

Sixth Form College Colchester

Inspection report

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Contents

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	8

Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. The Sixth Form College Colchester (SFCC) was established in 1987 as a result of a reorganisation of secondary and tertiary education in Essex. The aim was to provide post-16 education for learners from the nine 11 to 16 comprehensive schools in the Colchester and Manningtree area at the Sixth Form College or Colchester Institute (FE). SFCC also recruits learners from a number of other maintained and independent sector 11 to 16 and 11 to 18 schools and is currently over subscribed. Historically, it has been unable to meet the demand for places from learners outside the catchment area. SFCC works collaboratively with Colchester Institute. The Colchester Learning Shop provides joint information and guidance on post-16 provision between SFCC and other

providers. SFCC also provides opportunities for around 35 trainee teachers through local collaborative arrangements with local schools.

2. The college has grown from 1,400 full-time learners aged 16 to 19 in the early 1990s to approximately 2,750 in September 2007. The vast majority of students are aged 16 to 19 and studying full-time on advanced level courses. Adult enrolments form a very small part of the college's provision. The college introduced the International Baccalaureate programme in 2002. Numbers on this course have doubled in 2007 and there are currently 120 first year IB students. Four schools within Colchester provide sixth form education. Selection at these schools includes high entry criteria and learners entering SFCC have lower GCSE scores than the national average scores of school sixth forms and sixth form colleges. The college recruits more female than male students. In 2006, 56% of enrolments were of female students. Unemployment in Colchester is low at 1.7% compared with 2.6% nationally. At the last census, minority ethnic communities comprised 2.7% of the population. In 2007, approximately 8% of college students identified themselves as having a minority ethnic heritage. The college's mission is 'the provision, in a supportive environment, of high quality, full-time academic and general education courses to meet the needs of young people between the ages of 16 to 19 who live in the Colchester area and at the same time to equip them with the qualifications, skills and personal attributes required to move successfully and happily into higher or further education, employment and future life'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

3. The Sixth Form College Colchester is outstanding in all aspects of its provision. Students achieve excellent results. They make exceptional progress in their General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level studies and in the International Baccalaureate. Teaching and learning are monitored rigorously and are outstanding. Students benefit from a very wide range of enrichment activities and courses. Support and guidance are highly effective and the college supports its most vulnerable students exceptionally well. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college knows its strengths and areas for improvement and tackles them effectively. Quality assurance systems are rigorous, well understood and effective. Management information provides detailed and accurate data for planning and self-assessment. Financial management and value for money are excellent.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. Targets are realistic yet challenging and have led to improvements and the maintaining of high standards in, for example, students' achievement and progress. Self-assessment is accurate and self-critical. Quality assurance is rigorous and has a strong strategic focus on teaching and learning. Procedures for quality assurance are well understood and supported by staff. The vast majority of areas for improvement identified by inspectors had already been identified and targeted by college managers. Management information is accurate, readily available and detailed.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

5. The college has made outstanding progress in improving the areas of concern identified at the last inspection. Achievement and standards and leadership and management have improved from being good to outstanding. The college system of lesson observation provides highly effective monitoring of and improvements to teaching and learning. The college has focused effectively on the development of students' independent learning skills although, as managers have recognised, this remains an area for even further development. The new college building provides excellent accommodation for many students. However, there remain some small and cramped classrooms in the older building. The previous inspection noted the need to monitor more closely the progress of students studying GCSE. The progress of these students is now monitored very effectively with most progressing to further education and employment.

