

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College

Inspection report

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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
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College was established in 1970 on the site of the former grammar school close to the centre of Darlington. Other post-16 providers in the Darlington local authority area include: a general college of further education (GFE), one 11-18 school, a small number of work-based learning providers and an adult and community education provider. In 2005/06, there were 1,290 Year 11 leavers in Darlington and of these 57.9% achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, which was just below the England average of 59.2%. The achievement rate for 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including maths and English results was 44.7% against an England average of 45.8% (*source: Department for Children, Schools and Families DCSF performance tables 2006*).
2. The college is the major provider of GCE AS and A level courses for young people from Darlington and the outlying areas in South Durham and North Yorkshire. The vast majority of students at the college are aged 16 to 18 and are on full-time level 3 programmes. In 2006/07, 1,756 full-time students aged 16 to 18 and 426 adults studying part-time were enrolled. Most students are White British. Significantly more female than male students are enrolled at the college. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds at 4% is higher than that of the local population. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in the Darlington area is lower than the national average. The overall unemployment rate is higher than the national average.
3. The college's mission is 'to achieve and maintain excellence as a provider of education and, as a result, be recognised as one of the country's leading sixth form colleges'. The college was awarded Beacon Status in 2004 for its high standards.

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

4. Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College is outstanding in all aspects of its provision. Success rates are high and students make excellent progress. The vast majority exceed their potential based upon their GCSE entry qualifications. Senior and other managers provide strong leadership which promotes a culture of high expectations for both staff and students. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers and support staff work together in strong mutually supportive teams. Arrangements for sharing good practice are diverse and effective. Students are able to choose from a broad curriculum and an extensive range of enrichment activities. Their views on the quality of the provision are actively sought and used to inform self-assessment and improvement. Educational and social inclusion are outstanding.
5. Guidance and support for students are excellent. Teachers and other staff give their time freely to ensure that the needs of individual students are met. Leadership and management are outstanding. Arrangements for quality assurance are implemented thoroughly and comprehensive action plans to sustain high standards are monitored rigorously. The accommodation provides a high quality learning environment and is used very efficiently. Some areas are overcrowded. Plans for a substantial capital build are in the early stages of development.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. It has a history of setting and achieving challenging targets. The college promotes an ethos of high aspiration and expectations for staff and students. The high success rates noted at the last inspection have been sustained and improved, and are significantly above the sixth form college national averages. Arrangements for quality assurance are comprehensive and thoroughly implemented. Monitoring of performance and self-assessment at subject level are detailed and result in clear action plans to maintain improvements. Management information is accurate and widely used by managers and teachers to monitor closely students' progress. The new principal has reorganised senior managers' roles and responsibilities to ensure that the college continues to be able to respond to changing local and national policies. Teachers and support staff are well qualified and committed to the college's aspirations to maintain high standards.

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

7. The college has made outstanding progress since the last inspection. The large number of strengths noted then have been maintained and built upon. The one area for improvement relating to the accommodation has been tackled. The college has extended its partnership working with the local authority, schools, the local GFE college and higher education institutions to help to ensure that its curriculum responds to changes in local and national policy. There have been significant developments in the accommodation and learning resources. The new principal, appointed in August 2007, has reorganised the senior management roles and responsibilities to take forward 14 to 19 curriculum developments and to implement plans for improvements to the arrangements for whole college self-assessment.

