

# Soar Valley College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	120286
<b>Local Authority</b>	Leicester City
<b>Inspection number</b>	291695
<b>Inspection date</b>	26 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Brooker HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1215
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Indy Singh Panesar
<b>Headteacher</b>	Melvin Berry
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 September 2001
<b>School address</b>	Gleneagles Avenue Leicester LE4 7GY
<b>Telephone number</b>	0116 2669625
<b>Fax number</b>	0116 2660634

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The college serves an urban area in the north of Leicester with comparatively high levels of socio-economic deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Most students are from minority ethnic groups. At around 70% the largest proportion is students from Indian heritage, with around 25% from White British backgrounds. Three quarters of students speak English as an additional language; 25 community languages are spoken in the school. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average. In 2004 the college was designated as a specialist mathematics and computing college, and also achieved the Healthy Schools Award and the Young, Gifted and Equal Award.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good and improving college, with some outstanding features.

Achievement is good. When students start at the college, the standards of their work are generally below those expected. However, by the end of Year 9, their standards are in line with national figures and by the end of Year 11 they rise to slightly above average. All specialist college targets were exceeded in 2006 and the college is set to match or exceed these results this year.

Care, guidance and support are good. The college is a multi-faith school that enjoys a racially harmonious community where students can develop as tolerant young people. Parents are generally very supportive of the college and the benefits that it brings for their children. The students' personal development and well-being are good. They behave exceptionally well and they make an outstanding contribution to their community. When they leave college at 16 they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life. The college's strong links with the local community also promote well the students' personal development.

The curriculum is good because the college offers a good range of suitable pathways for students and has a good extra-curricular provision. The college's specialism makes a strong contribution to provision and outcomes by attracting good staff and by impacting positively on teaching and learning across the college, particularly through the development of information and communication technology (ICT) resources for learning.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with some that is outstanding. The college recognises the need to increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching in order to further raise achievement. Procedures are in place to share best practice. Lessons that are only satisfactory do not focus sharply on what students with different abilities should do to improve, particularly in their literacy, and do not give students sufficient opportunities to develop their independent learning.

Leadership and management are good. The college's arrangements for checking the progress of students and monitoring its own performance are excellent. Self-evaluation is outstanding and suitably guides improvement planning. The college has addressed the issues from the last inspection, although the inadequacies in accommodation cannot be addressed fully until the planned building programme is finished. The college's sustained improvement since the last inspection, its strong leadership at all levels and excellent self-evaluation demonstrate that it has outstanding capacity to improve. Nonetheless, the college recognises the need to maintain the drive to raise standards as it enters a difficult period of transition with the new building developments.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by sharing the best practice that exists in:
  - o meeting the needs of students of all abilities in lessons
  - o promoting students' independent learning
  - o developing students' higher language and literacy skills.
- Maintain the sharp focus on raising achievement during the difficult period of transition to the new building.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards of attainment have risen in recent years. Achievement is good because the students, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, make good progress as they move through the college. The standards of students' work when they start in Year 7 are below age-related expectations, particularly in English, where the language skills of a significant number of students are underdeveloped. By the end of Key Stage 3, however, standards in English and in mathematics are broadly in line with national figures, although few students gained the highest levels of attainment in 2006, particularly in English. Standards in science were below average. Given the starting points of students, these results represent good progress. Attainment in GCSE examinations in 2006 was just above the national average. The strong performance in English and mathematics ensured that the proportion of students gaining at least five higher-grade GCSEs that included these subjects was above the national figure. Results in 2006 exceeded the specialist college targets. There was no significant difference between the performance of different groups of students, although the achievement of those from an Indian background was particularly good.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The students' personal development, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, is good, with some outstanding features. The college draws effectively on its religious and cultural diversity to enrich the students' experiences and to develop their excellent commitment to racial harmony. The harmonious environment is soundly based on good relationships between adults and students. Around the college, in assembly and in lessons, students' behaviour is excellent. Although a significant number of students are rather passive learners, they have positive attitudes to work, are polite and helpful to visitors and show consideration for others. The challenging behaviour of a small number of students is well managed.

