

# Shrewsbury 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](http://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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on students and their achievement 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. Shrewsbury Sixth Form College is a small college situated in the centre of Shrewsbury, the county town of Shropshire. Its catchment area includes Shrewsbury and the surrounding, largely rural, area. Shropshire has a socially and economically favourable environment. There are very few areas of deprivation, and unemployment is lower than average. In 2006/07, the college enrolled 1,337 full-time students, all of whom studied advanced courses at GCE A and AS level. Female students outnumbered male students. The percentage of students from a minority ethnic heritage is very small, mirroring the profile in the locality. Provision is offered in 13 of 15 sector subject areas, mainly at level 3. The college's mission statement is 'to provide excellence in teaching and in the learning experience, in a supportive and challenging environment'.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

2. The overall effectiveness of the college is good, in contrast to the college's judgement, through self-assessment, of outstanding. The principal, senior managers, governors and staff inculcate a culture where students come first and the atmosphere within the college is enjoyable, busy and industrious. Achievement and standards are good and students make good progress compared to their prior attainment. Standards of work are high, as are progression rates between levels and into higher education. In 2006/07, success rates on level 3 courses declined to just above average, having been considerably higher in the previous two years. On level 2 courses, rates are well above average. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good, and many lessons include outstanding features. Teachers are highly skilled and many use information and learning technology (ILT) to very good effect. Assessment is thorough and supports good achievement. Initial assessment, however, is insufficient to ensure that all learning needs are promptly identified.
3. The college's curriculum is good and meets a wide range of needs, combined with very effective collaboration with the local general further education college to ensure students make the right choices. Social and educational inclusion are good. Enrichment activities are excellent and well supported. Key skills, other than good provision for information and communication technology (ICT), are not well embedded into the curriculum. Provision for personal, social and health education has been improved in the current academic year, but coverage of topics is not comprehensive for all students. Outstanding guidance and support for students is a key feature of the college. Systems for both pastoral and academic support are well established and robust. Students value teachers' support and advice highly.
4. Leadership and management are good. Quality assurance has improved and is good. Self-assessment identifies most strengths and areas for improvement accurately, but lacks rigour in its evaluation. Performance by students is closely monitored. Effective actions taken following the decline in success rates in 2006/07 have strengthened the skills of teachers in dealing with challenging students. Current retention rates show positive signs of improvement, compared to a similar point in the previous year. Accommodation is satisfactory, although much is dated and tired. Social facilities are cramped and insufficient. Governance is good with a clear and determined focus on students and their needs. Students use their voice well in contributing to college life. The college manages its finances well and provides good value for money.

## Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

5. The college demonstrates a good capacity to improve. Up to 2005/06, success rates had steadily improved and were high. Despite a marked decline in success rates in 2006/07, current retention of students on courses is high and most students are making good progress. The self-assessment report for 2006/07 is broadly accurate in identifying main strengths and most areas for improvement but lacks rigour in evaluation and several key aspects were over graded. It has led to relevant actions for improvement, however, which managers monitor effectively. Quality assurance systems have improved and are good. Subject reviews are detailed and thorough, and lead to improvements. Although the internal lesson observation system includes all teachers and connects well to appraisal, it lacks rigour and the links to staff development are tenuous.

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

6. The college has made good progress in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Managers have improved the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements considerably and these are now good. Enrichment activities have also improved and are excellent. Activities are more varied and involve more students than reported at the last inspection. In particular, sporting activities meet the wider needs of more students better than they did at the last inspection. Although the college has enhanced its provision for key skills in ICT by improving its relevance and success rates, the integration of other core and wider key skills into the curriculum is inconsistent and underdeveloped. Managers have made cosmetic improvements to students' social space and facilities, but these are cramped at busy times and afford limited provision. The sharing of good practice between subject areas has improved and teachers are encouraged, for example, through the lesson observation process, to share their good practice with teams or to take advantage of others' expertise.

## Key strengths

- good progress by students compared to prior attainment
- high progression rates
- high standards of students' work
- exemplary use of information and learning technology
- high levels of participation in extensive high quality enrichment activities
- outstanding guidance and support
- good governance
- very effective use of the student voice.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- reversing the decline in success rates in 2006/07
- improving attendance and punctuality
- insufficient use of initial assessment
- shortcomings in the curriculum for key skills and personal, social and health education
- unsatisfactory aspects of accommodation and social space
- insufficient rigour in self-assessment and in the lesson observation process.



## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good. This disagrees with the college's judgement of outstanding. Success rates were high in 2004/05 and 2005/06, but rates declined markedly in 2006/07. Rates are still well above the national average on level 2 courses but are just above the national average on level 3 courses, which constitute almost all of the provision. Success rates of certain small groups of students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are consistently lower than those of students from a White British background. Students receiving additional learning support succeed as well as students not receiving support. Success rates on levels 2 and 3 key skills qualifications in ICT improved in 2006/07 and are satisfactory.
8. Retention rates declined in 2006/07, especially on level 2 courses, and rates are close to the national average. In-year retention rates are high. Pass rates on level 2 courses increased for the fourth year and are very high but on level 3 courses they declined in 2006/07 to just above the national rate. The proportion of students gaining high grades in GCSE subjects increased in 2006/07 and is very high. The proportion gaining high grades on level 3 courses in the same year is above the national average, especially in GCE A level subjects, but is the lowest for three years. The progress students make is good and well above that expected from their prior attainment on entry to the college, especially at GCE A level. Nevertheless, most measures of students' progress indicate a decline in performance in 2006/07, compared with 2005/06. Progression rates between years 1 and 2 of level 3 courses and to higher education are very high.
9. Attendance is satisfactory. Managers were concerned about students' punctuality in 2006/07, but are not monitoring it sufficiently in 2007/08. The standard of students' work is high. Students adopt safe practices and enjoy all aspects of college life fully.

### Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

10. The quality of provision is good, in contrast to the college's overall judgement of outstanding. Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features, which matches the self-assessment judgement. Teachers are very knowledgeable and create a productive learning environment, using resources well. Students are highly attentive and behave well. Teachers use ILT very effectively to enhance learning. In a few curriculum areas, use of ILT is impressive. A majority of lessons include a challenging pace and very effective questioning. In these lessons, teachers help students to develop independent learning skills very effectively.
11. In a minority of lessons, however, teachers dominate, allowing students to become passive. In these lessons, teaching strategies do not always involve students fully and make them think for themselves. Assessment is good and

used very effectively to support learning. Initial assessment, however, is not formally undertaken at the start of the academic year. As a result, teachers rely on GCSE grades and information from schools which do not always give a full and accurate picture of students' starting points or identify where they may have additional learning needs.

12. Work to develop the lesson observation process is starting to bear fruit. Observers are focused on evaluating learning and are developing confidence in their practice, with increasing success. Teachers view the process positively and sharing of good practice is much improved. Aspects of the process lack rigour, however, and the grade profile produced is unreliable.
13. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is good. The breadth of the curriculum at advanced level is wide-ranging and good, as identified in self-assessment. Productive collaboration with partner schools and local colleges, including using video conferencing, has increased access to the college's curriculum and improved the choices of students. The curriculum in modern foreign languages is particularly well developed as part of a collaboration project between similar colleges in the West Midlands. The college works well with employers to create relevant work-related learning opportunities.
14. Provision for the development of skills in ICT is good; however, development of other core and wider key skills is less well embedded into the curriculum. Formal matching of skill development against the existing curriculum has not taken place for some years and is overdue to ensure that all students develop appropriate skills. The curriculum for personal, social and health education is being strengthened in the current academic year but is not yet comprehensively embedded in the tutorial programme for all students.
15. Social and educational inclusion is good. Productive work has been undertaken to widen participation from under-represented groups such as disaffected pupils, students with complex learning difficulties and those from less socially and economically favourable areas within the locality. Students across the ability range are provided for well.
16. The provision of enrichment activities is extensive, of high quality and much enjoyed by students. Sport, both competitive and recreational, is very well established with a high participation rate. Drama and music productions are frequent and involve a high number of students from across the college. Exciting expeditions, nationally and internationally, are frequent and well used to motivate students. They include a wide variety of cultural and topical venues.
17. Guidance and support are outstanding, as identified in self-assessment. Well established systems ensure that students receive very high quality personal and academic support, which they value. Regular tutorials ensure that good and productive relationships are established from an early stage and progress is closely monitored. Initial advice and guidance, induction and careers guidance, including support for applications to higher education, are all outstanding features of the college's work. The college has ensured its approach to

identifying students at risk of underachieving is more robust following some underperformance by a minority of students in 2006/07. The skills of staff in supporting challenging students have been increased effectively, with evidence of impact of improved retention in the current year.

