

New College Swindon

Inspection report

Provider reference 130851

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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.

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. New College Swindon was formed in 1983 following a re-organisation of secondary education in Swindon, a unitary authority in Wiltshire. At just under 5%, Swindon has a minority ethnic population higher than in the south-west region as a whole. Employment rates and wages are higher than both regional and national rates but there are nevertheless areas of economic deprivation.
2. The prior attainment of Swindon's school leavers at age 16 is low. The town's other college (Swindon College) runs predominantly vocational provision at levels 1 and 2 and no longer offers general certificate of education (GCE) A-level courses. Most of Swindon's schools do not have sixth forms. As a result, New College is the main provider of A-level courses in the town. Around 80% of

the college's full-time equivalent (FTE) learners are aged 16 to 18. Some 80% of students aged 16 to 18 studied at level 3 in 2007/08. The college ran approximately 60 A levels in 2007/08 and in that year the numbers of students completing A levels outnumbered those completing Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas by seven to one. The college runs courses with significant numbers in most sector subject areas. Long courses at levels 1 and 2 account for a growing proportion of the college's work for this age group, as it strives to meet the needs of learners in Swindon leaving school at age 16 with below average attainment. Around one third of learners joining the college to study AS levels have an average GCSE grade of less than C.

3. Included in the college's provision are Train to Gain for around 800 adults, schools link provision for learners aged 14 to 16 and young apprenticeships, accounting for some 150 learners. The college started a small work-based learning contract in 2007 in the curriculum area of business and administration. Course provision for the local community accounts for around 2,500 learners at a number of local centres but this work is now run with only a small LSC-funded subsidy.
4. New College Swindon's mission is 'to provide high quality education and training services ... helping young people, the community and business to prosper'.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. This is a good college with outstanding features and good capacity to improve its provision further. The past 18 months have seen a significant improvement in success rates for adults and for learners aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 and 2. However, success rates for these learners remain mostly broadly in line with an improving national average. Achievement and standards are good overall. Pass rates and the achievement of high grades for the large numbers of learners studying A levels are good and compare with those in sixth form colleges. Students on science and mathematics courses make particularly good progress in AS and A levels from their starting points on entry to the college. However, there is significant variation in students' progress across the range of courses and this is broadly average overall. This is an area for development for the college together with addressing the numbers of students who withdraw from part of their programme of study in the first year of their A-level courses.
6. The quality of provision and teaching and learning are good. Knowledgeable teachers plan lessons well and use a broad range of activities to enthuse and motivate learners. However, lesson planning does not always meet learners' individual needs sufficiently. The college needs to improve the consistent standard of progress reviews and target-setting for learners across the range of its work, to enable learners to fulfil their potential. The extent to which programmes meet the needs of learners is good. Partnership and collaborative working are good. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college is highly successful in engaging learners from under-represented groups and knows its community well. Provision for enrichment and Every Child Matters outcomes is outstanding and is highly valued by learners. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding. There is a high level of student engagement with additional learning support. This is highly effective in enabling them to achieve.
7. Leadership and management are good. The college's leadership, vision and strategic direction are clear and highly responsive to local and national priorities. Accommodation and learning resources are outstanding and financial management is strong. Arrangements to gather learners' views are highly developed and the college uses the information very well to improve provision. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good. Self-assessment accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement, although the grades awarded over-state the quality in some areas. The college is insufficiently self-critical in its use of success rate data in assessing its overall progress on achievement and standards.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

8. The college's capacity to improve is good. Managers and governors have made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses identified at the last inspection, particularly over the past 18 months. There is now a clear vision and direction of travel, in line with regional and government priorities. Despite the

over-generous grades awarded by the college in its self-assessment, quality assurance and self-assessment procedures are good and staff make good use of target setting, self-assessment, lesson observation and review meetings to raise standards. Management information systems produce regular, accurate and reliable data which are readily accessible to managers. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Financial management is good and the college is in a strong financial position. The support and involvement of governors is good. Accommodation and resources are outstanding. The college has well developed plans for expansion over the next few years.

