

The Sixth Form College, Solihull

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. The Sixth Form College, Solihull (SFCS) is situated a short distance from the centre of Solihull. The college is the main provider of sixth form education for the borough of Solihull but also recruits approximately a third of its students from south Birmingham. The college serves areas of prosperity within south Solihull; however, it also provides for areas of social, economic and educational deprivation in north Solihull and adjacent parts of Birmingham.
2. The proportion of young people achieving five or more GCSEs at A* to C is higher in Solihull than in Birmingham. The ethnic heritage profile of Solihull and Birmingham is widely different with 5% of the population of Solihull identifying themselves as from a minority ethnic heritage compared to 30% in

Birmingham. Some 14% of college students identify themselves as coming from a Pakistani heritage and approximately 62% as from a White British heritage. Increasing numbers of students are recruited from areas with widening participation postcodes. In 2008/09, they constituted 27% of the student cohort.

3. The vast majority of students are studying full time on advanced level courses. In 2008/09, the college enrolled 2,608 students, most of them aged 16 to 18. There are slightly more male than female students. The college offers courses in most sector subject areas. The highest numbers of students are in science and mathematics; languages, literature, culture; and business, administration and law. The college identifies its mission as providing a college where students strive to achieve academic distinction and personal growth.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The effectiveness of provision is good and some aspects are outstanding. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates on GCE A levels are high and improving. Most students progress from AS levels to GCE A levels. A minority of AS levels have below average success rates and overall success rates on AS courses remain slightly below the national average.
5. Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are well planned and stimulating. Support for students with additional learning needs and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding.
6. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students and employers is outstanding. Students benefit from a particularly wide range of subjects and an increasing number of vocational courses. Educational and social inclusion are outstanding.
7. Guidance and support for students are good. The arrangements for vulnerable young people moving from school to college are particularly strong and successful. The college's new electronic system for monitoring students' progress requires further development, particularly in the use of individual learning targets. Attendance is satisfactory.
8. Leadership and management are outstanding. Leaders and managers share a particularly strong commitment to students' progress and achievement. Robust quality assurance has been effective in securing improvements to provision and students' outcomes. Curriculum areas are well managed and the promotion of equal opportunities is good.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. The self-assessment report is detailed and uses accurate evidence and data. The operational plan is well thought out and provides an exceptionally clear agenda for improvement with well focused tasks and actions. Although inspectors graded teaching and learning lower than the college, they agreed with the strengths and areas for improvement as identified through the college lesson observation system and self-assessment. Curriculum areas are well managed with a relentless focus on students' outcomes and achievement. Managers are highly accountable for the progress of their courses and individual students' outcomes. College resources are targeted closely on achieving improvements to provision, and financial management is excellent.

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

10. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Success rates at General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level are high and improving; pass rates continue to be very high. Students make good progress compared to their prior attainment at GCSE. The proportion of students achieving high grade passes in GCSE English has improved significantly and is now high. Accommodation in art and science has been improved significantly. High levels of progression to higher education and employment have been maintained as has the good support for students; good teaching and learning and productive work with partners and stakeholders. Educational and social inclusion, judged previously to be good, are now outstanding.

Key strengths

- high and improving success rates at GCE A level
- good teaching and learning
- strong and productive links with schools
- outstanding transition arrangements for vulnerable young people between the college and schools
- particularly effective pastoral and academic support
- highly effective quality improvement procedures
- outstanding leadership and management
- good promotion of equal opportunities.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- a few AS levels with below average success rates
- a minority of vocational courses with below average success rates
- target setting and the monitoring of students' progress using the electronic individual learning plan.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good. This concurs with the college's self-assessment. The vast majority of students study on GCE A level and AS courses. Most students progress from AS levels to GCE A levels where success rates are high and improving. In 2007/08, almost half of students achieved high grades at GCE A level. Students make good progress compared with their prior attainment at GCSE and a high proportion goes on to higher education and employment. Success rates at AS level have improved steadily over the last three years but remain slightly below average. A small minority of AS level courses have lower than average success rates. The small number of students studying the International Baccalaureate achieved very good results and made excellent progress compared with their previous attainment. Most students studying vocational courses achieve well but in 2007/08, a few vocational courses had below average success rates at level 3. A high proportion of students studying level 2 courses make good progress and go on to study at level 3. GCSE success rates at grades A* to G have been broadly at or above average for the years between 2005/06 and 2006/07. In 2007/08, they declined to below average. Students thoroughly enjoy their learning and speak confidently about their studies. The college has recognised that, despite their vigorous attempts to rectify the situation, students from a Pakistani heritage achieve success rates below the college average at AS level. However, the same group achieve well at GCE A level and a very high proportion goes on to higher education.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

12. The quality of provision is good and some aspects are outstanding. This is lower than the college's self-assessment where the overall quality of provision was graded as outstanding. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and teaching and learning activities stimulate learning very well. Most teachers make much good use of a wide range of high quality learning resources and information learning technology (ILT). Students receive very good support for their practical and project work and are well prepared for their examinations. The college's arrangements for involving parents and carers are good. Students value highly the particularly good support for students with additional learning needs and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Assessment is good with work marked promptly and feedback that helps students understand how they can improve their work.
13. A small number of lessons are insufficiently planned and teachers do not place enough emphasis on different learning activities to meet the needs of all students. In a minority of lessons, question and answer techniques need further development to ensure learning is effective.
14. The college is outstanding at identifying and meeting the needs of students. Students have excellent access to a very wide range of subjects and options at advanced level and an increasing range of intermediate and vocational options.

