

Inspection of Rochdale Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 18 to 21 October 2022

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	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Rochdale Sixth Form College opened in September 2010. In April 2017, the governing body of the college created the Altus Education Partnership, a multi-academy trust that currently includes Rochdale Sixth Form College, a free school that was opened by the Trust and, more recently, an 11 to 16 mixed secondary school in Rochdale.

The college offers a broad range of A levels and a small number of level 3 vocational courses. The A-level subjects with the largest cohorts include psychology, mathematics, biology, chemistry, business and law. The largest vocational subject areas are applied science, and health and social care.

There are currently 1,878 students enrolled at the college. Eight students have education, health and care plans; all are integrated into the standard curriculum.

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

Students describe their experiences at the college as 'heart-warming', 'enjoyable', 'rewarding', 'motivational' and 'safe'. They talk about their college with pride. Almost all of them would recommend the college to a friend. Students told inspectors that the college provides a happy and supportive education where teachers are very helpful and make learning fun.

Staff have high aspirations for their students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. They know their students very well. Teaching staff create highly purposeful and productive learning environments that enable students to flourish academically and personally. Around three quarters of students progress to university. Almost all high-needs students perform better than their peers and all progress to university. Teachers are very effective in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in lessons and around the college. Consequently, students leave the college with a set of values and standards that prepares them for their futures.

Students develop high levels of confidence and resilience as a result of their programmes. For example, students respond positively following mistakes they make in their work and use this experience to self-reflect and to improve their next piece of work. Student support is wide-ranging, well structured and of an excellent quality.

Students' behaviour and attendance are exemplary. They arrive to lessons on time, and they are keen and enthusiastic to learn. Students demonstrate consistently high levels of respect for others. They fully embrace their peers' opinions and different viewpoints, and value their contributions in lessons. Students listen very attentively to teachers' instructions and work very conscientiously throughout their time at the college.

Students participate routinely in an extensive range of highly relevant extra-curricular and volunteering activities. These include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the college's annual theatre production, the Student Union and a variety of activities to support students' next steps, such as astrophysics, biochemistry, law society, medical society and other pre-career programmes. Students contribute to their local community regularly. For example, they help to clean a local river and paint fences for local care homes. Students become active and responsible citizens in their local and wider communities.

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

Leaders and managers offer a highly responsive and ambitious curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs and interests of all students. They take account of local circumstances, such as lower GCSE attainment. They support unequivocally all students' aspirations for higher education and other positive destinations. Managers and teachers take a careful and informed account of students' prior experiences at GCSE level in order to ensure direct and relevant links to students' existing

knowledge. For example, in history, they start the course with the War of the Roses, to put the students at ease with a topic that they are familiar with.

Leaders work in close partnership with local schools and colleges. They meet routinely with primary and secondary school leaders to understand changes in their curriculums, how this might impact on the college curriculum and how they can share good practice to enable a high-quality education from primary school to post-16. A few teachers at the college support the teaching skills of local school teachers by completing joint teaching activities.

Teachers demonstrate how they use their expert subject knowledge to develop students' transferrable skills, higher order thinking skills and critical analysis. They explain new topics skilfully and effectively. Consequently, students demonstrate an excellent grasp of a variety of different and complex subjects and ideas. For example, in psychology, students learn about the key principles and research methods they need to help them to succeed in the later topics of social influence and psychopathology. The second year course builds on this learning and starts with experimental methods and statistics, biopsychology and applied topics such as schizophrenia, addiction and relationships.

Teachers check what students now know and can do extremely effectively and regularly. In GCSE English language, students begin lessons with tests to check their learning, such as how to use synonyms to improve the quality of their writing. Teachers monitor and review these activities frequently in whole-class discussions. This enables them to quickly identify and correct misunderstandings. Students benefit from formal assessments each half-term that identify their performance at regular points in their programmes. Teachers monitor the results of these very carefully and put focused, additional support in place to help those students who are underperforming to succeed.

Managers and teachers weave high needs students' education, health and care plan targets fully and seamlessly into their individual learning programmes. All staff are fully aware of what students need to achieve above and beyond their academic or vocational goals. Learning support officers and teachers work very closely together to ensure that high needs students achieve their full potential. Teachers receive specific, individual training on how to teach and support each high needs student in their lessons and understand fully the learning implications of their diagnoses. In weekly support sessions, learning support officers recap the previous week's learning and ensure that students' knowledge and understanding of key concepts are secure.

Teachers assess students' written work frequently. Students receive very helpful feedback on what they need to do to improve. Assessment is embedded effectively in the sequence of learning so that students' knowledge and understanding are regularly checked, and students are fully prepared for their final examinations.

Students develop their English and mathematical skills effectively through their learning programmes. They use technical terminology and can utilise this accurately

in their verbal and written responses to questions. Students use mathematics in financial calculations when analysing business accounts. In psychology, students work through statistical problems in a clear and logical way that helps non-mathematical students to understand concepts fully. In history, teachers ensure that students understand how to accurately cite and reference academic sources in their coursework, such as footnotes and academic referencing from both primary and secondary academic sources. This results in students developing further the knowledge and skills that will benefit them at university or in employment.

Teachers are very well qualified and benefit from high-quality and highly effective professional development. For instance, they develop their teaching techniques around sequencing, coherent mapping, planning for reading, quizzing, concrete examples, dual coding and scaffolding. Consequently, teachers utilise this range of teaching techniques to support learners to develop a strong understanding of what they have been taught.

A very high proportion of students progress on to positive destinations. The number of students who achieve high grades across academic and vocational programmes is high. Around a fifth of students progress to prestigious universities. A significant number of students on health and social care courses progress to higher level study in health-related disciplines, such as nursing, midwifery and social care.

Leaders place a very high priority on their staff's mental health and well-being. They ensure that teachers have sufficient planning and marking time. Leaders ensure that subject leaders have a timetable that enables them to support their staff effectively and drive forward any necessary improvements in the curriculum. Staff appreciate this and feel that their workload is manageable.

Governance is highly effective. Governors promote extremely high standards across all aspects of the college. They understand their roles fully and ensure that the college meets its statutory responsibilities. Governors hold leaders firmly to account to ensure that students receive the high-quality education they deserve. They promote equality throughout the organisation.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise safeguarding to ensure that students are safe and protected. Students are taught how to keep themselves safe at college, when travelling to and from the college and in their personal lives. Students learn about issues such as hate crime, gambling, healthy relationships, and sexual harassment and abuse. Students know how to protect themselves online and have an excellent understanding of the risks in the Rochdale area.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and their deputies are highly qualified and have the expertise to carry out their roles effectively. All staff and governors benefit from regular training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders carry out

comprehensive, pre-employment scrutiny of job applicants' suitability to work with their students.

The DSL and their deputies have cultivated effective partnerships with a wide range of organisations, including the local area designated officer, the police, and the Rochdale Safeguarding Board. This enables the safeguarding team to make appropriate referrals where necessary.

Provider details

Unique reference number	144463
Address	College Road Rochdale Lancashire OL12 6HY
Contact number	01706 769800
Website	www.rochdalesfc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Richard Ronksley
Provider type	16 to 19 academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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 (pre-academisation). 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

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Suzanne Horner	His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Whelan	His Majesty's Inspector
Louise Tipping	Ofsted Inspector

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