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

9. The college has made good progress in improving the quality of provision since the last inspection. Success rates on long courses for adult learners have improved but remain in line with the increased national average. Success rates for key skills provision have improved significantly and were high in 2007/08. The lesson observation scheme has improved significantly. It now plays a key role in helping to raise the standard of teaching and learning across the college. Teachers now make good use of a wide range of initiatives and technology to extend and inspire students in lessons. The college has comprehensively implemented appropriate arrangements for identifying learners' numeracy support needs through the introduction of robust initial assessment.

Key strengths

- high pass rates and achievement of A and B grades on A-level courses
- good teaching and learning
- outstanding provision for enrichment and Every Child Matters outcomes
- good collaborative and partnership working
- outstanding support and guidance for learners
- outstanding accommodation and learning resources
- clear leadership, vision and strategic direction which is highly responsive to local and national priorities
- very good collection and use of learners' views to improve provision
- strong financial management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- reducing the number of learners who withdraw from part of their programme of study at AS level
- the inconsistent progress made by learners aged 16 to 18 across the range of AS and A-level courses
- lesson planning to meet all learners' individual needs more fully
- the rigour of procedures for deciding and moderating graded judgements about the quality of the college's provision

- the evaluation of learners' performance data throughout the college's provision to allow clearer benchmarking with other similar providers
- improving the consistency of progress reviews and target-setting for all learners.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:

Adults

Satisfactory: grade 3

Learners aged 14 to 16

Satisfactory: grade 3

10. Achievement and standards are good overall. For adult learners on long courses and for pupils aged 14 to 16 on school link programmes they are satisfactory. Learners' outcomes do not justify the college's own view that achievement and standards are outstanding.
11. At the last inspection retention and pass rates for learners aged 16 to 18 at level 3 were high. However, retention and pass rates for adult learners were a key area for improvement. The past 18 months have seen a significant improvement in those long course success rates that were previously low. In 2007/08 success rates for adults were broadly average. For learners aged 16 to 18 they were broadly average at level 2 and above average at level 1.
12. Success rates for the high numbers of learners aged 16 to 18 studying AS and A-level courses have been at or above the national average for general further education (GFE) and tertiary colleges over the past four years. The college agrees with inspectors that, in the future, this provision should be compared with the same provision in sixth form colleges. By this measure, pass rates and the achievement of high grades in A levels are in line with the high national average and are good. Pass rates in AS qualifications are broadly in line with the national average. A-level success rates are mostly in line with sixth form college averages but at AS level they are low in comparison. This is as a result of learners withdrawing from part of their programme of study during the year. Learners' progression from AS to A levels is high. In both AS and A-level courses value-added measures indicate that students make positive but broadly average progress in comparison with their prior attainment. There is considerable variation across the range of subjects, with students in science and mathematics courses making particularly good progress.
13. Success rates in BTEC qualifications are high. In the broad range of GCSEs on offer for learners aged 16 to 18 the achievement of A* to C grades is high. Learners enjoy their studies and their behaviour is exemplary. Their attendance and the standard of their work are good. They develop high levels of practical and work-related skills on vocational courses and work safely. Key skills success rates have improved since the last inspection and are now high. As a result, learners are very well equipped for their future social and economic well-being. The college has identified potential under-performance by adults from a small number of black minority ethnic backgrounds and is taking appropriate steps to investigate potential causes for this. Overall success rates in Train to Gain are good but timely success rates are poor. The college acknowledges this issue and is taking well considered steps to address it.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