The college has very strong and productive links with local schools and responds well to make improvements to the curriculum; for example, it has recently introduced the International Baccalaureate in partnership with a local school. The college has worked very effectively to lead a consortium to develop and introduce the new 14-19 Diplomas. The college's educational enrichment provision is particularly good and participation in enrichment activities is also good. Many students make a positive contribution through these activities to the college, local community and beyond.

15. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college has been successful in recruiting students from a diverse range of ethnic heritages and from disadvantaged areas. Individual consideration is given to students who achieve less than the standard entry requirements and new transport arrangements encourage the participation of a wide range of students. Students feel safe and identify with the strong sense of respect fostered in the college.
16. Guidance and support for students are good. Pre-enrolment advice and guidance are good. Transitional arrangements for vulnerable students are outstanding. The excellent team of support workers ensures students settle very quickly into learning and many make very good progress.
17. The college's new electronic system for managing each student's individual learning plan is used particularly well by some tutors. However, some tutors and students do not use it confidently. Targets in a number of individual learning plans are insufficiently specific and are not time constrained. Targets and action plans do not always provide students with a clear understanding of what they need to do to succeed. Systems to support students at risk of not completing their course are well organised and involve parents and carers appropriately.
18. Students have good access to an extensive and particularly effective range of services which provide both academic and pastoral support. Careers advice and guidance are well planned and have especially strong features.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

19. Leadership and management are outstanding. This concurs with the college's self-assessment. The principal and senior managers provide clear strategic leadership based on an ambitious but realistic view of students' potential. Staff share a particularly strong commitment to students' progress and achievement. Quality assurance and planning for improvements are coherent and monitored very closely. The operational plan provides a wide range of specific outcomes and tasks against which the college measures its progress. Together, these have been successful in securing significant improvements to provision. Overall, the self-assessment report is a thorough and accurate analysis of college

provision. Although the self-assessment report graded teaching and learning higher than the inspectors, the lesson observation system provides the college with an accurate and useful view of strengths and areas for improvement. Training needs are identified and staff development is focused well on improving teaching and learning.

20. Curriculum areas are well managed with a relentless focus on students' outcomes and achievement. Managers and teachers are highly accountable for the progress of their courses and individual students. Management information is particularly detailed and useful in supporting progress and monitoring college and course targets.
21. Governance is excellent. Governors use their wide range of skills and experience to challenge and monitor the college's performance effectively. The profile of the governing body increasingly represents the college's diverse community.
22. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced in their subjects. Learning resources are good and accommodation has been improved significantly since the last inspection. Financial management is excellent and value for money is good. The college works particularly well with a range of partners. As a result, students benefit from an increasingly wide range of academic and vocational provision.
23. The college's procedures for promoting equality of opportunity are good. Students in receipt of additional learning support achieve success rates higher than the college average. However, students of Pakistani heritage have lower than the college average success rates at AS level. This aspect is acknowledged frankly in the self-assessment report and has been the subject of much analysis and activity. Equality and diversity occupy a prominent role in all planning and self-assessment procedures. Careful note is taken of aspects such as gender, disadvantage and ethnic heritage in all analyses of students' progress and achievement. Underperformance is made the subject of action planning and monitoring. Teachers make particularly good use of materials on aspects of ethnic heritage, culture and society to promote and reinforce equality and respect and to challenge stereotypical thinking and prejudice. The college makes an appropriate response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA). The college complies with the requirements for safeguarding young people under the Child Protection Act.

Learners' 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	49	67	71	-4	**	**		
	06/07	37	30	73	-43	**	**		
	07/08*	96	50	N/A		**	**	N/A	
GNVQs/AVCEs	05/06	**	**			**	**		
	06/07	**	**			**	**		
	07/08*	**	**	N/A		**	**	N/A	
NVOs	05/06	**	**			**	**		
	06/07	**	**			**	**		
	07/08*	**	**	N/A		**	**	N/A	
Other	05/06	49	67	71	-4	**	**		
	06/07	37	30	72	-42	**	**		
	07/08*	96	50	N/A		**	**	N/A	

* college data

** very small numbers

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	592	71	78	-7	**	**		
	06/07	511	76	82	-6	**	**		
	07/08*	462	79	N/A		**	**	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	224	81	82	-1	**	**		
	06/07	192	85	83	2	**	**		
	07/08*	199	77	N/A		**	**	N/A	
GNVQs/AVCEs	05/06	95	83	77	6	**	**		
	06/07	42	88	78	10	**	**		
	07/08*	48	83	N/A		**	**	N/A	
NVOs	05/06	**	**			**	**		
	06/07	**	**			**	**		
	07/08*	**	**	N/A		**	**	N/A	
Other	05/06	273	59	70	-11	**	**		
	06/07	277	67	79	-12	**	**		
	07/08*	215	80	N/A		**	**	N/A	

* college data

** very small numbers

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	7163	82	84	-2	**	**		
	06/07	7146	83	85	-2	**	**		
	07/08*	7063	84	N/A		63	81	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	2315	94	93	1	**	**		
	06/07	2741	94	93	1	**	**		
	07/08*	2588	96	N/A		24	100	N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	4406	77	79	-2	**	**		
	06/07	4147	78	81	-3	**	**		
	07/08*	4252	79	N/A		30	77	N/A	
GNVQs/AVCEs	05/06	348	71	77	-6	**	**		
	06/07	211	46	***		**	**		
	07/08*	184	64	N/A		**	**	N/A	
NVQs	05/06	**	**			**	**		
	06/07	**	**			**	**		
	07/08*	**	**	N/A		**	**	N/A	
Other	05/06	94	62	79	-17	**	**		
	06/07	47	87	80	7	**	**		
	07/08*	39	62	N/A		**	**	N/A	

* college data
 ** very small numbers
 *** not applicable