

Inspection of Hereford Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 24 to 27 January 2023

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

Hereford Sixth Form College is a 16 to 19 academy based in Hereford. It opened in 1973 and became a single academy trust in 2016. Then, it established the Heart of Mercia Trust, a multi-academy trust, with Worcester Sixth Form College in 2019. King Edward VI College, Stourbridge joined the Trust in February 2021.

During the inspection, 2097 students were studying on education programmes for young people. This included five students in receipt of high-needs funding. Most students were studying academic and vocational courses at level 3. A smaller cohort were studying on level 2 programmes, including vocational and GCSE courses.

Students can choose to study from 32 A-level subjects and 16 vocational subjects. The courses with the largest number of students are in science, mathematics, psychology, sociology and criminology. At level 2, students can choose to study from seven GCSE subjects and six vocational subjects.

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

Staff have high expectations of students in terms of their behaviour and attitudes to learning. In response, students behave exceptionally well and show high levels of respect and support towards each other. Students' attendance is extremely high in almost all cases, despite significant transport issues in the area. Students show a high level of commitment to learning, their college and their community.

Students benefit from an inclusive, supportive and nurturing environment at the college. They respond positively to the mature learning environment created by staff and develop as confident individuals. Students appreciate the help and support that they receive from staff and how this supports them to develop academically and personally throughout their studies.

Students benefit from an extensive enrichment programme, on which participation is high. The opportunities offered, including within the college's own theatre company, choirs, bands, and interest groups, cover a wide range of students' interests. Students design and lead on developing several special interest groups, such as the Latin club and a vet society for those students who aspire to become veterinary surgeons. These clubs also support those students who need additional support in developing social skills and friendships.

Students feel safe at college. They are aware of local risks and of how to keep themselves safe. Leaders ensure that the culture of trust and respect at the college means that students are confident in supporting each other. They also have the confidence to ask for help from college staff when needed. The large majority of students can talk confidently about building mature relationships, the risks of drug and alcohol abuse and the importance of being mentally fit.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality, inclusive education that helps almost all students to progress into higher education, apprenticeships or further study. They are rightly proud of a curriculum that enables students of all backgrounds to develop as well-rounded individuals, who achieve high grades in their studies.

Students at the college excel. This includes those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Leaders and teachers track student grades and progress carefully and intervene rapidly with additional support if students fall behind.

Leaders plan and design the curriculum with care and precision. For example, biology teachers order topics starting with simple cells and progress to more complex topics, such as gene mutation and expression. In psychology, tutors start with key theories of human behaviour that underpin later individual research projects. As a result, students incrementally develop their knowledge and skills to allow them to make exceptional progress in their studies.

Staff provide very effective support for the small number of students with high needs. Support staff use education, health and care plans to create detailed individual learning plans, which teachers and support assistants follow diligently. This includes communication strategies, as well as support with organisation and note taking. Support staff work with teachers to carefully track students' progress and update their plans where additional help is needed. Students with high needs make the same strong progress. They achieve equally high grades in line with their peers.

Teachers are highly knowledgeable subject specialists. They break topics down, so that students are confident in their understanding before moving on to the next area. They ensure that topics are reintroduced, revised and repeated, so that learning is well embedded, and students understand how topics link together. In art, teachers promote discussion around key topics in contemporary art, such as gender identity, to develop further students' ideas. In psychology, teachers break down topics according to the grading criteria, so that students understand how to answer examination and assignment questions, alongside the theory that they are learning. As a result, students make rapid progress in developing new knowledge and skills.

Teachers plan and use assessment very effectively. They use a range of methods to understand students' progress, including interactive quizzes, examination question practise and reflective exercises. In English, teachers use skilful questioning to consolidate students' understanding of key texts and to continually develop creative thinking and independent thought.

Teachers provide highly effective feedback to help improve students' work. Students can explain how feedback has helped them to develop their ideas and their skills. Students have improved their grades because of this feedback. For example, in mathematics, students explain how they develop increasingly complex mathematical techniques, such as integration by substitution to evaluate integrals. Teachers and students track this progress diligently to ensure that students continue to make strong progress throughout their studies.

Teachers enhance the curriculum with the use of guest speakers to broaden students' understanding of their subject. For example, in social development, an early years teacher from a local playgroup demonstrated how to plan an early years learning activity. In A-level biology, teachers use residential fieldwork and extensive practical work to make study more relevant to potential careers and students' lives.

Leaders have created a broad programme of wraparound support for students with additional support needs, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Support staff mentor, advise, create individual well-being programmes, and communicate closely with teaching staff to ensure that every student has the help that they need. For students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, the physical well-being manager works closely with them in the gym to help increase their classroom focus. Those students awaiting formal diagnoses for

additional learning and health needs are extremely well supported to find strategies to help improve their own health.

Students are exceedingly well prepared for life after college. There is an extensive personal development programme, which is taught both face to face and via the college's virtual learning platform. While a small minority of students do not attend this programme consistently well, personal development is seamlessly woven through the taught curriculum. As a result, any gaps in skills and knowledge are swiftly closed.

The quality of the careers support available to students is excellent; students benefit from a broad programme of career-focused activity throughout their time at college. This includes a career and work experience focused week where learners can take part in additional courses and activities to enhance their CV, such as Makaton baby sign language and sports coaching.

The quality of preparation for students progressing to higher studies is noteworthy. The college has nurtured partnerships with several universities. Students benefit from extensive support with their applications from university and college staff. The college's Reach programme is highly successful in raising aspirations for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A large proportion of students applying to prestigious universities are offered places because of the excellent support that they receive at the college.

Students play an active role in college life and in the leadership of the college. Groups such as the student council and the LGBTQA+ group are highly influential in contributing to college leaders' decisions relating to the management of the college. Students show compassion and generosity in their volunteering and fundraising activities, which include students supporting a local SEND school and welcoming and integrating new Ukrainian students into the college.

Leaders prioritise staff well-being and support staff in managing their workload. They ensure that staff have enough time to complete time-critical work, such as assessment marking. They have created a supportive work environment and developed a menopause café and staff sports groups to develop team working and understanding. Staff continuing professional development (CPD) includes well-being sessions focused on physical and mental health.

Leaders have put in place a robust programme of staff CPD. Staff benefit from training across the academy trust and opportunities to share good practice. A CPD week allows teachers to focus on improving their teaching skills. Learning lunches are run throughout the year on current and emerging themes and to introduce new learning tools. Students appreciate the variety of methods and techniques used in the classroom.

Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the college and support the vision of responding to social disadvantage through an accessible curriculum.

They robustly challenge leaders to demonstrate how they prioritise improvement throughout the college.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have comprehensive policies and procedures that they use to keep students safe. They follow their procedures closely and meticulously log concerns, issues and incidents in order to ensure that low-level concerns are tracked before they become more problematic. Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment procedures to ensure that staff are suitable to work with students at the college.

The designated safeguarding leader and deputies are all appropriately trained and experienced. They receive safeguarding updates and keep both staff and students updated on local risks, including those around the local town.

Students have a strong understanding of the risks of sexual harm, peer-on-peer abuse, and healthy relationships. They know where lines of appropriate behaviour lie. The strong, respectful culture and team ethic within the college results in any poor behaviour being swiftly rectified by students and appropriately resolved by staff.

Provider details

Unique reference number	143929
Address	Folly Lane Hereford Herefordshire HR1 1LU
Contact number	01432355166
Website	https://www.hereford.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Catherine Brearey
Provider type	16 to 18 Academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Acting 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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Helen Morgan, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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