

Sir John Deane's 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 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. Sir John Deane's College opened in September 1978 as a voluntary controlled sixth form college exclusively for 16-18 year old students. In recent years the popularity of the college has led to considerable growth and the full-time student roll in 2006/07 was 1,268. In September 1998, the college launched its adult education programme and it now has around 3,000 enrolments by part-time students attending evening and weekend classes during the course of the academic year.
2. The college serves the thriving town of Northwich, in the heart of Cheshire, and surrounding rural areas including Weaverham, Middlewich and numerous smaller villages, with five partner 11-16 high schools at Hartford, Leftwich, Middlewich, Rudheath and Weaverham providing about half of the annual intake of full-time students. As the major provider of A level courses in Cheshire, however, Sir John Deane's draws the remainder of its daytime students from a wide range of secondary schools, within Cheshire and beyond, from both the maintained and independent sectors. The proportion of learners of minority ethnic heritage is slightly above the local average.
3. The college's mission is to aim for excellence in its educational provision, focusing primarily on academic achievement but also on developing the skills and enthusiasm for successful lifelong learning. This is described within the context of its mission as "believing in the 'education of the whole person' and in the fulfilment of individual potential". The college is about to embark on a two-year £26 million re-building project.

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. This is an outstanding college. The progress and welfare of all students is at the heart of outstanding quality assurance, data analysis and monitoring systems. The principal and his senior staff drive an improvement agenda. All staff share responsibility and accountability for promoting improvement. Achievement and standards are outstanding. The college acknowledges that progress could be improved in a very small number of GCE AS level subjects. Challenging and innovative approaches to teaching and learning are central to this college's exemplary learning culture. Teaching is lively, purposeful and committed. Students bring a sense of excitement and enjoyment to their learning. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning is outstanding, although, the college acknowledges that it needs to further improve the ratio of computers to students. The sharing of good practice is firmly embedded in the college culture. Attendance is excellent. Care, guidance and support are exemplary. The college makes an excellent contribution to its local communities.
5. The curriculum offered is outstanding and fully meets the needs and interests of students. Appreciation of artistic and sporting endeavour has a high priority within the college. Healthy living and participation in sport, clubs and cultural activities are encouraged and are very popular. There are excellent links with schools and programmes to engage the world of work are of high quality. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Transition and induction arrangements are very well planned. Students settle into college life quickly. All issues around students' learning and welfare are monitored carefully. There is excellent and speedy support for students who are causing concern or in need of additional support.
6. Central to the college's exemplary standards and continuing improvement is the outstanding leadership of the principal. He is ably supported by an excellent senior leadership team. The vision that they share places students' learning and progress at the centre of all college activity. Senior managers and staff have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses, are self-critical and constantly seek and drive for further improvement. Leadership responsibility, accountability and aspirational targets for all are strongly promoted. Quality assurance systems are excellent. The use of data is comprehensive and informs tracking and monitoring processes. Self-assessment is critical and accurate. Governance is a strength. Finances are well monitored. The accommodation currently available for teaching and learning has some limitations, however, the college is about to embark upon a two-year re-building programme.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

7. Inspectors agreed with the college that its capacity to improve is outstanding. College plans have a strong focus on raising aspirations,

improving the quality of provision for learners and identifying and tackling areas for improvement. Success and pass rates are outstanding. Learners make excellent progress on GCE AS and A level courses. Teaching and learning are outstanding, challenging and innovative. Quality assurance systems are highly effective. Management information systems are systematic. Self-assessment is established, highly self-critical and accurate. Performance is monitored thoroughly. Clear strategies and operational plans are in place to promote further and sustained improvement.

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

8. The college has made excellent progress in tackling the key issues raised in the last inspection. Outstanding progress has been made in integrating ILT into learning. Extensive staff development has ensured that all subject areas now use ILT in teaching and learning. The college virtual learning environment (VLE) is extensive, well designed and effectively used by both staff and students. While improvements have been made to classroom accommodation, the library and private study areas still lack sufficient space. However, the college is about to embark on a two-year re-building project.