Key strengths

- high success rates
- students make excellent progress
- outstanding teaching and learning
- broad curriculum and extensive opportunities for enrichment
- effective partnership working with local schools, higher education providers, the community and employers
- excellent academic and personal support
- thorough and effective arrangements for quality assurance
- a culture of high expectations for both staff and students
- strong senior leadership which effectively promotes improvement
- the use of accommodation and resources to support learning
- strong focus on the views of students.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- aspects of self-assessment at college level.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

8. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates were high at the last inspection and have improved steadily since then. On long courses at levels 2 and 3, success rates have been significantly above the high sixth form college national averages for the last three years. Success rates on GCE AS and A level courses for students aged 16 to 18, which cover the vast majority of learners, are well above the national averages. Only a very small minority of subjects underperform. Success rates have improved in key skills and are good. Retention has been high for a number of years. In 2006/07, retention of students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A level courses is 99% and 93% for AS students. Pass rates on A level and AS level courses at 99% and 91% respectively, are well above national averages.
9. Students make excellent progress during their time at the college. For many years, students on both GCE AS and A-level courses have achieved significantly higher grades than those predicted from their GCSE results. Students attendance at lessons is monitored rigorously; high rates have been sustained over the last three years. Standards of work are also very high.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. Teaching and learning are outstanding. The high standards evident at the last inspection have been maintained. Lessons are well planned and contain an appropriate variety of learning activities. Teaching is well matched to the needs of students and generates a purposeful atmosphere in which students contribute well and make excellent progress. The college's lesson observation system is well managed and the judgements made about teaching are accurate.
11. Students are set challenging attainment targets. Progress towards achieving them, and students' attendance and effort, are monitored closely. Work is set regularly, marked and returned promptly and the feedback to students is helpful. Students receive outstanding academic support. They report that teachers and other staff readily spend time outside lessons helping them. Students respond well. There is an all-pervading sense of high expectation and scholarship within the college. Tutorial systems have been improved since the last inspection by, for example, clarifying roles, providing useful tutorial guides and introducing a programme of tutorial observations.
12. The provision meets the needs and interests of students very well. The college has an excellent reputation. Each student's programme of study provides a broad and balanced curriculum. The college offers a wide range of GCE A and AS level subjects. Students can study from two to four subjects depending on their incoming attainment. They also take enrichment and supplementary studies, selected to suit their needs. Some of these

subjects, for example general studies and key skills, are studied using e-learning. The supplementary programme includes a wide range of sporting, community-based and cultural activities. Students with lower levels of incoming attainment can join a level 2 transition course which provides good progression to higher level work or employment. A daytime or evening access to Higher Education (HE) course and a selection of evening courses are available to adults.

13. Students receive outstanding personal and pastoral support. Links with partner schools are strong. Prospective students receive helpful transition advice and guidance. Bridging courses during their final school year enable pupils to sample a range of subjects. Students confirm that they were well advised and are happy with their chosen subjects. The induction process is very helpful in enabling students to settle into college life and academic study quickly and develop good habits of general and academic behaviour. New students start later than second year students, so that they are exposed to excellent behaviour patterns as soon as they arrive. A programme of activities "QE expects" successfully reinforces these patterns.
14. The pastoral programme is wide-ranging and covers the themes of "Every Child Matters" well. The extensive careers education and guidance programme is well devised and provides good support for students seeking to progress to HE or to employment. The "Business Associates" scheme has links with a large number of employers, and facilitates well the extensive work placement scheme, visits and visiting speakers.
15. Students with additional learning needs receive effective support, of which they speak very positively. Their needs are identified early and they receive prompt and effective support from learning support assistants. The support provided enables these students to make good progress. A learning mentor team of young graduates provide transition support for pupils in partner schools and learning support when students arrive at the college. Their work is focused on pupils who are deemed, by their schools, to be at risk of not progressing to the college, and on college students whose effort is deemed to be not good enough. Their work is highly regarded by students.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

16. Leadership and management are outstanding. The governors, the previous principal and the recently appointed new principal have set a clear strategic direction and educational character for the college, which are based on the maintenance of high levels of student performance. Expectations of staff and students are high and both take pride in the high levels of success that the college has sustained over many years. Senior managers provide strong leadership which promotes improvements in standards. Governance is excellent. Governors have a wide range of skills and extensive knowledge of

