

South Cheshire 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. South Cheshire College is a tertiary college, which serves the education and training needs of Crewe, Nantwich and the surrounding area. Crewe is a fast growing area for industrial and distribution businesses. In 2006/07, 186 firms sent employees to courses and 1,200 full-time students had work experience. There are eight 11-16 schools, one 11-18, and two schools for learners with special educational needs. A care centre provides for young people with behavioural problems.
2. The college offers programmes in 14 sector subject areas, higher national diplomas (HNDs), foundation degrees, non-vocational adult education, Train to Gain and courses for 14-19 school students. The GCSE pass rate for five grades at A* to C in the area is 3.4% above the national average and 6.6% above when English and mathematics are included. The Crewe and Nantwich area has five wards in the highest quartile of deprived wards nationally.
3. In 2006/07, there were 2,532 students, aged 16-18 and 3,721 adults. About two thirds of students aged 16-18 study at level 3, 24% at level 2, and 10% at entry level or level 1. Most adults study at entry level or levels 1 and 2. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision has increased to provide for migrant workers to the area. The college has Beacon status, is an Investor in People and in 2006 and 2007 was included in the Sunday Times' list of the 100 best companies to work for. The college mission is to promote quality teaching and learning in a supportive environment.

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. South Cheshire College is outstanding in all aspects of its provision. Achievement and standards are outstanding. There are consistently high success rates particularly on long courses at levels 2 and 3, where they exceed the national average by more than 10%. Success rates on nearly all courses are at or above the national average. Students with a learning difficulty and/or a learning disability and those receiving additional help with their literacy and numeracy achieve well. Retention rates on key skills courses are improving each year and success rates remain well above the low national average. Students aged 14-16 achieve well and for all students progression rates between levels and to higher education are good.
5. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning are very effective and the proportion of outstanding teaching has now risen to 31%. Learners make excellent progress and are encouraged to achieve highly through challenging targets. Methods used to enliven teaching are effective and innovative practice is encouraged. Assessment practice is rigorous and students' initial needs are well identified by good dialogue with partner schools. Teachers make much use of information technology (IT) and good quality learning resources to meet students' preferred ways of learning. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding.
6. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The range of programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. Links with local schools are exceptionally strong and with employers are very good. The promotion of equality of opportunity is effective and the college places a very high emphasis on respect for the individual and the celebration of difference. Students are given extensive opportunities to help shape the development of the college. The wide-ranging curriculum offers good opportunities for progression and is accessible to all learners. Successful action is taken to address barriers to learning. The college is accessible to learners with physical disabilities and responds well to new demands such as the language needs of migrant workers.
7. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior leaders and governors have a very clear vision for the strategic development of the college. The planning for a new college building is exemplary, with a strong focus on involving existing students in the shape of future developments. Managers strongly support quality arrangements that are highly successful in improving and sustaining improvements in success rates and all aspects of learning. The college maintains a strong financial position and has invested well in significant improvements to the learning environment. The curriculum is highly responsive to regional and national priorities. The college has met all of its challenging targets for 2006/07.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

8. The college demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve. In its inspection in 2004 the college was judged to be one of the highest performing in the country and subsequent monitoring inspection visits have confirmed its capacity to maintain this standard. The college has sustained grade 'A' financial status. Leadership and governance are outstanding and success rates are high and have improved consistently each year. Staff development focuses strongly on measures to improve learning. The college regularly meets its targets for improvement and has maintained strong financial health. The college's annual self-assessment arrangements are rigorous, includes the views of staff and students, and enable managers to have an accurate view of priorities for quality improvement. The report is accurate and makes good use of data on student performance. Quality assurance arrangements are outstanding.

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

9. The college has made excellent progress in correcting the few areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The college has sustained and further improved its high success rates and key strengths. It identified a few areas of underperformance in 2005/06 and these have been successfully rectified in 2006/07. New appointments have been made to further strengthen the management of the college. Good progress has been made each year in improving the quality of key skills.