Key strengths

- outstanding leadership and management
- excellent retention and pass rates
- exceptional progress made by students taking GCE A level courses
- excellent performance and progress by students taking the International Baccalaureate
- outstanding teaching and learning
- very wide range of well attended enrichment activities
- highly effective guidance and support
- particularly effective quality assurance and self-assessment
- excellent promotion of equality and diversity.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- a minority of small, cramped rooms
- the restricted opportunities for curriculum managers to develop management skills outside their subject area
- the use of individual learning plans to plan learning activities and improve further the progress made by students.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

- Achievement and standards are outstanding. Overall success rates at level 3, which covers most students, have been significantly above the average for sixth form colleges for the last three years. Both retention and pass rates for GCE A level and AS level are consistently high with male and female students achieving very similar high standards. A substantial proportion of students achieve high grades. College data for 2006/07 show that these high standards have been maintained and, in some cases, further improved. For example, pass rates for GCE A level subjects in 2006/07 were 98%. Success rates for GCE A level and AS level courses have been at, or slightly above, the high sixth form average for the past three years. Students make good progress at AS level and the vast majority stay on to study for a second year. At GCE A level, students make exceptional progress and achieve much better results than might be predicted from their GCSE grades. The growing numbers of students studying the International Baccalaureate achieve excellent results and make exceptionally good progress. The smaller numbers of students studying level 2 courses achieve success rates significantly above the national averages. In 2006/07, these were 96% compared with the average of 78%. The very small numbers at level 1 achieved 100% success rates in both 2005/06 and 2006/07. Students studying on the Level 2 Advanced Foundation Programme (AFP) make good progress and have very good progression to advanced courses, training and employment. Students demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning and produce work of a high standard. Many show enjoyment, enthusiasm and commitment to the subjects they are studying. A high and increasing proportion of students progresses to higher education.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

- The quality of provision is outstanding and this concurs with the college's self-assessment. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. The college has a clear and successful focus on continuously improving the quality of teaching and learning that is reflected in the work of departments and individual teachers. Lesson observations are comprehensive and detailed. Joint observations conducted during the inspection indicated a very close match between the judgements made by college observers and inspectors. College records indicate that almost all lessons observed in 2006/07 were judged to be good or better, with a substantial proportion being outstanding. Clear links are in place between observations of teaching and learning and staff professional development. The college provides a wide range of training courses relating to teaching and learning. Teachers have high levels of subject expertise, and their enthusiasm and commitment inspire learners to develop a particularly thorough knowledge and understanding of their courses. Learners benefit from highly effective planning of lessons and a wide range of learning activities that ensure they are involved actively in stimulating lessons. Regular assessment includes useful feedback on how students can improve their work. Progress is monitored

frequently, although some targets in individual learning plans (ILPs) are not sufficiently detailed or specific. The college recognises the need to make better use of ILPs to plan learning activities and improve further the progress made by learners. Parents and carers are well informed about learners' progress and about the work of the college.

8. The college curriculum meets the needs and interests of learners outstandingly well. The college is very responsive to external requirements and works well in partnership with other providers to ensure that it provides a relevant and rich learning experience. A very wide range of GCE A level and AS level courses is available and timetabling permits almost all possible combinations of subjects. The college also provides a growing and highly successful International Baccalaureate programme and an Advanced Foundation Programme at level 2 that provides a good range of learning opportunities and progression routes to further study. The number of learners attending the college has grown significantly in recent years and this has been accompanied by an increasing diversity in the learners' population. The college supports its students very well and they make very good progress. The approach of the college to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. Learners benefit from an excellent range of enrichment activities that contribute well to their enjoyment, achievement and personal development. All learners participate in a personal development programme and there are high levels of participation in other enrichment activities. These activities include residential trips, sport, performing arts, peer mentoring and charity work. Most of the activities are accredited and they contribute well to helping learners stay healthy and make a positive contribution to the college and the local community. Employability skills are enhanced by good literacy, numeracy and information technology skills, as well as a programme of work-related activities in tutorials and a three-day event each summer focused on progression to higher education and employment.
9. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Learners receive excellent initial advice and guidance on entry to the college. Liaison with schools is very effective and ensures a smooth transition for learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Initial assessment is comprehensive and ensures that learners are placed on the right courses and receive any support they need. Communication between teachers, personal tutors and support staff is good. There is a full range of welfare services and good liaison with external agencies to meet specific support needs. Staff provide strong pastoral support and all learners participate in a highly effective and well resourced tutorial programme. Attendance monitoring is rigorous and levels of attendance at the college are consistently high. Staff are well informed about the individual needs of learners and the college supports its most vulnerable young people exceptionally well. Curriculum areas within the college provide a very good range of subject-specific workshops to help learners achieve, and individual teachers are very responsive to requests for additional support. Careers education and guidance are very well planned. The overall success rate of learners receiving additional support is above that of the college as a whole and is improving. Learners are overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive from the college.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grade