14. The quality of provision and teaching and learning are good, although the college judges that these are outstanding. Since the last inspection the college has taken highly effective action to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The college's lesson observation process is robust and reliable and the proportion of lessons judged as good or outstanding has increased since the last inspection. The college has effective measures to raise further the quality of satisfactory lessons and analysis of learner feedback indicates high levels of satisfaction.
15. Teachers manage learning well, including lessons specifically for learners aged 14 to 16, adults in college and community settings and in work-based learning, including Train to Gain. Learners' absence and lateness are dealt with effectively. Schemes of work are clear and comprehensive. They give priority to the Every Child Matters outcomes and the promotion of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity.
16. In the best lessons, teachers provide challenging learning opportunities that stretch learners' abilities. Knowledgeable and well qualified teachers plan well and use a variety of methods to enthuse and motivate learners. They question skilfully to check learning. Resources for teaching and learning are outstanding and teachers use technology well in interactive learning. Learners benefit from the college intranet to support their learning. In less effective lessons teachers plan insufficiently to meet the needs of all learners. A significant minority of lessons provide insufficient challenge for the most able learners.
17. Assessment and internal verification procedures are thorough and ensure the college meets the requirements of regulatory bodies. Most learners' work is marked accurately and promptly and constructive feedback encourages learners. In a few courses errors remain uncorrected and comments are brief. Teams of experienced assessors provide very good support to work-based learners. In Train to Gain provision, employers value the flexibility of the college's assessors to meet their needs and those of their employees; assessments are planned well to take place around shift patterns and daily work activities. However, the consistency of progress reviews varies and targets for some learners are too broad. Insufficient attention is given to checking the learners' understanding of equality of opportunity.
18. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college is highly successful in engaging learners from under-represented groups and knows its community well. Good partnership working is responsive to local and national needs. The college offers courses at college, in the community, in the workplace and online. Sound procedures identify and develop new courses. The curriculum offer ranges from entry level to level 4. The college has plans in place to develop further progression pathways and the growing offer at levels 1 and 2. The college works collaboratively with local schools and is increasingly responsive to the needs of employers with some apprenticeships and growing

Train to Gain provision. Learners take good advantage of a wide range of enrichment activities, including sports, cultural groups, visits and volunteering. Learners make very positive contributions to the college and local community.

19. Guidance and support are outstanding. Comprehensive reports from initial assessment enable teachers to meet individual needs extremely well. Take-up of support is very high. Support for learners with Aspergers Syndrome is outstanding, with support arrangements beginning prior to starting at college. Those learners in Train to Gain for whom English is an additional language receive highly relevant and useful support in the workplace. Particularly effective one-to-one support sessions meet individual needs. Learners who receive additional learning support have success rates at or above college rates. The tutorial system is particularly good and valued by learners. Well managed and resourced, it provides outstanding promotion of Every Child Matters outcomes. Welfare services are well used. Tutors and specialist staff such as counsellors and nurses provide very good pastoral support. Particularly good sexual health education addresses teenage pregnancy and Chlamydia, the occurrence of which is high in Swindon. All learners receive good initial advice and guidance for employment and higher education. Learners speak highly of the process. Tutors provide extensive support outside of lessons.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

20. Leadership and management are good but not yet outstanding as the college judges them. The college's mission, strategy and priorities lie at the heart of its self-assessment and improvement plan. They focus appropriately on meeting the needs of learners, achieving learner numbers, improving quality, maintaining best practice, valuing learners and staff and maintaining financial stability. The college is making good progress in all these areas. Managers and staff feel a strong sense of accountability and empowerment to achieve these objectives. There have been some comparatively recent changes to the structure and membership of the senior management team which have had a positive impact on the team's effectiveness. Communication across the organisation is good. The college has undergone significant, well managed year-on-year growth. The curriculum has been developed well in response to local needs and national priorities.
21. There is a strong focus on raising standards through the implementation of more rigorous quality assurance procedures. These are proving increasingly effective, particularly over the past 18 months. The college has recently upgraded aspects of its management information systems. Managers now have good access to timely and increasingly accurate attendance and success rate data, and financial information. There are highly developed systems in place to gather the views of learners through the use of questionnaires and learners' active involvement in meetings. There is a good and improving lesson observation scheme in place which helps inform staff development and training priorities. Self-assessment processes accurately identify strengths and areas for

improvement, although the grades awarded over-state the quality in some areas. The college has been insufficiently self-critical in its use of success rate data in assessing its overall progress on achievement and standards. Quality improvement plans are clear and succinct and comprehensively address weaknesses identified in self-assessment.

