

Inspection of The Blackpool Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 7 to 10 December 2021

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Education programmes for young people	Outstanding
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

The Blackpool Sixth Form College offers A-level and vocational courses in most subject areas. Students come to the college from across the Fylde Coast and Lancashire. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,205 students attending the college, almost all of whom were studying level 3 full-time education programmes for young people. The remainder, representing 3.1% of students, were studying level 2 vocational programmes. Ten students were in receipt of high-needs funding. The largest subject areas at level 3 include arts, business, health and social care, mathematics, psychology and science. Level 2 programmes include business, digital media, health and social care, public services and science.

The proportion of young people who leave school with five GCSEs in the Blackpool area, including in English and mathematics at grades 9 to 4, is significantly below the national average. There are pockets of significant deprivation across the area that the college serves. The proportion of the college population who belong to ethnic minority groups is low at 6.2%, which is reflective of the local area.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students find The Blackpool Sixth Form College a truly aspirational place to learn. They told inspectors that they are very proud to attend the college. Students have an extremely positive attitude to their learning and value their time at college. They continuously strive to make the most of the life-changing opportunities on offer to them.

Leaders and staff have created a calm, professional and inclusive learning environment where students feel safe and can flourish. Teachers successfully develop the resilience of their students through the carefully planned pastoral curriculum. All staff have very high expectations of what their students can achieve. They are very passionate about how learning can help students to achieve whatever they want to be, regardless of their starting points. As a result, students achieve aspirational next steps, such as progression to prestigious universities and professions, that far exceed their previous ambitions.

Students make a significant contribution to the respectful culture in the college. They work productively together in lessons and are considerate of the needs and views of others. Leaders reinforce a culture where respect for others and diversity are celebrated. Students attend events such as Trans Awareness Week, White Ribbon Day, Black History Month and World Kindness Day. The LGBT+ group is very active. Students across the college raise a considerable amount of money for charity and have a positive, wide-reaching effect on the local community.

Staff provide extensive enrichment activities that they purposefully, skilfully and seamlessly integrate into every student's curriculum. Most activities are student initiated and student led. They prepare students extremely well for their next steps and give them a wide range of essential life skills so that they can make a positive contribution to society. Students benefit greatly from external speakers and lectures on interesting topics, such as gender and language and the Rwandan genocide. Students wishing to progress to university are supported fully, including through preparations for interviews at prestigious universities.

Leaders are fully aware of the ongoing impact of the pandemic on students' learning, both academically and personally. They worked tirelessly to ensure that students continued to access their full learning programmes throughout national restrictions. Students benefit from very high levels of pastoral support, including access to pastoral mentors and to counselling services. Students describe how the college facilitates peer-to-peer self-help groups, for example around mental health, depression and anxiety. Students said that these have had a profound impact on their well-being. Students are unreservedly positive about the work that all staff do to support them.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have designed and developed a high-quality, comprehensive and ambitious curriculum that supports students to make substantial progress throughout their learning programmes. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is very well informed by external stakeholders such as local and regional employers, the Blackpool Education Improvement Board and through links with local schools. They are very aware of the local and regional context and the significant disadvantage within the communities they serve. Consequently, leaders ensure that the curriculum provides social mobility opportunities and develops students' sense of social justice.

Leaders and managers work very closely with local high schools to help students settle quickly into college life. They identify thoroughly the gaps in students' knowledge, skills and behaviours at the start of their programmes. Managers design the curriculum to fill these gaps. In information and communication technology (ICT), students have options to progress to higher level ICT courses or into professions within creative industries such as animation or digital photography. In art, teachers help students to develop skills in a wide variety of artistic disciplines, such as drawing, painting, the use of ink, textiles, plaster and wire work. This enables students to identify their preferred areas of specialism in preparation for their university courses.

Teachers plan and teach the curriculum in a highly sequenced and logical order. For example, in psychology, students consider developmental systems theory by reflecting on their previous learning of attachment theory. Teachers fully recognise that students need to gain a comprehensive understanding of these concepts before moving on to the more difficult topic of forensic psychology. Teachers use a range of strategies to ensure that students remember key facts and technical language. For example, in geography, teachers use well-planned quizzes to reinforce learning. In health and social care, they use revision flash cards to help students remember key theorists.

Teachers' strong links with local employers ensure that course modules are relevant and meet local, regional and national needs. For example, in sports courses, leaders ensure that live, anonymised data and information from local fitness centres are used as part of the course content to add industry relevance and appropriate mathematical skills development. In ICT, guest speakers explain the concept of entity relationship diagrams in databases and their usage in industry.

Teaching staff are very highly qualified and experienced in their subject specialisms. They benefit significantly from highly relevant and regular developmental activities through an effective internal staff development programme and using strong links with employers and universities. These help teachers keep up to date in their subject knowledge and teaching practices. Following nominations by their students, teachers have won prestigious teaching awards, for example 'the inspirational mathematics teacher of the year' award from the University of Oxford and the promotion of Latin and classical history from a specialist classics charity.

