

City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College

Inspection report

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| Provider reference | 130817 |
| Published date | March 2009 |

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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 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. The City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College is medium-sized and situated near to the city centre. Its main catchment area is the city but a significant number of students attend from the county of Staffordshire and a very few from Cheshire. In partnership with Stoke-on-Trent College and local schools, the college provides courses at the Burslem centre to cater for students from the north of the city. The college offers provision in 12 of the 15 sector subject areas (SSAs). The large majority of its provision is at level 3 and comprises GCE A- and AS-level subjects, as well as an increasing number of vocational courses at levels 2 and 3. The Fenton Manor Sports Complex is situated on the college campus and has extensive facilities.

2. Stoke-on-Trent ranks as the 16th most deprived local authority area in England. Unemployment is higher than the regional and national average. Participation in education and training is lower than regionally, especially for students aged 17. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is decreasing but is considerably higher than that in Staffordshire. The proportion of students aged 16 achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is well below regional and national levels. Over half of students receive educational maintenance allowances and this proportion is increasing yearly.
3. In 2007/08, of the 1,880 students on roll, 1,799 were aged 16 to 18. Just over half of students were female and almost all were of White British heritage with the largest minority ethnic group being Asian Pakistani. Well over three quarters of the enrolments are on level 3 provision. Approximately 7% of students study at the Burslem centre. A small number of pupils aged 14 to 16 are involved in courses run by a 14 to 19 consortium, of which the college is a member. The college's mission statement is 'high quality education in a caring environment'.

Summary of grades awarded

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Effectiveness of provision | Satisfactory: Grade 3 |
| Capacity to improve | Satisfactory: Grade 3 |
| Achievement and standards | Satisfactory: Grade 3 |
| Quality of provision | Satisfactory: Grade 3 |
| Leadership and management | Satisfactory: Grade 3 |
| <i>Equality of opportunity</i> | <i>Satisfactory: contributory grade 3</i> |

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. The overall effectiveness of the college is satisfactory. Since the last inspection a decline in success rates has been reversed and marked improvement has taken place in 2007/08. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates on GCE A-level courses are high. The majority of students exceed their predicted grades on vocational courses. Success rates on AS-level courses, most vocational courses and courses at level 2, although improving, are low. Progression rates are high.
5. The quality of provision is satisfactory, as are teaching and learning. Lesson observations are used effectively to improve the quality of lessons. Almost all lessons are satisfactory and many include good features, such as effective use of information and learning technology (ILT). Sufficient challenge and the use of precise initial assessment information, however, are not used well enough in all lessons to ensure that students fulfil their maximum potential. Assessment is satisfactory.
6. The college's response to meeting students' needs and interests is good. A wide choice of subjects, flexible timetabling and combinations of levels of study ensure progression and educational maturation. Work experience is underdeveloped. Educational and social inclusion are good. The college has widened participation effectively and welcomes students with low levels of prior attainment and low aspirations. Progression rates are high and the overwhelming majority of students leave college to enter further or higher education or employment. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Course advice and personal support are good. Tutorial provision is satisfactory and monitoring of progress is particularly thorough, although learning targets are imprecise.
7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A strong commitment to the values of friendliness, inclusivity and harmony pervades the college, although managers realise that raising the level of achievement is a priority. Managers, through realistic self-assessment and thorough improvement planning, have succeeded in making recent, notable improvements in key areas of the college's work. Quality assurance arrangements have been strengthened. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Improved success rates by males at level 3 are creditable but females underperform at level 2. Financial management is sound and the college provides satisfactory value for money.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. The college has a satisfactory capacity to improve. In 2006/07, the college's self-assessment report awarded over-generous grades and failed to take account of the decline in students' success rates. In contrast, the self-assessment report of 2007/08 has identified more accurately the college's strengths and areas for improvement and graded most areas with an increased rigour and realism. The improved success rates of 2007/08, current improvements to retention and the rigour of recent quality improvement

procedures are firm indicators that the college's determined efforts to bring about improvements are beginning to succeed.

