

# Luton Sixth Form College

Inspection report

---

Provider reference	130600
Published date	December 2008

## Contents

---

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	9

## 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 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. Luton Sixth Form College was the first sixth form college to be established in the country in 1966 and is located in a largely residential area some two miles north of the centre of Luton. The college, which achieved Beacon status in 2004, serves an area, which includes districts of significant deprivation. In 2007, 44.9% of 16 year-olds in Luton achieved five or more GCSEs at A\* to C, including mathematics and English which was below the national figure of 46.8%. Some 63% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, well above both the national average and the Luton population of 28%.
2. The college provides courses, mainly at level 3, in most sector subject areas. Student numbers are highest in science and mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), arts, media and publishing and in languages, literature and culture. The college enrolled 2,163 students in 2008/09, nearly all of whom were aged 16 to 18. The majority of students are full-time and follow GCE AS and A-level courses.
3. The mission of the college is: 'to be the outstanding provider of academic and general vocational education for young people in Luton'.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
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. The college's overall effectiveness is outstanding. It provides a safe and harmonious environment for students to work in. Students are expected to achieve well and the excellent commitment of managers and teachers ensure that they are given every opportunity to do so. Achievement and standards are good. The prior attainment of students varies significantly but their progress in the college is at least good, and very good in GCE AS-level subjects. The success rate on GCE A-level courses is high. Attendance and punctuality are good.
5. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic. The college has a genuine commitment to improving the quality of learning and the recent 'building learning power' initiative is providing much greater coherence to its efforts. The proportion of good and outstanding lessons is high, reflecting the rich variety of activities and challenges that most lessons provide. In a few lessons, teachers do not provide activities to meet the learning needs of all the students.
6. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. The curriculum is broad and provides excellent opportunities for students to follow academic and general vocational courses, or combinations of both. There is an excellent range of enrichment activities, and out-of-hours classes for students who need additional help with their learning, or wish to develop and extend what they have already learned. These activities are very well attended. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent.
7. Guidance and support to help students achieve are outstanding. The excellent team of support workers provides friendly advice and help which enable students to make a smooth transition into college and provide excellent support for them during their courses. Students in need of additional support are identified early and helped to achieve through a range of very effective services. The team of specialist personal tutors provides excellent pastoral care. The views of students are given high priority by the college. Their views are listened to carefully, and acted upon.
8. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal provides outstanding leadership and is supported by a strong and capable senior management team. The college has clear values which underpin all of its work and are shared by all staff. There are strong partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders which encourage participation and enhance the curriculum. Quality assurance is good and self-assessment is excellent. The college has identified the few subjects in which students underperformed in 2007/08 and has plans in place to improve them. Equality of opportunity is outstanding and

the college takes an active role in promoting community cohesion. Governance is outstanding. Accommodation and resources are good and value for money is outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. The college has outstanding capacity to improve. It has maintained an excellent record of improvement in its overall success rate since the last inspection. Students perform better in external examinations than predicted from their performance at GCSE. The principal provides outstanding leadership, and morale throughout the college is high. Curriculum management is consistently good and decisive action is taken when performance falls below the high standard that the college sets. College planning procedures are rigorous. Quality assurance is good. Self-assessment is rigorous, self-critical and accurate. The college sets challenging institutional targets which it nearly always meets and often exceeds. Teaching and support staff have excellent opportunities to improve their professional skills. The college collaborates effectively with representatives of its local community and other education providers. Accommodation and resources are good.

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

10. The college has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Pass rates and the proportion of high grades achieved by students have improved. Thorough revision of tutorial arrangements has led to significant improvements in the quality and relevance of group tutorials. There are excellent arrangements for sharing best teaching practice amongst departments. Key skills provision is much improved, although the college recognises that key skills remain a focus for continuing development.

Key strengths

- outstanding leadership
- high success rates in GCE A-level subjects
- safe and harmonious environment for students to work in
- outstanding educational and social inclusion
- exemplary response to the promotion of equality and diversity
- strong and successful commitment to improving the quality of students' learning
- excellent curriculum which provides a very broad choice of courses
- outstanding support and guidance
- excellent provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- outstanding governance.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- variable performance in a minority of AS and A-level subjects
- insufficient challenge to students in a minority of lessons.



## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good. Students join the college with a wide range of prior achievement and frequently display lower levels of literacy and numeracy than is usual for advanced level courses. The achievement of students who find learning difficult is a strong feature of the college and their improving confidence and aspirations underpin the very good progress they make. Value-added measures show that students make good progress at GCE A level and very good progress at AS level compared to their starting points. In most subjects, students meet or exceed expectations, although the college identified a few subjects where students underperformed in 2007/08. The standard of students' work is good.
12. The overall success rate has improved steadily since the last inspection and is well above average. Success rates at levels 1 and 2 are also well above average. At level 3, where the large majority of students study, the overall rate is broadly average, but is high for students taking GCE A-level courses. Success rates at AS level are average. The percentage of students who achieve high grades at GCE A and AS level is improving at a better rate than nationally, although it remains below average. Students taking vocational courses at level 3 underperformed in 2006/07; however, success rates improved in 2007/08 and are in line with or above average on most certificate and award courses. Success rates for students from minority ethnic groups are higher than figures for similar groups nationally. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well.
13. A high number of students retake GCSE courses in mathematics and English alongside their main programme of study. The success rate at grades A\* to C for mathematics is above average but the rate for English declined in 2007/08 to well below average from a previously strong position. Achievement of key skills qualifications is satisfactory and improving. Attendance and punctuality are good.

### Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

14. The quality of provision is outstanding which agrees with the college's own judgement. Teaching and learning are outstanding. There are comprehensive and accurate procedures for assessing the quality of teaching and learning. The lesson observation system provides a detailed assessment of the strengths and areas for improvement in individual lessons. The college's teaching and learning strategy is well considered and the recent initiative, 'building learning power', provides a strong focus for developing students' critical thinking and learning.
15. Teachers are well qualified and experienced in their specialist areas. They are good at projecting their enthusiasm for the subjects they teach so that

students become fully engaged with their studies. A broad range of learning activities, thoughtful use of information and learning technology and high expectations are features of the best lessons. In the minority of less successful lessons students do not receive such a high level of challenge because the lessons are dominated by the teacher and do not address the learning needs of all students in the class. Assessment is thorough, accurate and fair. Work is marked promptly and the quality of most feedback to students is good, providing them with useful guidance on how their standards could be improved.

16. The college is outstanding at identifying and meeting the needs of students. The excellent curriculum provides not only a very good choice of advanced level subjects but also a wide range of general vocational education courses at levels 1 to 3. There are good opportunities for students to follow general vocational courses alongside AS levels and this makes a significant contribution to their future economic well-being. The college recently introduced the International Baccalaureate to provide further opportunities for the most able students. Progression between programmes at different levels in the college is good and the vast majority of students who complete advanced level studies progress successfully to higher education. Students benefit from an excellent range of enrichment activities, including team sports, performing and creative arts, faith groups and a very successful debating society. Most subject teachers also provide out-of-hours sessions which help give extra challenge or additional support for students.
17. Educational and social inclusion are outstanding. The college has worked successfully to widen participation by students from disadvantaged areas in Luton by having relatively low entry requirements for many of its courses. It provides an environment in which students of different races and backgrounds can work safely and harmoniously together to achieve their potential. Partnership working with local schools is strong and this ensures that teachers are well briefed on the particular needs of potential students before they enrol. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent.
18. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Students benefit from highly effective initial advice and guidance. Course information is easy to understand and procedures to ensure that students enrol on the right course are secure. Initial assessment accurately identifies students' additional learning needs. These needs are met effectively so that students in receipt of learning support make at least as much progress as other students. Pastoral support is outstanding. The team of specialist personal tutors is highly skilled and effective at using targets and action plans to help improve achievement. The tutorial programme is a good vehicle for helping students to appreciate the benefits of living healthily and working hard. The college provides a comprehensive range of support services, including a college counsellor and student welfare officer, and has excellent referral procedures when students require more specialised help. The high quality careers advice is particularly effective in guiding students towards appropriate higher education courses.