Key strengths

- consistently high success rates on long courses at levels 2 and 3
- high success rates in GCE A levels and NVQs
- outstanding teaching and learning
- outstanding learning guidance and support
- excellent IT systems to record and monitor students' engagement and performance
- outstanding educational and social inclusion
- effective collaboration with schools and other educational providers
- outstanding leadership and governance
- strong and sustained financial health
- outstanding promotion of equality and diversity.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- student performance in some key skills and on some BTEC national diplomas
- the insufficient awareness and use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) by some students.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates on long courses at levels 2 and 3 are consistently high, improving, and more than 10% above the national average in 2006/07. Success rates are high on NVQ programmes, GCE A level programmes for all learners and on AS programmes for students aged 16-18. The college has exceeded its overall targets for improving success rates in 2006/07. The focus on improving retention in GCSE in English and maths has led to significant improvements in success rates, with more than a 10% improvement in both subjects in 2006/07. Most students achieve at a higher level than would be expected from their GCSE grades. The college has significantly improved success rates in a small number of courses where results were poor in 2005/06. Key skills success rates are higher than the low national average. The college places a high priority on key skills for all full-time students. Retention rates improved generally in 2006/07, but success rates declined from the previous year in application of number at levels 1 and 3 and in communication at level 1. The college has recognised the need to further improve success rates on some BTEC national diploma courses.
11. The college has recognised the need to make fuller use of value added measures. In-year retention and attendance rates for 2007/08 have improved since the same period in the previous year. Attendance is good; the average attendance rate is 91%.
12. Overall, success rates on part-time courses for adult students declined with the withdrawal of funding for very short courses but success rates for the remaining courses have been maintained by comparison with the previous year. Students are making good progress and producing accomplished work in the lessons observed by inspectors. There is good progression between course levels and to higher education.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

13. The quality of provision is outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the college's own judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Students are strongly motivated. Learners enjoy their lessons and are enthusiastic about their courses. The college has an accurate view of the quality of its teaching and a high proportion is good and outstanding. Teachers use a wide range of activities to meet learners' needs and successfully challenge the most able. There is a well established rigorous observation system for teaching and learning. Teachers receive detailed and constructive feedback. Short observations that focus on specific themes and peer observations to help teachers develop new ideas and share good practice, have recently been introduced. Good use is made of the outcomes to determine personal, faculty and cross-college staff development. Inspectors agreed with the summary judgements on lessons they observed

jointly with observers. Assessment is thorough, and positive guidance helps learners to improve their work. Learners' additional learning needs are identified at the beginning of their programme. The college works closely with partner schools to evaluate learners' needs before they start their course. The quality of accommodation, information learning technology (ILT) and learning resources is good. The VLE contains some excellent innovative learning materials and is well used by many learners. However, the VLE is used well by all curriculum areas and not all learners are sufficiently aware of the resource or encouraged to use it fully. The provision for key skills has greatly improved since the last inspection and learners have a good understanding of their relevance.

14. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that the range of programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college continues to expand and introduce new provision. It offers a flexible curriculum which is responsive to the needs of the local community. There is a broad range of GCE A level provision and vocational routes from levels 1 to 3. The college has recently significantly expanded ESOL provision to meet the needs of migrant workers who have recently joined the local community. The college's higher education offer provides good progression routes for learners in the college and to other universities. Currently, there are seven foundation degrees; this offer will increase to 12 from September 2008. The range of GCE A level provision has been extended, with expansion of AS provision from 31 subjects to 38 subjects and in A2 from 30 subjects to 36 subjects. The college is actively involved in local 14-19 developments. Links with employers are very good. Enrichment opportunities are outstanding and participation is high. The college has the confidence of its partners and links with local schools are excellent. The college responds well to the needs of local employers who appreciate the flexible response to their needs and the high quality training provided.
15. The guidance and support for students are outstanding. Initial advice and guidance are very good. There are good relationships with feeder schools. Learners receive good impartial advice and guidance. Learning support is outstanding and arrangements to support learners with additional learning needs are very effective. Success rates for learners receiving additional learning support are high at 91%. The views of learners are collected through a wide range of appropriate methods and used to inform improvements. The tutorial programme successfully covers a comprehensive range of topics including promoting healthy lifestyles. Particularly good support is offered to those applying for higher education and work. Learners are aware of their target grades and how to achieve or surpass them. There are regular reviews of learner progress. The college's innovative electronic information systems facilitate excellent communication between teachers and learners, so that measures for monitoring and tracking attendance and tutorials are highly effective. Personal tutors are well supported by a team of experienced senior tutors.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grade:**Equality of opportunity**Outstanding: Grade 1*

16. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college has responded well to the areas for development identified at the last inspection by improving and sustaining the key strengths including high retention and success rates. Students enjoy the strong focus in the college on raising aspirations and achieving at a high level. They appreciate their opportunities to become involved in the life of the college and to influence its direction and priorities. Students recognise how well the college is managed. Governance and leadership by the principal and senior managers are very effective and has been a key to the success of the college. Governors have excellent links with curriculum areas and with students, and contribute significantly to the development of the college's strategic direction and to monitoring its progress and performance.
17. Quality improvement systems are very effective and all staff are expected to contribute to the culture of continuous improvement in the college. Management information is readily accessible, accurate and is used well to monitor and improve performance. Good use is made of on-line quality systems such as the student tracker, records of teaching and learning observations, and attendance monitoring, to address areas for development. This has helped the college develop measures to address some over-grading in teaching and learning.
18. The judgements in the self-assessment report are based on a detailed analysis of a wide range of performance measures and are accurate. Challenging yet achievable targets are set for a wide range of performance measures. The self-assessment process is rigorous, includes all staff and pays appropriate attention to student performance. Action plans contribute to improved performance, for example, in GCSE success rates or the maintenance of high standards. Good use is made of achievable but challenging targets which are set at curriculum, programme and course levels. Sector subject self-assessment is well informed by course reviews and student views.
19. Resources for learning are particularly good. Teachers are well qualified and their performance is carefully monitored. There is a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning. The campus is an attractive learning environment offering excellent support for students at all stages of their learning programmes. The college is financially strong, average class sizes are high and it provides excellent value for money.
20. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college monitors equality of opportunity closely and promotes it actively, imaginatively and well. It focuses on impact measures that make a difference to students' experience and there is a strong culture of respect for all. Teachers receive regular emails to make them aware of cultural activities and religious festivals and

the websites they can use to inform their teaching or through tutorials. These enable differences to be celebrated. An equality and diversity coordinator produces an annual schedule of equality and diversity events. There is particularly good specialist learning support and assistive technology for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's response to recent legislation, including equality matters relating to race and disability, and to child protection has been good. There is zero tolerance to any form of harassment and bullying. Students have contributed actively to a scheme to 'kick racism out of football'. The success of all learners is celebrated well and gifted and talented students are strongly supported. The five themes of Every Child Matters are particularly well integrated into college life. The college complies fully with the requirements for safeguarding children, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2002.

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	636	67	65	2	1,351	64	62	2
	05/06	657	74	69	5	753	70	65	5
	06/07	493	73	-	-	1,061	70	-	-
GNVQs	04/05	45	80	68	12	-	-	-	-
	05/06	18	72	72	0	-	-	-	-
	06/07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	04/05	49	67	68	-1	18	100	66	34
	05/06	132	76	72	4	5	80	74	6
	06/07	86	81	-	-	15	80	-	-
Other	04/05	542	66	64	2	1,330	64	62	2
	05/06	507	73	69	4	748	70	65	5
	06/07	407	71	-	-	1,046	70	-	-

Figures for 2006/07 are from college data

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	1,177	66	61	5	1,023	64	60	4
	05/06	1,184	72	66	6	608	64	66	-2
	06/07	916	80	-	-	725	76	-	-
GCSEs	04/05	172	67	64	3	123	63	63	0
	05/06	124	56	68	-12	86	58	67	-9
	06/07	141	67	-	-	64	75	-	-
GNVQs	04/05	96	63	67	-4	13	69	75	-6
	05/06	41	88	69	19	-	-	-	-
	06/07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	04/05	287	65	57	8	215	66	60	6
	05/06	301	67	65	2	139	70	67	3
	06/07	243	84	-	-	159	83	-	-
Other	04/05	622	66	61	5	672	64	59	5
	05/06	718	77	66	11	383	63	65	-2
	06/07	532	82	-	-	502	74	-	-

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with 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	2,914	77	68	9	807	65	58	7
	05/06	3,278	79	71	8	531	69	63	6
	06/07	3,334	81	-	-	464	73	-	-
A/A2 Levels	04/05	714	91	86	5	33	85	69	16
	05/06	753	91	87	4	43	81	72	9
	06/07	915	95	-	-	22	91	-	-
AS Levels	04/05	1,479	75	66	9	109	56	52	4
	05/06	1,858	76	67	9	55	56	55	1
	06/07	1,780	79	-	-	49	49	-	-
GNVQs	04/05	98	67	61	6	-	-	-	-
	05/06	46	74	66	8	-	-	-	-
	06/07	48	63	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	04/05	33	70	63	7	223	77	56	21
	05/06	30	73	71	2	134	75	63	12
	06-07	39	79	-	-	143	85	-	-
Other	04/05	590	65	60	5	439	60	59	1
	05/06	591	71	65	6	296	68	64	4
	06/07	552	69	-	-	238	71	-	-

Figures for 2006/07 are from college data