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

9. The college has made satisfactory progress to address the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. Attendance and punctuality have improved and are satisfactory. The performance management of staff is tied closely to students' learning and outcomes. The college has established rigorous quality improvement procedures, although their implementation is not yet fully effective. Individual learning plans have been improved but targets are insufficiently precise. Lesson observation has secured improvements, including the significant reduction of unsatisfactory teaching. Additional learning support is effective for students on level 3 courses but does not yet have sufficient impact on the level 2 success rates.

Key strengths

- friendly and harmonious environment
- high success rates on GCE A-level courses
- good progress by students on vocational courses compared with their prior attainment
- good use of information and learning technology
- wide curriculum choice and flexibility
- particularly thorough monitoring of students' progress
- strong personal support
- good progression to further and higher education or employment
- clear and well supported mission to promote inclusion.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low success rates on AS and level 2 courses by students aged 16 to 18
- low success rates on vocational courses
- underperformance by female students at level 2
- insufficient challenge in lessons to ensure that all students maximise their potential
- underdeveloped identification of language, literacy and numeracy needs
- underdeveloped work experience opportunities
- imprecise learning targets.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. Achievement and standards are satisfactory and this judgement agrees with the college's self-assessment. The long course success rate increased in 2007/08, reversing the decline between 2005 and 2007 and closing the gap considerably between the college's rate and the national rate. At level 3, on which the large majority of students study, improvement was marked. The college's strong focus on raising retention rates was successful at all levels, but pass rates declined at levels 2 and 3. College data show further improvement in 'in-year' retention in the current academic year. In 2007/08, success rates on the majority of GCE A-level courses were high but they were low on the majority of AS-level courses. Success rates on level 2 courses were low.
11. A high proportion of students resits GCSEs in mathematics and English. Success rates at grades A* to C in these subjects were low in 2006/07 and 2007/08. Current students, however, show improved progress and have gained a high level of success in a mathematics module. Success rates on key skills qualifications were very low in 2006/07 but were high at level 2 in both communication and application of number qualifications in 2007/08.
12. Most students meet their expected grade compared with their prior attainment. They often exceed predicted grades on vocational courses, although success rates on these courses remain below national rates. Progression from AS to GCE A-level courses and from substantive courses at level 2 to level 3 is high. The standard of students' work is satisfactory. Students work safely, gain self-confidence and become enterprising, supporting their future economic well-being. Their attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.
13. Students from minority ethnic groups achieve success rates similar to the college's average rate. The gap between underperformance by males compared with females at level 3 has been closed. At level 2, however, females are less successful than males. Students receiving additional learning support at level 3 achieve in line with their peers, however, at level 2, success rates of students receiving additional support are lower than the college's average.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. The quality of provision is satisfactory and this matches the college's self-assessment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A comprehensive lesson observation scheme identifies strengths and areas for improvement accurately but the grades awarded are often over-generous. The college is rightly building the expertise of its internal observation team and uses external observers extensively to conduct targeted observations and to moderate judgements. The college has reduced the proportion of inadequate lessons effectively through targeted support for individual teachers. Managers have developed a good range of strategies to increase the low proportion of outstanding lessons.

15. Many lessons are well planned, briskly delivered and incorporate high quality learning materials; some accessed electronically from the virtual learning environment. Good use of ILT is a feature of most lessons. Students enjoy lessons, are usually well engaged and have a positive working relationship with teachers and peers. Teachers' use of prior attainment and initial assessment information in lesson planning is underdeveloped. Not enough lessons focus on meeting students' individual needs or on challenging them to achieve more, especially more able students. The use of directed questioning to stretch students varies in effectiveness. Lesson aims and objectives are not always communicated clearly.
16. Initial assessment of students' language, literacy and numeracy skills is insufficiently precise to enable their individual needs to be addressed efficiently. This academic year, additional academic support sessions are effective in raising achievement. Some are targeted at students who are at risk of failing and others are aimed at raising the aspirations of potentially high attaining students. Students on some courses have rightly identified the need for increasing their independent learning skills.
17. Assessment is satisfactory. The college has recently improved the clarity of information on assessment and is monitoring the frequency of assessments more rigorously. Marking is accurate but the quality of written feedback to students varies and it does not always help students to improve their work.
18. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is good. Strong and well established partnerships with the local authority, schools, other colleges and local universities have created a coherent curriculum and good progression routes. Shared provision includes four Diplomas with two more due to start in September 2009. Particularly flexible combinations of level 2 and level 3 units offer good progression for young people who enrol with modest qualifications. The curriculum has recently been restructured to strengthen the development of key and functional skills, particularly to support students with low prior attainment. The use of a January start for tailored courses has helped to reduce significantly the high number of local young people who are not in education, employment or training.
19. Enrichment activities for students interested in sport are good, including a full 'Talented Athlete' programme. Other activities, including a range of clubs, subject residential visits and trips, provide satisfactory enrichment for many students. Students on vocational courses benefit from relevant work experience and visiting speakers. The college offers useful work experience opportunities to school pupils. One subject area has developed a strong link with a large employer. The college identifies rightly that work experience and employer links across other subject areas are underdeveloped. Students contribute positively in many ways to college life.
20. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. It has been successful at recruiting and supporting students from groups under-represented in further education and who often have low initial aspirations. The proportion of students from a minority ethnic heritage is slightly higher than the local