- the community which the college serves. They monitor the performance of the college well.
17. Arrangements for quality assurance are thorough and have supported sustained improvements in success rates over a period of many years. Management information is easily accessible and accurate. Teachers and managers use data on attendance and retention to monitor rigorously students' performance. The college sets itself challenging targets, often above sixth form college averages, that it has a history of meeting. It sets targets at subject level which are monitored meticulously against the college average and the previous year's performance. Students' views are used extensively to review and evaluate the quality of the curriculum and other college services. Information from the observation of teaching is used to inform teachers' appraisal and their targets for professional development. Staff development is focused well on continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Staff work together well. They are empowered by senior and other managers to develop ideas and solutions relevant to their curriculum areas. Arrangements for sharing good practice are diverse and effective. Subject self-assessment is thorough and the judgements made are accurate. Detailed action plans to maintain high standards are implemented effectively. Plans are in place to implement new arrangements for self-assessment so that a more focused summary of whole college strengths and areas for improvement is made and to strengthen arrangements for external validation of the report.
 18. Accommodation and resources are used very efficiently and effectively to support learning. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Good quality curriculum support services help to ensure that teachers focus on and prioritise teaching and learning. Equipment and facilities to support the use of new technologies in teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection. Teachers make good use of information and learning technology (ILT) to enrich lessons and students have good access to and make effective use of, computers in the learning resource centre to continue their learning outside timetabled sessions. A recent capital project has provided additional high quality general classrooms and specialist teaching areas including science laboratories and a sports hall. The buildings and external areas are welcoming and well maintained. Corridors and classrooms are used extensively to display and celebrate high quality student work. The college provides a safe and welcoming environment for students and staff. As a result of the popularity and success of the college, some areas are too small for the number of students using them.
 19. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college is an inclusive environment which provides well for a diverse community of students. The progress of all students is monitored rigorously and effective action is taken to support all to achieve their potential. The pastoral programme includes events and teaching to promote equality issues. The college complies with legislation relating to race, disability and child protection. The five themes of "Every Child Matters" are integrated well into college life which ensures that students are prepared well for transition to

the next stage of their lives. The college is financially strong, average class sizes are high, and it provides outstanding value for money.

Learner's achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004/05 to 2006/07, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

16 - 18						19+			
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04-05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05-06	...	...	...	...	37	41	56	-15
	06-07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04-05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05-06	...	...	...	...	37	41	56	-15
	06-07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

... denotes no enrolments

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004/05 to 2006/07, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

16 - 18						19 +			
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04-05	421	73	73	0	78	78	56	22
	05-06	341	83	78	5	89	75	64	11
	06-07	397	83	*	*	103	67	*	*
GCSEs	04-05	356	74	78	-4	71	80	65	15
	05-06	292	84	82	2	89	75	66	9
	06-07	331	85	*	*	103	67	*	*
GNVQs	04-05	56	71	74	-3	...	...	...	...
	05-06	49	78	77	1	...	...	...	...
	06-07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04-05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05-06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06-07	66	74	*	*	...	...	...	...

... denotes no enrolments

* denotes no national averages available for comparison

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003/04 to 2005/06, 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	5243	86	82	4	219	62	59	3
	05-06	5896	86	83	3	223	74	65	9
	06-07	6614	88	*	*	188	74	*	*
A/A2	04-05	1501	94	92	2	17	59	76	-17
	05-06	1694	96	93	3	15	80	78	2
	06-07	1801	98	*	*	23	78	*	*
AS	04-05	3361	85	78	7	59	58	54	4
	05-06	3732	84	79	5	44	77	58	19
	06-07	3941	84	*	*	12	58	*	*
GNVQs	04-05	342	65	74	-9	...	...	...	...
	05-06	441	70	74	-4	...	...	...	...
	06-07	833	83	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04-05	39	95	72	23	143	64	56	8
	05-06	29	83	75	8	163	73	62	11
	06-07	39	87	*	*	153	75	*	*

... denotes no enrolments

* denotes no national averages available for comparison