19. The views of students are taken extremely seriously by the college and questionnaires are used extensively to canvas their opinions. The student council has been revised so that it reflects the views of students better. Representatives take this responsibility very seriously indeed. The appointment of student ambassadors is proving a very useful addition to the range of measures which the college employs to provide information to, and promote the work of, its students.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grade:*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Outstanding: grade 1*

20. Leadership and management are outstanding; a judgement that matches the college's view. Outstanding leadership by the principal, who is well supported by managers at all levels, ensures a relentless drive to raise levels of achievement as well as to promote the personal and social development and well-being of students. The college has clear values which underpin all of its work and are shared by all staff. This common sense of purpose provides consistency and stability to students and contributes to the high morale in the college.
21. Strategic planning is very effective and development plans are well conceived. Senior managers, with clear direction from governors, are highly skilled in implementing plans to improve provision. The college's ambitious building project is being managed well to ensure minimal impact on students' learning. Collaborative work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders is extremely productive, with the college taking a leading role in a number of curriculum development projects, including the implementation of several new diplomas.
22. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and rigorous. Self-assessment is a highly effective process, completed promptly and making very effective use of a wide range of data to support judgements. Resulting action plans are of high quality and include a range of challenging targets. The college has a good record of meeting or exceeding the targets it sets. Procedures for monitoring course performance have been strengthened, especially for the minority of courses on which performance is erratic. Curriculum management is good.
23. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. Staff have been well trained to seek out, investigate and tackle the rare tensions that occur. Policies in response to race equality, disability and gender legislation are clear and all-embracing. The impact of the equal opportunities policy is assessed thoroughly in all aspects of college work. Analysis of the participation and performance of different groups of students, especially those from black and minority ethnic groups, is extremely thorough and resulting action plans are sharply focused. The college has taken positive action to attract more staff from other than white British heritage groups, including teachers who were formerly students at the college, and their numbers are increasing. The college has implemented some

extremely imaginative approaches to ensure that its students are treated equally and fairly. Student ambassadors provide training in equal opportunities for all new students, staff, governors and some outside organisations. Four chaplains, representing three different faiths, have been appointed to the multi-faith chaplaincy, reflecting the high priority given to addressing the different spiritual needs of students. The college makes a full response to the requirements of the Child Protection Act and safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive. The needs of vulnerable students are dealt with sympathetically and successfully. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive excellent support and achieve well. The college takes an active role in promoting community cohesion. It celebrates its cultural diversity.

24. Support functions across the college are highly efficient and staff and resources are deployed effectively. Professional development for all staff is comprehensive and of high quality. Accommodation and resources are good. Value for money is outstanding. Governance is outstanding. Governors are well informed and have a broad and highly useful spread of expertise, which they use wisely to guide the strategic direction of the college. They are decisive and supportive, but equally make full use of opportunities to challenge the work of the college to ensure its continued progress.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 long 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
All Long - Level 1	04/05	325	60	64	-4	...	...	...	...
	05/06	690	77	71	6	6	100	57	43
	06/07	600	85	73	12	...	...	...	...
GNVQs/ AVCEs	04/05	48	81	71	10	...	...	...	...
	05/06	30	97	78	19	...	...	...	...
	06/07	24	88	79	9	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05/06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04/05	277	56	63	-7	...	...	...	...
	05/06	660	76	71	5	6	100	57	43
	06/07	576	85	72	13	...	...	...	...

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 long 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
All Long - Level 2	04/05	1759	54	74	-20	2	50	57	-7
	05/06	1144	87	78	9	10	100	65	35
	06/07	1193	89	82	7	4	100	65	35
GCSEs	04/05	762	89	78	11	1	100	65	35
	05/06	781	87	82	5	4	100	67	33
	06/07	766	90	83	7	4	100	68	32
GNVQs/ AVCEs	04/05	205	83	75	8	...	...	...	...
	05/06	182	82	77	5	...	...	...	...
	06/07	86	88	78	10	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05/06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04/05	792	12	62	-50	1	0	53	-53
	05/06	181	91	70	21	6	100	62	38
	06/07	341	87	79	8	...	...	...	...

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 long 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
All Long - Level 3	04/05	4508	84	82	2	21	86	60	26
	05/06	4841	85	84	1	6	50	65	-15
	06/07	4653	84	85	-1	4	100	69	31
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1311	95	92	3	14	79	76	3
	05/06	1586	96	93	3	1	100	78	22
	06/07	1611	95	93	2	...	...	...	...
AS Levels	04/05	2655	80	78	2	4	100	54	46
	05/06	2660	79	79	0	2	50	58	-8
	06/07	2581	80	81	-1	3	100	61	39
GNVQs/ AVCEs	04/05	449	78	74	4	2	100	...	...
	05/06	444	84	77	7	1	100	...	...
	06/07	106	49	65	-16	...	...	...	...
NVQs	04/05	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	05/06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Other	04/05	93	55	72	-17	1	100	55	45
	05/06	151	72	79	-7	2	0	62	-62
	06/07	355	72	80	-8	1	100	66	34