minority ethnic population, and the college is particularly successful at enabling young women of Pakistani heritage to progress to higher education.

21. Guidance and support are satisfactory. At the last inspection, procedures for pre-enrolment advice and guidance were extensive; this remains the position. Good links with local schools and Connexions, a thorough interview process and a well established programme of taster events help students select their course of study. A substantial and useful programme of careers advice and guidance assists students to move to further or higher education or employment successfully.
22. Tutorial support is comprehensive. Substantial action to improve tutorial provision has helped resolve concerns with retention and attendance rates but impact is not yet evident in achievement rates. Structured individual tutorials are used to monitor students' progress far more thoroughly than previously and are supported by very good electronic performance data. Learning targets to improve students' work are insufficiently precise.
23. The range of support services for students is strong. Counselling, advice and welfare support and health promotion services are widely available. Links with external support agencies are well established. Students speak highly of the support they receive from staff. Potentially vulnerable students are clearly identified, including those with caring responsibilities, and are well supported.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Satisfactory: grade 3

24. Leadership and management are satisfactory, matching the college's self-assessment. The college's clear strategic role and mission as an inclusive and open access institution are well understood and supported by governors, managers and staff. Staff are wholly committed to the college's role in supporting students' aspirations and contributing to the regeneration of the local community. The self-assessment report of 2007/08 pays due regard to the need to secure significant improvements and the grades awarded better reflect students' achievement. Recent actions taken by the college have resulted in measurable improvements. Retention rates have improved significantly. Students' attendance has also improved and is now satisfactory. A comprehensive lesson observation system has been established.
25. The principal, managers and staff have worked hard to implement detailed quality improvement plans and they monitor these closely. Underperforming courses have been scrutinised intensively, although progress in improving success rates in a few subjects in 2007/08 was slow. The college has succeeded in reducing significantly the proportion of courses judged to be below minimum levels of performance by the local LSC. The performance management of staff has been redesigned to better reflect their impact on students' performance. Curriculum managers are now highly accountable for students' progress and

outcomes. Lesson observation is linked explicitly to performance management and appropriate staff training. Staff are well qualified and many have extensive experience in examining their subjects. ILT resources are good and are readily accessible. Accommodation is satisfactory. Plans for a new building are well developed. Management information is useful, accurate and is used increasingly by staff to measure students' progress.

26. Governance is satisfactory. The governors' wide range of skills and experience supports the college well. Standards and achievement have been the subject of close examination; but the over-generous self-assessment grades in 2006/07 were accepted and endorsed by the corporation. Governors monitor courses causing concern closely and critically. Governors have recognised that the corporation does not represent the diverse college community, despite their vigorous attempts to recruit members from minority ethnic backgrounds. Financial management is sound and the college provides satisfactory value for money.
27. The promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to meet the requirements of equality and diversity legislation. The arrangements for safeguarding young people meet current government requirements. The college has been successful in closing the gap between male and female success rates at level 3, but the underperformance of female students at level 2 remains an area for improvement. Students from a Pakistani heritage, the largest minority ethnic group at the college, achieve success rates broadly at the college average. The corporation has approved a single equality plan to replace the current equal opportunities policy, but managers have fallen behind the schedule for its introduction and implementation. Managers monitor individual and group performance closely but impact assessments are underdeveloped.