Teachers use their highly developed teaching skills to create a range of stimulating learning activities. For example, in mathematics, they use group work, collaborative problem-solving, demonstration and practice to reinforce learning. Teachers repeat topics regularly throughout the year. They test students frequently to ensure that they retain their knowledge over time and can discuss what they learn confidently and fluently. For example, in psychology, second year A-level students can articulately recall detail from their first year relating to the six principles of psychology, the associated theorists and the experiments behind them.

Students on vocational programmes develop industry-standard knowledge and skills that are linked to their specific career aspirations. Most students progress to degree courses or apprenticeships. For example, in health and social care, almost all students go on to medical-related degrees. The remainder secure apprenticeships in professions such as radiography, nursing and primary education. Around half of these students receive additional support through the 'closing the gap' initiative and overcome significant barriers to learning.

Students develop high-level research skills throughout their studies at the college. For example, in sports courses, students begin their research with simple cut-and-paste answers from internet searches. They move on to complex research methodologies that demonstrate their skilful use of primary and secondary sources, referencing and higher level evaluation to judge the validity of the information presented.

Teachers plan and sequence assessment activities very effectively. They provide students with numerous opportunities to demonstrate and develop their knowledge through a wide range of assessment processes. In vocational subjects, assignment briefs are expertly tailored to draw on students' future aspirations for employment. Teachers provide valuable spoken and written feedback to students that helps them to improve their work. For example, students know precisely what they have done well and how they could improve their assessed grades in the future. Consequently, students' work is of a very high standard.

Managers and teachers identify accurately students who have additional support needs. They ensure that they are not disadvantaged and implement support strategies to help them to achieve at least as well as their peers. High-needs students are integrated fully into the college's broad and very well-planned curriculum. Students benefit further from the specific training that teachers and additional learning support assistants (ALSAs) receive to support their specific needs and to break down their barriers to learning. Teachers and ALSAs plan the curriculum for high-needs students effectively together. They liaise with each other regularly to ensure that the ALSAs understand the lesson content and the support that the student will need to succeed in each lesson and over time. Support is effective for all students and helps to build students' confidence and skills.

Teachers provide extremely high-quality advice and guidance to students before the start of the course to ensure that they enrol on the right course that meets their

career aims and personal aspirations. As a result, retention and progression rates are very high, including for disadvantaged and vulnerable students. Students benefit from a very strong programme of ongoing careers advice while on their courses. College leaders successfully introduced the 'Career Ready' programme to support students to develop employability skills in their chosen career pathway. The programme expertly links students to external mentors in industry that are well aligned with students' career aspirations.

Leaders care tremendously about their staff and their health and well-being. They monitor staff's workload carefully. Leaders created a health and well-being charter, a staff well-being group and a health and well-being hub. The hub contains a wealth of highly relevant resources to support staff through a variety of life challenges. These include mental, financial and physical health issues. Leaders strongly promote that 'it is okay not to be okay' and have signed the 'Time to Change' charter. They provide an abundance of opportunities for staff to share their concerns and worries in a safe and supportive environment.

The work of governors is highly effective. Governors have a thorough strategic understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement across all college activities. Records of their meetings are clear and detailed. These demonstrate how governors use their skills and experience to fully support senior leaders and challenge the information they receive appropriately and rigorously. This ensures that quality improvement actions are very effective and implemented swiftly. Governors are ambitious for their students. They have an excellent understanding of the curriculum rationale and the impact that it has on ensuring high levels of social justice and student achievement. Governors have a high level of trust and confidence in the senior leadership team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is at the forefront of everything that students do. Staff regularly consult students to check on their knowledge of safeguarding issues and update the curriculum to rectify any gaps in students' understanding. For example, leaders created a very strong programme of support around sexual health, consent, and sexual harassment and abuse following the national campaign to raise awareness of these issues.

The extensive safeguarding team is highly qualified. Each member of the team is a 'champion' for an aspect of safeguarding, such as mental health, domestic abuse, honour-based violence and child criminal and sexual exploitation. They use these roles to provide updated information to senior leaders and to ensure the currency of the information within the curriculum, including that related to fundamental British values. Designated safeguarding leads use external agencies skilfully when necessary.

Leaders plan staff recruitment carefully to ensure that they complete thorough pre-employment checks before new staff start work at the college. Staff receive a wide

variety of highly relevant mandatory training modules to ensure that they have up-to-date knowledge of all aspects of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. While students have a thorough understanding of safeguarding, a minority do not always know how risks relating to radicalisation and extremism apply to their daily lives.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130744
Address	Blackpool Old Road Blackpool Lancashire FY3 7LR
Contact number	01253 394911
Website	https://blackpoolsixth.ac.uk/
Principal	Jill Gray
Provider type	Sixth-form college
Date of previous inspection	11 to 15 May 2009
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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