

Inspection of Bolton Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 17 to 20 October 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Information about this provider

Bolton Sixth Form College provides a wide range of education programmes for young people. There are currently 29 A-level courses available, as well as several vocational options. These consist of 13 level 3 certificates, two diplomas and seven extended diplomas, including business, health and social care, information technology, public services and sport science. Students can study a blend of A-level and vocational courses. Just under two thirds of students follow a vocational curriculum and just over a third undertake A levels.

There are currently 1,862 students enrolled at the college. Eleven students have education, health and care plans; all are integrated into the A-level or vocational curriculums. The college operates from one main site in Bolton town centre.

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

Students are positive about their learning and what college life offers them. They are ambitious and have clear aspirations for their future. They understand the importance of their studies in helping them to progress to the next stage of their lives.

Most students enjoy their courses and learn to expect challenge as an integral part of learning. Teachers create learning environments where errors and misconceptions are openly discussed. Students develop their confidence and resilience to help them achieve and progress in their studies. Most students who complete their courses progress to university. Many are proud that they are the first in their families to access higher education.

Leaders have designed a professional growth pathways programme to prepare students for their careers. This includes industry sectors that are experiencing skills gaps such as health and social care, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and digital. Employers create modules of learning which help students to develop practical skills linked to their career aspirations.

Leaders create a safe, secure environment. Teachers, support staff and security liaison officers are highly visible around the campus and know students very well. Students feel safe and well supported. They particularly value the guidance they receive about maintaining their positive mental health. They access support from student 'be kind' ambassadors, mental health first aiders and trained counsellors and can gain immediate support via a well-being hub that students have fondly named 'The Cocoon'. This helps students to make progress towards their goals.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders to meet many of the skills priorities for the Greater Manchester region. They work closely with organisations to provide highly competitive work placements for their students. These help students to develop the skills that they need to work across sectors such as the media, law, accountancy and construction.

Most course leaders link their curriculums to what employers identify as the most important skills they need in their workforce. These include teamwork, leadership, digital and communication skills. A few course leaders develop curriculum content and sequencing collaboratively with stakeholders from industry or university.

Leaders have a beneficial working relationship with a multi-national software company. They have secured an agreement with them to provide professional digital qualifications in a suite of applications to improve students' digital skills. They also operate collaboratively with other local and regional providers. They worked with another sixth form to develop students' digital skills as part of the Consortium of

North West Industry Leaders' 'Tech Talent' collaboration. Leaders are currently working with a local further education college to discuss joint working on a pathway to health curriculum through the new Bolton Institute of Medical Science.

Leaders' initiatives such as 'Women into Leadership' and 'Women into Digital Technologies' help female students to understand the opportunities available to them in sectors that they might not otherwise have considered. Students attend networking events where they meet influential female role models. Leaders discuss the attributes that students need if they are to succeed in sectors that are traditionally male-oriented.

Leaders recognise that they could better coordinate and monitor the impact of these activities to improve their strategic oversight.

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

Leaders provide a diverse range of academic and vocational courses to prepare students for university, apprenticeships or employment. They place a strong emphasis on developing students' English, mathematical and digital skills. All students who do not study mathematics as part of their advanced programmes in accounting, computing, economics and science undertake a core mathematics qualification in their first year. This helps them to secure the underpinning mathematical skills they need to cope with the demands of their courses and to prepare them for higher-level study.

Most teachers plan and sequence their curriculums well. They consider the knowledge students bring from their previous learning. In A-level mathematics, leaders identify that students have mixed experiences of mathematics from school. They design an effective induction programme, including additional workshops to bridge any gaps in knowledge that students may have. In history, teachers select curriculum content to interest, engage and enthuse students. Teachers design the course well to develop students' skills of source analysis, academic writing and evaluative skills.

On a small minority of A-level courses, teachers do not consider the sequencing of the curriculums carefully enough. They do not embed students' knowledge from their first-year studies into their long-term memory. Students are unable to recall their knowledge in the assessments at the beginning of their second year and they struggle to meet their potential.