22. The standard of accommodation and learning resources is outstanding. The college has recently submitted well conceived plans for a 40% expansion and refurbishment of its accommodation to cater for the projected growth in learner numbers over the next five years. The quality of teaching and support staff is high. Student feedback and lesson observation outcomes confirm that teachers have the knowledge and expertise to assure high quality teaching and learning. The application and quality of the staff performance review and target setting procedures are inconsistent across the college although they have improved in the past 12 months.
23. Value for money is good. The college is in a strong financial position and manages its finances well. It has maintained the accommodation and resources to a high standard and has accrued a significant surplus in anticipation of the proposed new build. Success rates have improved. Staff and room utilisation is very good and above average for the sector.
24. Governance is good. Members of the corporation have a valuable and diverse set of skills. Governors are well informed about progress, have good access to reliable data and take an active interest in the work of the college. They are appropriately challenging to the principal and senior managers.
25. The college's approach to equality of opportunities is good. There is a happy, industrious and safe environment with enthusiastic, supportive staff and a strong sense of community. The college's approach to the Every Child Matters agenda is outstanding. Diversity and equality of opportunity have a high profile around the college. There are good community links and partnerships with local organisations and employers. The curriculum continues to become more inclusive and responsive to local needs. The college's response to recent legislation, including equality, race, gender and disability, is good. It comprehensively fulfils its legislative requirements and helps safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

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 to 18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 1	05/06	337	44	69	-25	478	62	65	-3
	06/07	694	61	74	-13	324	61	70	-9
	07/08*	258	82	N/A		545	75	N/A	
GNVQs/ AVCEs	05/06	12	67	73	-6	...	...	...	...
	06/07	11	73	72	1	...	...	...	...
	07/08*	53	92	N/A		...	...	N/A	...
NVQs	05/06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	07/08*	...	...	N/A	...	...	...	N/A	...
Other	05/06	325	43	69	-26	472	62	65	-3
	06/07	683	61	74	-13	323	61	70	-9
	07/08 *	205	79	N/A		543	75	N/A	

* college data, ** course types or years with low numbers of learners have been omitted to simplify the table.

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 to 18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 2	05/06	1403	55	66	-11	850	75	66	9
	06/07	1476	63	70	-7	792	60	69	-9
	07/08*	1376	72	N/A		1066	69	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	781	66	68	-2	110	66	67	-1
	06/07	733	69	71	-2	151	66	70	-4
	07/08*	931	71	N/A		157	69	N/A	
GNVQs/ AVCEs	05/06	67	58	69	-11	...	...	...	...
	06/07	33	73	73	0	...	...	...	...
	07/08*	123	86	N/A		...	...	N/A	...
NVQs	05/06	14	86	65	21	207	76	68	8
	06/07	19	53	68	-15	168	74	69	5
	07/08*	43	63	N/A		487	71	N/A	
Other	05/06	541	36	66	-30	533	76	65	11
	06/07	691	56	70	-14	473	52	69	-17
	07/08*	279	72	N/A		416	67	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 to 18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 3	05/06	5070	77	71	6	764	60	64	-4
	06/07	5392	74	73	1	601	61	68	-7
	07/08	5542	78	N/A		861	69	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	1615	90	87	3	122	61	72	-11
	06/07	1834	87	87	0	146	65	76	-11
	07/08	1769	90	N/A		140	74	N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	3126	70	67	3	158	59	55	4
	06/07	3307	68	69	-1	204	57	59	-2
	07/08	3493	72	N/A		199	58	N/A	
GNVQs/ AVCEs	05/06	141	89	66	23	...	...	...	...
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	07/08			N/A		...	...	N/A	...
NVQs	05/06	...	...	...	...	104	75	63	12
	06/07	...	...	...	...	46	61	N/A	
	07/08	...	...	N/A	...	176	64	73	-9
Other	05/06	186	64	65	-1	368	54	64	-10
	06/07	250	55	70	-15	205	61	69	-8
	07/08	547	75	N/A		355	75	N/A	

* college data

Table 5a
Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes managed by the provider/college 2007 to 2009

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	55	73
		timely	126	28
	2007/08	overall	309	82
		timely	422	36
	2008/09 (4 months)	overall	510	89
		timely	1018	28

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three months or greater of the LSC contract year

- * Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
- ** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college/provider prior to inspection