Key strengths

- outstanding student attainment and achievement
- outstanding teaching and learning
- excellent curriculum and additional curriculum activities that enhance learning
- excellent use of ILT to aid learning
- outstanding enrichment programmes
- outstanding personal support and support for learning and progression
- outstanding leadership and management and capacity to improve
- highly effective quality assurance and data systems
- outstanding governance.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- progress in a very small number of subjects at GCE AS level
- low ratio of computers to students
- limited space especially in the library and for personal study.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Nearly all students aged 16-18 are enrolled on courses at level 3 where the overall success rate is consistently in the top quartile. Level 3 pass and retention rates are consistently high; 95% for the three years to 2007. The small number of students from minority ethnic groups generally do well. Some students achieve outstanding results, for example, top five position in a subject nationally, achieving sporting excellence, or in overcoming personal disability in order to achieve academic success. Attendance rates are excellent. The standard of written and practical work is excellent.
10. The GCE A level success rate is consistently high, being in the mid-nineties in both 2006 and 2007. Very few subjects had success rates which were not at or above 90%. In 2006/07, 49% A level entries achieved grade A or B, significantly above the national average. Pass and retention rates are both consistently in the high nineties. The progress GCE A level students make compared with their attainment levels at Key Stage 4 is excellent overall. A very high proportion of the students who enrol for GCE AS and A level programmes, nearly 90%, complete their two year programme and around 90% of these progress to higher education.
11. The GCE AS success rate is high. It has been above 87% in each of the four years to 2007 and is consistently well above the sixth form college average. The progress GCE AS level students make compared with their attainment levels at Key Stage 4 is good. Progress is at least satisfactory in all but a few subjects. In applied GCE AS levels progress is outstanding. Especial note should be made of VCE business, and health and social care, in which the progress made, as measured by a commercial value added system, was the best of all providers subscribing to that system. The success rates for the relatively small number of adult students undertaking long courses is consistently high compared with similar colleges. At both levels 1 and 2 success rates are well above the national average. The overall success rate is high on short courses, where there are about 1,400 enrolments. The college's self-assessment gives an accurate assessment of achievement and standards.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

12. The quality of provision is outstanding. Challenging and innovative approaches to teaching and learning are central to this college's exemplary improvement culture. Students' enthusiasm for and progress in learning is outstanding. Lessons are well paced and with a strong focus on student participation and independent learning. Teachers are good at conveying the excitement, challenge and enjoyment of their subject to students. Students respond to this with enthusiasm, commitment and a sense of enjoyment. A wide variety of teaching strategies are used to challenge students and

encourage their participation including group and paired work, discussion and debate, role-play and student presentations. The use of ILT to promote learning is outstanding. The well designed and resourced VLE is popular as a learning aid with both staff and students. The college has a strong sense of what is required to elicit further improvement to teaching and learning and well focused strategies to achieve these objectives have been developed. Assessment is thorough and teachers make helpful comments to promote further improvement. There is excellent monitoring of student progress. The college shares good practice observed in teaching in many effective ways.

13. The curriculum is outstanding. A broad range of GCE AS and A levels are offered and these fully meet the needs and interests of students. A wide range of sports provision is offered and in many of these students excel to high levels of performance. Popular musical activities include orchestral, jazz and rock ensembles. High quality and thought provoking student art festoons the corridors. Many trips, excursions and college events supplement and enrich the curriculum. There are good links with employers which enhance the student understanding of the world of work. A raft of opportunities are offered to promote student responsibility and participation; for example, mentoring groups work with primary school pupils on drug awareness and anti-bullying strategies, and with secondary school pupils on raising aspirations. The college is highly responsive to the local community. This is exemplified by the college's commitment to an extensive, popular and high quality adult education provision. Links with partner high schools are excellent and very effective in promoting participation in and transition to post-16 education.
14. Students are provided with outstanding academic and personal support, a judgement which has not changed since the last inspection and agrees with the college's own self-assessment. Pre-enrolment advice and guidance continue to be effective and impartial. Students confirm that they are happy with their choice of college and subjects. Links with partner schools are strong. Induction is well managed. Students with additional learning needs are identified early. They receive outstanding support from the skills for learning team and speak very positively of it. The support is provided appropriately and sensitively. The effectiveness of the support arrangements is evaluated carefully and indicates that these students make good progress.
15. Students are set challenging targets for the standard of their work and are expected to make good progress. They meet this expectation. Their attendance, punctuality, behaviour and the standard of their work are monitored closely. Work is set regularly, and is marked and returned promptly. Students report that the feedback they receive from teachers is helpful, and that teachers give freely of their time in helping them outside their lessons. Formal reviews of each student's progress in each subject and in their overall progress are conducted rigorously, appropriate plans for future learning are set and their implementation is monitored closely, partly through good use of the VLE. Parents are kept informed and students respond well.