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

10. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college mission and values are clear, appropriate and well understood by staff. The principal provides highly effective and inspirational leadership. A culture of continuous improvement has been established successfully. Communication is excellent, staff morale is high and the college enjoys a very good reputation in the community. Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been dealt with successfully. Governance is excellent; well informed, active and committed governors support and monitor the college effectively.
11. Quality assurance systems are robust and effective in securing improvements and maintaining strengths. Areas identified in the previous self-assessment report (SAR) have been tackled. For example, subjects identified as having below the average proportion of high grades now show above average results. The SAR is evaluative and realistic and based on a detailed analysis of performance measures. Data to inform judgements are very detailed and accurate. Financial management and value for money are excellent. Curriculum areas are very well managed with clear lines of communication and accountability. However, at present, curriculum managers are focused too exclusively into their own subject areas and have insufficient opportunities to share and develop aspects of management such as data and SARs.
12. Resources for learning are good. Teachers are very well qualified and performance is monitored effectively through observation and appraisal. A wide range of staff development activities are focused on teaching and learning and linked clearly to the outcomes of previous observations. The college campus has benefited from a new building that provides excellent teaching accommodation. There remain some small and cramped classrooms in the older part of the building where teachers have difficulty in moving around the class and students cannot always see whiteboards clearly.
13. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college monitors equality carefully and takes swift action on any identified differences in achievements and progress. For example, the five percentage point difference between achievements by gender has been closed successfully through actions including staff training on raising male achievement. Similarly, the college has reduced considerably the gender differences in the achievement of high grades. The small number of minority ethnic students achieves as well, or better, than the college average. The college recruits a significantly higher proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds than that in the community. The campus is completely accessible to students with restricted mobility. The college complies with the requirements of Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA) and appropriate child protection procedures are in place. Every Child Matters themes are well integrated into college planning and monitoring.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	04/05	122	97	64	33	*	*	*	*
	05/06	79	100	71	29	*	*	*	*
	06/07	66	100			*	*	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
	05/06	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
	06/07	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
NVQs	04/05	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
	05/06	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
	06/07	*	*	*		*	*	*	*
Other	04/05	122	97	63	34	*	*	*	*
	05/06	79	100	71	29	*	*	*	*
	06/07	66	100			*	*	*	*

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	04/05	1798	85	73	12	*	*	*	*
	05/06	1876	96	78	18	*	*	*	*
	06/07	1878	96			*	*	*	*
GCSEs	04/05	457	84	78	6	*	*	*	*
	05/06	481	86	82	4	*	*	*	*
	06/07	547	86			*	*	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	05/06	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	06/07	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
NVQs	04/05	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	05/06	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	06/07	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other	04/05	1341	94	62	32	*	*	*	*
	05/06	1395	99	70	29	*	*	*	*
	06/07	1331	99			*	*	*	*

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	9893	89	82	7	*	*	*	*
	05/06	10623	88	83	5	*	*	*	*
	06/07	11186	89			*	*	*	*
A/A2 Levels	04/05	3202	94	92	2	*	*	*	*
	05/06	3316	93	93	0	*	*	*	*
	06/07	3664	94			*	*	*	*
AS Levels	04/05	5400	83	78	5	*	*	*	*
	05/06	5793	82	79	3	*	*	*	*
	06/07	6088	83			*	*	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	113	88	74	14	*	*	*	*
	05/06	84	88	74	14	*	*	*	*
	06/07	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
NVQs	04/05	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	05/06	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	06/07	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other	04/05	1178	98	72	26	*	*	*	*
	05/06	1430	97	75	22	*	*	*	*
	06/07	1434	98			*	*	*	*

College data for 2006/07 may be subject to adjustment