Students' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, 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 | <i>Diff</i> | Starts – Transfers | College Rate | National Rate | <i>Diff</i> |
| 1 Long | 05/06 | 34 | 59 | 71 | -12 | 131 | 50 | 57 | -7 |
| | 06/07 | 27 | 67 | 73 | -6 | 31 | 55 | 64 | -9 |
| | 07/08* | 65 | 85 | N/A | | 3 | 67 | N/A | |
| GNVQs and precursors | 05/06 | 14 | 64 | 78 | -14 | 0 | | | |
| | 06/07 | 18 | 61 | 79 | -18 | 0 | | | |
| | 07/08* | 0 | 0 | N/A | | 0 | | N/A | |
| NVQs | 05/06 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 06/07 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 07/08* | 0 | | N/A | | 0 | | N/A | |
| Other | 05/06 | 20 | 55 | 71 | -16 | 131 | 50 | 57 | -7 |
| | 06/07 | 9 | 78 | 72 | 6 | 31 | 55 | 64 | -9 |
| | 07/08* | 65 | 85 | N/A | | 3 | 67 | N/A | |

* college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, 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 | <i>Diff</i> | Starts – Transfers | College Rate | National Rate | <i>Diff</i> |
| 2 Long | 05/06 | 568 | 75 | 78 | -3 | 73 | 55 | 65 | -10 |
| | 06/07 | 867 | 68 | 82 | -14 | 31 | 39 | 65 | -26 |
| | 07/08* | 843 | 70 | N/A | | 43 | 81 | N/A | |
| GCSEs | 05/06 | 386 | 79 | 82 | -3 | 19 | 42 | 67 | -25 |
| | 06/07 | 532 | 76 | 83 | -7 | 15 | 47 | 68 | -21 |
| | 07/08* | 556 | 73 | N/A | | 13 | 85 | N/A | |
| GNVQs and precursors | 05/06 | 70 | 40 | 77 | -37 | 0 | | | |
| | 06/07 | 59 | 68 | 78 | -10 | 0 | | | |
| | 07/08* | 0 | | N/A | | 0 | | N/A | |
| NVQs | 05/06 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 06/07 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 07/08* | 0 | | N/A | | 0 | | N/A | |
| Other | 05/06 | 112 | 81 | 70 | 11 | 54 | 59 | 62 | -3 |
| | 06/07 | 276 | 53 | 79 | -26 | 16 | 31 | 62 | -31 |
| | 07/08* | 286 | 63 | N/A | | 30 | 80 | N/A | |

* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, 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 | <i>Diff</i> | Starts – Transfers | College Rate | National Rate | <i>Diff</i> |
| 3 Long | 05/06 | 4952 | 81 | 84 | -3 | 80 | 69 | 65 | 4 |
| | 06/07 | 4563 | 77 | 85 | -8 | 95 | 59 | 69 | -10 |
| | 07/08* | 4490 | 80 | N/A | | 86 | 78 | N/A | |
| A/A2 Levels | 05/06 | 1756 | 92 | 93 | -1 | 28 | 79 | 78 | 1 |
| | 06/07 | 1601 | 89 | 93 | -4 | 34 | 65 | 80 | -15 |
| | 07/08* | 1372 | 92 | N/A | | 47 | 89 | N/A | |
| AS Levels | 05/06 | 3042 | 74 | 79 | -5 | 27 | 37 | 58 | -21 |
| | 06/07 | 2848 | 71 | 81 | -10 | 46 | 50 | 61 | -11 |
| | 07/08* | 2546 | 76 | N/A | | 27 | 63 | N/A | |
| GNVQs and precursors | 05/06 | 61 | 95 | 77 | 18 | 0 | | | |
| | 06/07 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 07/08* | 0 | | N/A | | 0 | | N/A | |
| NVQs | 05/06 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 06/07 | 0 | | | | 0 | | | |
| | 07/08* | 0 | | N/A | | 0 | | N/A | |
| Other | 05/06 | 93 | 69 | 79 | -10 | 20 | 100 | 62 | 38 |
| | 06/07 | 114 | 55 | 80 | -25 | 15 | 73 | 66 | 7 |
| | 07/08* | 571 | 71 | N/A | | 12 | 67 | N/A | |

* college data