what progress they are making and whether this is within the timeframe expected. Newly appointed senior leaders have put in place a training plan to bring about a more effective approach to quality improvement.
- Good and effective impartial careers advice and guidance support most students to plan their futures effectively. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities further extend and enhance the experience of the students and raise their aspirations. Senior managers have recognised weaknesses in careers advice for students not going to university and put

actions in place to improve the situation. It is too early to assess the impact of this on the guidance these students receive.

- Staff promote the value of diversity effectively, and, as a result, students show mutual respect and tolerance. Activities and events for students promote a broad understanding of their responsibilities and contribution to society.

The governance of the provider

- Governors know the college well and understand its strengths and weaknesses. They are highly motivated and have a proven commitment to securing the future of the college and strengthening its leadership.
- Governors provide appropriate challenge to senior leaders and carry out effective scrutiny of reports and key performance indicators. They also visit the college frequently to speak to students and staff and to observe learning. They use these opportunities to assess the standards of provision and the student experience. They use their skills to support key areas of the college, such as safeguarding and finance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Students feel safe at the college. They are aware of the support available to them and know who to speak to if they have any concerns. Students take part in a good range of enrichment and tutorial activities that focus on key safeguarding and well-being themes. Staff at all levels respond effectively to any concerns raised. They work closely with external agencies, for example the multi-agency safeguarding hub, social services and the virtual school, to support a wide range of welfare and safeguarding processes.
- Managers use effective recruitment procedures, with a comprehensive scrutiny of candidates' suitability. Staff and governors receive safeguarding training and frequent updates that are appropriate to their role.
- Leaders have embedded British values into the values of the college. Students and staff model them throughout the college. A minority of students lack awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Students enjoy their learning, and are focused and attentive. The large majority of students make good progress and achieve well. Staff set them work that meets their individual needs, extends their knowledge and understanding and develops their skills. Students who have a secure understanding of the key concepts being taught are set challenging extension activities to extend their knowledge further.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students and make effective use of realistic but stretching target grades to motivate them and track their progress. The large majority of teachers assess students' work frequently. They provide feedback to students that is useful. Students know what they have done well and what they need to do to develop their work further. Useful homework tasks are set often and assessed promptly.
- Teachers challenge students to make good progress and develop their thinking skills. On

the IB programme, students develop critical analysis and personal thinking skills that encourage them to strive for success. In English, students enjoy analysing a surreal aspect of a poem by Yeats; in French, students use the language to debate their views fluently in relation to a text 'Et te moi'.

- The inclusive learning environment in the college helps students to work well together. Students undertake effective peer learning and make good use of peer assessment activities. For example, level 3 childcare students confidently critique each other's work in a respectful and constructive manner.
- Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. They explain concepts clearly. Teachers make good use of their own experiences and other effective examples to develop the students' understanding of the topic they are learning or the skill they are developing.
- Staff quickly and accurately identify students' support and additional learning needs. They do this through a combination of effective initial assessment and close liaison with students' former schools. The large majority of teachers use this information to put effective support in place.
- Teachers and learning support assistants make effective use of a range of information communication technologies in the classroom to support students' learning needs, for example assistive technology software that speaks out the text the student highlights, and technology that allows students with hearing impairments to turn the teacher's speech into text. Such technologies help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to engage fully in their lessons.
- A small minority of teachers do not plan effectively for the needs of all students. They do not plan tasks and activities that involve all the students in their groups. In addition, a small minority of teachers do not check that students have fully understood the topic or task at hand, before moving on to the next. As a result, a small minority of students do not make sufficiently rapid progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students have high expectations and positive attitudes to their learning and are proud of their work. They are confident, self-assured, courteous and respectful. Students feel that staff treat their health and well-being as a priority, which supports them to learn and achieve.
- The vast majority of students produce work of a high standard. The standard of the work produced by students on the IB course is exceptional. Work produced by academic and vocational students in art, psychology, English literature, textiles, film studies, media and GCSE English is also of a very high standard.
- Students attend well and are aware of the high expectations set for punctuality and attendance. On the rare occasion a student is late, staff challenge this lateness appropriately. Students make good use of the college tracking system to review their own attendance.
- Students who have not achieved a grade 4 to 9 in GCSE English and/or mathematics when they start at the college receive high levels of support to gain these qualifications. Students who have already achieved their GCSE English and mathematics qualifications at

grades 4 to 9 do not receive enough support to develop their skills further in their other courses.

- Students and teachers make effective use of information technology in lessons and between lessons to enhance learning. For example, in performing arts students record the teacher's oral feedback on rehearsal techniques on their mobile phones, so that they can review this later and adjust their own practice.
- Students with additional learning support needs, those with high needs and those with education, health and care plans benefit from good learning support. Experienced learning support staff help them to develop their skills for independence and to prepare for life after college.
- The majority of students benefit from work-related activities that develop their employability and social skills. For example, law students take part in mock trials with serving practitioners, meet representatives of the institute of legal executives and go through a rigorous application process for work placements. Students on public services courses do exercises with the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and the Sussex Counter Terrorism Group. Art students visit galleries and meet artists and practitioners, and sport students benefit from an on-site football academy run by a professional footballer. Too few students on vocational courses have relevant external work placements. The majority of these students do not develop a good understanding of the vocational areas in which they plan to work.
- Students who plan to go to university benefit from comprehensive impartial careers advice and guidance. Staff support them very effectively through the university application process, including preparing for entrance examinations. For example, all IB English Higher students complete the Oxbridge entrance examination and hold insightful debates and discussions in class. The minority of students who want to get jobs or apprenticeships after college do not benefit from sufficiently wide-ranging careers advice.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The vast majority of students make consistently good progress, complete their courses and achieve qualifications. A high proportion of students who resit GCSE English and mathematics qualifications successfully gain grades 4 to 9.
- The vast majority of students develop secure skills, knowledge and understanding that help them to move to higher levels of study, apprenticeships or employment. The majority of students produce work of a high or very high standard.
- Students on the IB course make outstanding progress. Their achievement is exceptionally high and well above the international average. They develop extremely high levels of skill, knowledge and understanding, and the very large majority move on to their first-choice university.
- The vast majority of students on A-level courses make good progress from their starting points. Their achievement remains high. The number of students who make substantially better progress than might be expected from their starting points has declined overall. However, students on A-level courses in English language, government and politics, textiles, photography, fine art, 3D design and anthropology make outstanding progress. The progress students make from their starting point on A-level music, geography and

chemistry requires improvement.

- The proportion of students on vocational courses who make good progress from their starting points has improved. The large majority complete and achieve their qualifications. Students on vocational courses in performing arts, dance, business, travel and tourism, and childcare make good progress. The progress students make on courses in uniformed public services requires improvement.
- Adult students on courses in English for speakers of other languages and on most vocational courses make good progress and achieve well. Not all adult students on access to higher education courses complete the courses, and as a result overall achievement is too low. For those students who do complete the courses, the vast majority achieve and move on to higher education.
- The large majority of students in receipt of high-needs funding and those who are children looked after make good progress academically and personally. They achieve their qualifications and move to further study, university or employment.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130668
Type of provider	Sixth-form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,500
Principal/CEO	Phillip Harland
Telephone number	01273508011
Website	www.varndean.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	472	150	197	1578	87	-	30
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	18							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the 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

Judy Lye-Forster, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Daphne King	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector
Lisa Smith	Ofsted Inspector

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