Leaders support students with high needs very effectively. They take into account the individualised strategies students need to make a successful transition from school. Students feel less anxious and have a readiness to learn when they start college. Teachers use clearly identified interventions to inform their lesson planning, such as adjusted text and specialist screenwriting and auditory equipment. Students access occupational therapy and sensory support for those with sight problems and

deaf students. Therefore, students are not disadvantaged due to their physical or sensory needs.

Teachers are well qualified. Over a third work as external examiners, and they use this experience to raise students' aspirations. Students benefit from effective teaching strategies, including low-stakes quizzes, debates and regular recap and consolidation throughout lessons, to ensure they understand key concepts. In sport science, teachers use practical role play and verbal delivery to develop students' understanding of key concepts. For example, teachers use sweets to describe sliding filament theory. Students talk through the sweet names before they add the technical terminology.

In a few lessons, teachers do not deal with students' questions well enough, for example when students want to explore the role of organelles in the body or understand why haemoglobin is red. This means students miss opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In some lessons, students' learning is not sufficiently checked before teachers move on. In biology, teachers move on to a new topic knowing that students do not have a secure understanding of previous topics.

Most teachers know their students well and use a range of strategies to monitor their learning. On most courses, students are aware of how they are progressing. Teachers provide constructive written feedback on assessed work. Students add to this and then record their areas for development in reflective diaries. Most students' work improves over time. However, teachers' assessment practices in biology are weak and students do not know how to improve their work.

Students achieve well on most courses and their results are above national rates. Those students who need to resit examinations in GCSE English and mathematics make sustained progress in improving their skills and increasing their grades. However, leaders are aware that not enough students gain high grades in A-level courses or make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders and teachers create a calm working environment for students and apply college rules consistently. Most students attend their lessons regularly; however, attendance is too low on a few courses. Students typically arrive to lessons on time. If they are late, this is challenged by teachers, who remind students of their responsibilities and that valuable learning is being missed.

Leaders prepare students well for life in modern Britain. Students complete comprehensive training on safeguarding, online safety and radicalisation and extremism. Students are aware of local and national threats. Students cover a range of safeguarding themes as part of the tutorial programme. This includes healthy relationships. Students understand the importance of consent and the signs of coercive behaviour, grooming and gaslighting. They also understand how to maintain their personal safety when they are online.

Students have access to meaningful work-related opportunities that extend their

learning beyond the curriculum. Performing arts students work with a national theatre and perform in regional venues. Health and social care students complete work experience in pharmacies, care charities and hospitals. This supports the development of students' skills for future employment. However, only half of students studying A levels complete work experience.

Students have access to a range of enrichment opportunities that include sports, law and performing arts academies. Most participate in an annual enrichment day. Others act as marketing ambassadors and participate in clubs such as debating and chess. Leaders recognise that regular participation in activities that develop students' interests and talents is too low.

Students receive effective, impartial careers advice and guidance. They discuss their aspirations at one-to-one tutorials, attend careers fairs and have visiting speakers and familiarisation visits to universities. Progress coaches and careers staff support students well with employment, university and apprenticeship applications.

Leaders have a clear vision to provide education that supports students to reach their potential. They support teachers to develop their teaching practice. Teachers get protected time for their professional development and can participate in a professional growth programme and an aspiring leaders' programme. They have access to teaching and learning coaches to support them with the development of their teaching skills.

Leaders have implemented quality assurance processes that are mostly effective. Managers complete curriculum performance reviews and provide reports to senior leaders on all aspects of their curriculum. Despite this, leaders have not remedied all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

Governors are well established in their roles and have the relevant experience to undertake specialist roles on the board. Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college. They provide scrutiny and challenge to leaders and recognise that in a small minority of curriculum areas, improvements have been too slow.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Swiftly improve teaching and assessment on the A-level science curriculums.
- Increase the number of students who achieve high grades and make sustained progress from their starting points.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131867
Address	Town Centre Campus Deane Road Bolton Lancashire BL3 5BU
Contact number	01204846215
Website	www.bolton-sfc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Stuart Merrills
Provider type	Sixth form college
Date of previous inspection	14 January 2014
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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