16. The pastoral programme is wide-ranging. Arrangements to quality assure its delivery have been strengthened since the last inspection and indicate that the variability in quality that existed then has been reduced. The careers education and guidance programme is extensive and provides good support, both for students seeking to progress to higher education and for those seeking employment. The 'employability' skills that are valued by employers have been mapped to the curriculum of each subject so that students can speak cogently of what their studies can bring to the world of work. The college manages an extensive higher education and careers fair each year which attracts many representatives from higher education, training, employment, financial services and others. Students are encouraged to apply to Oxbridge and receive good support in the application process. The college's self-assessment gives an accurate assessment of the quality of provision.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

17. Leadership and management are outstanding. Governors and senior managers have set a very clear strategic direction for the college. The principal gives strong leadership in promoting a culture of improvement, achievement, aspiration and equality of opportunity for students and staff alike. He is ably supported by a strong senior management team. Much of middle management is outstanding. There is a strongly shared ethos that places students and their success at the centre of all college activity. The quality assurance procedures are very well established and staff have a good understanding of these procedures. The college uses student feedback well to improve systems and processes. Students' progress is monitored closely and improvement targets set for each student against their minimum target and their predicted grade. The college has clear and detailed procedures for the observation of teaching and learning. An annual observation period ensures that all staff and departments are observed and receive appropriate feedback. The college links with a similar college to assure the quality of these observations and managers and teachers from both colleges observe staff respectively.
18. The management of self-assessment is excellent. The self-assessment process is extremely thorough and involves all staff and governors and makes very good use of student feedback and lesson observations to identify issues. The self-assessment report is accurate and clear. The strengths and weaknesses of the self-assessment report match closely those identified by inspectors. Staff development is very well managed. Staff development activities are closely evaluated for impact and value for money and methods are identified to share the training with other staff.
19. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. The commitment is clear in the college mission to develop students' social conscience and fulfil individual potential. It is promoted through the tutorial and general studies

programmes, increasingly through the subject curricula, through the college's support arrangements, and through the high quality and inclusiveness of the teaching. Its impact can be seen by the good progress made by students and the high success rates. Special events are held annually focusing on particular topics, for example on disability, ethnicity and religious freedom. The college complies with legislation relating to race, disability and child protection. Governors demonstrate an excellent understanding of the college, its mission and the environment in which it operates and they use this knowledge well to resolve key challenges. They are actively involved in all stages of the college self-assessment report. Financial management is strong.

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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	04/05	*				112	72.3	56.2	16.1
	05/06	*				143	71.3	56.1	15.2
	06/07	*				111	70		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	*				*			
	05/06	*				*			
	06/07	*							
NVQs	04/05	*				*			
	05/06	*				*			
	06/07	*							
Other	04/05	*				112	72.3	56.2	16.1
	05/06	*				143	71.3	56	15.3
	06/07	*				111	70		

* learner numbers too small to warrant inclusion

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	29	93.1	73.3	20	27	96.3	55.9	40.4
	05/06	27	96.3	77.8	18.5	31	81	63.6	17.4
	06/07	24	96			12	75		
GCSEs	04/05	28	92.9	78	14.9	*			
	05/06	27	96.3	81.5	14.8	*			
	06/07	24	96			*			
GNVQs And precursors	04/05	*				*			
	05/06	*				*			
	06/07	*				*			
NVQs	04/05	*				*			
	05/06	*				*			
	06/07	*				*			
Other	04/05	*				27	96.3	51.5	44.8
	05/06	*				31	80.6	61.2	19.4
	06/07	*				12	75		

* learner numbers too small to warrant inclusion

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	5,407	90.5	82.1	8.4	*			
	05/06	5,661	90.5	83.5	7	*			
	06/07	5,666	91			*			
A/A2 Levels	04/05	2,114	92.3	91.9	0.4	*			
	05/06	2,324	95.3	93.1	2.2	*			
	06/07	2,196	95			*			
AS Levels	04/05	3,190	89.7	77.7	12	*			
	05/06	3,146	86.9	79.3	7.6	*			
	06/07	3,249	88			*			
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	103	81.6	73.8	7.8	*			
	05/06	70	87.1	74.2	12.9	*			
	06/07	*				*			
NVQs	04/05	*				*			
	05/06	*				*			
	06/07	*				*			
Other	04/05	*				*			
	05/06	121	92.6	75	17.6	*			
	06/07	199	91			*			

* learner numbers too small to warrant inclusion
Data for 06/7 provided by the college