Students feel very safe at college. They know who to turn to when they are troubled and have confidence in the procedures to combat rare incidents of bullying. Students understand well the importance of healthy eating and drinking, and participation rates in the many extra-curricular activities are high. Attendance is good, reflecting the fact that most students enjoy college and the many opportunities that it provides. These include some very good opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to the college, local primary schools and the wider community through an impressive range of schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, sports leadership, charity fund raising and large community celebrations such as Ram Katha. By the age of 16, students have the academic and personal skills that equip them well for life after college and for the world of work.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is good. Work is well planned and prepared, often making very good use of ICT to structure work and to provide stimulating resources for learning. Good relationships ensure that there is a positive

climate in lessons. All teachers have detailed assessment data, so that work is generally challenging. The most effective lessons focus sharply on students' different needs and plan interesting activities that engage students in their learning through small-group and pair work. Most teaching is good or outstanding, but the college recognises that, in order to further raise achievement, this proportion needs to increase. Lessons that are satisfactory rather than good do not meet the learning needs of all students equally well and tend to do too little to develop students' independent learning skills. When there is an over-reliance on teacher-led discussion the passivity of students is not addressed and they are given too few opportunities to develop higher language skills. Marking is satisfactory, but does not consistently guide what students need to do to improve.

Teaching and learning are monitored and evaluated through a robust system of self-review. Any shortcomings, for example, in the provision last year for students with learning difficulties or disabilities, are quickly identified and addressed. The college has in place some good strategies for sharing best practice which it is sensibly looking to extend.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good. It meets statutory requirements and matches well the needs of students, with a good balance of academic and vocational courses. The college is beginning to develop good personalised learning options for students with particular behavioural or learning needs. Recent initiatives to strengthen the curriculum, particularly through the use of ICT and in promoting more active learning styles, have had an impact on classroom practice. However, the college recognises that the best curriculum practice needs duplicating more widely. The range of extra-curricular activities is extensive. Students are offered a good range of trips and other activities, including residential abroad, to enrich the curriculum. Careers advice and preparation for the world of work are good.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The college has well-established and effective procedures for supporting and caring for students. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are properly adhered to and are understood by staff. Pastoral care is good. The college makes good use of a range of support services and outside agencies. The recent restructuring of pastoral responsibilities has strengthened the effectiveness of individual support and academic guidance through the better coordinated work of 'progress managers', tutors and the departments for inclusion and special educational needs. The college makes good use of assessment information to track the progress of students and to guide suitable intervention and support for targeted individuals and subjects. Sensible steps have been taken to ensure that parents are suitably informed and involved in this process. Induction procedures are good.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are developing well and are good. The principal's leadership is excellent. He has skilfully juggled his strategic leadership role with the demands of day-to-day management and the additional workload imposed by the planned new building. This has been

achieved, in part, by delegating roles to the college's strong and effective senior leadership team, and by sensibly developing the leadership responsibilities of staff at all levels. Senior leaders, many of whom are recently in post, have complementary skills that enable them to work well as a cohesive team. Restructuring and recent appointments, both in curriculum and pastoral management, have strengthened the role and impact of middle leadership, which is also good. Procedures for line management are systematic, supportive and effective. All staff are engaged in school self-evaluation, and improvement planning is properly guided by the findings of subject reviews.

The governing body has strengthened since the last inspection. Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of the college's strengths and areas for development. They work well with the principal to bring about improvement and are suitably involved in the self-review process.

The college has addressed each of the action points raised at the last inspection, although many of the much needed improvements in accommodation have had to be put in abeyance until the new school is built. In the interim, the college has been judicious in the way that resources have been used to strengthen provision. Financial management is good. The college's productive links both with the wider community and with its business partner, Alliance and Leicester, are a significant strength. The college's sustained improvement, the development of good leadership at all levels and excellent self-evaluation demonstrate that there is outstanding capacity to improve. However, the college is entering a difficult period of transition and recognises that it must maintain its focus on raising standards.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students

Inspection of Soar Valley College, Gleneagles Avenue, Leicester, LE4 7GY

- Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We were impressed by your friendly welcome and how mature and sensible you were when you spoke with us. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us about the college. We agree that the college is good and that it has some outstanding strengths. We were particularly impressed with:
  - the harmony of the college and the good relationships that exist between students and adults
  - your excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning
  - your positive and wide-ranging contributions to the college and wider community
  - the good progress that you make in lessons and over time, as a result of the good education that the college provides for you
  - the quality and effectiveness of the college's leadership.
- The college has excellent procedures for monitoring your progress and for checking its own work, so it knows well what needs to be improved. We have asked that the college focuses particularly on:
  - making more of your lessons good or outstanding, particularly by ensuring that you are all suitably challenged and engaged in your learning
  - keeping a sharp focus on raising standards during the next two years when there will be some distraction or disruption with the new building programme.

You all have a role to play in this, particularly in the responsibility that you take for your own learning.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Paul Brooker Her Majesty's Inspector 2