18. The quality of additional learning support, including specialist support for some very specific learning needs, is high and effective in ensuring success, including destinations. Monitoring of the quality and impact is now in place but not yet reflected in self-assessment.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grades:*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Good: Grade 2*

19. Leadership and management are good and this agrees with the college's self-assessment. The principal and governors provide a well considered strategic direction which strongly emphasises the college's culture and climate of putting students at the heart of its work. Collaboration with other providers is strong and productive.
20. Quality assurance systems and processes have improved since the last inspection and are good. Curriculum management is very effective. Subject reviews are thorough and detailed and the monitoring of subject quality improvement plans is detailed. The internal lesson observation process has also improved since the last inspection but it is insufficiently rigorous. Observers do not grade lessons and the formal systematic link between observation outcomes and staff development is often not made. The outcomes, however, do link to appraisal appropriately. The self-assessment process has improved and is effective, especially at subject area level. The self-assessment report links well to the quality improvement plan. It lacks rigour, however, in some key aspects of its judgements. It does not contain sufficient evaluation of the decline in achievement and standards in 2006/07 and does not emphasise sufficiently some of the outstanding aspects of college provision.
21. Governance is good. Governors are very committed to the college and to improving the quality of students' experience. They work closely and effectively with senior staff. Many link well with subject areas and with students. They challenge senior staff strongly where appropriate and follow through areas of concern regarding students' under-achievement and attendance. The proportion of female governors is low. Not all governors have received training on child protection matters. Governors and senior managers have spent much time on the strategy to relocate the college to a joint campus with the nearby further education college. This controversial project has received much opposition from staff, students and parents and has led to reduced confidence by staff in governors. Communication within the college is good. Students have a clear voice and their opinions are considered fully.
22. Accommodation is adequate. The learning centre is very good and well used. Many of the buildings, however, are old and in need of refurbishment. Some

classrooms suffer from excessive noise from adjacent areas, which can disturb lessons and learning. Social spaces have been improved within the constraints of existing buildings, but are cramped and insufficient. Teachers are very well qualified and all staff engage in wide-ranging and relevant staff development. Financial management is good, students achieve well. Value for money is good.

23. Equality of opportunity is good. The college meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA) and child protection legislation. Staff with restricted mobility, however, are unable to access the administration block. Managers analyse data on students' achievement and on staff recruitment by different groups rigorously. Lesson plans include references to equality of opportunity, but lesson observation proforma do not prompt judgements on the appropriate use of language and materials.

## Learners' achievement

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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	8	63	64	-1	172	50	56	-6
	05/06	4	75	71	4	139	71	56	15
	06/07	2	0			22	55		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
NVQs	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
Other	04/05	8	63	64	-1	172	50	56	-6
	05/06	4	75	71	4	139	71	56	15
	06/07	2	0			22	55		

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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	123	86	73	13	520	53	56	-3
	05/06	113	93	78	15	242	63	64	-1
	06/07	89	88			11	64		
GCSEs	04/05	90	91	78	13	24	71	65	6
	05/06	102	94	82	12	18	67	66	1
	06/07	80	86			0			
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
NVQs	04/05	10	60	62	-2	167	60	58	2
	05/06	6	83	70	13	70	50	68	-18
	06/07	0				0			
Other	04/05	23	78	62	16	329	48	52	-4
	05/06	5	90	70	10	154	68	61	7
	06/07	9	100			11	64		

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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	04/05	4,911	88	82	6	63	68	59	9
	05/06	5,123	89	83	6	87	66	65	1
	06/07	5,498	86			3	100		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1,637	95	92	3	13	77	76	1
	05/06	1,706	97	93	4	6	100	78	22
	06/07	1,829	94			3	100		
AS Levels	04/05	3,151	84	78	6	5	60	54	6
	05/06	3,190	85	79	6	2	100	58	42
	06/07	3,429	82			0			
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	121	88	74	14	0			
	05/06	57	96	74	22	2	50		
	06/07	0				0			
NVQs	04/05	2	0			45	67	50	17
	05/06	1	0			59	64	63	1
	06/07	0				0			
Other	04/05	0							
	05/06	169	65	75	-10	18	56	62	-6
	06/07	240	83			0			