

Soar Valley College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120286
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	339666
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Deborah James

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Indy Singh Panasar
Headteacher	Mr M Berry
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 57 lessons and held meetings with staff, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body. They studied a range of college documentation, including the improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, evidence from departmental monitoring of effectiveness and records of students' progress. The majority of inspectors' time was spent observing learning. Inspectors also reviewed responses to questionnaires returned from students, staff and 144 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the work of the college. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well students are progressing in lessons and the evidence held by the college to support their evaluation that students are making good progress
- the effectiveness of the curriculum and care, guidance and support processes in meeting the needs of White British and lower ability students who, from the data from previous years, made less progress than other groups
- the actions taken since the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching to meet the needs of all students, promote independent learning and develop higher language and literacy skills.

Information about the school

The college is larger than average and serves an urban area in the north of Leicester. 88% of students are from minority ethnic groups. Students from Indian backgrounds have the highest representation. More than one third of students do not have English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. The college was designated a specialist mathematics and computing college in 2004. It holds the Healthy Schools Award, the Financial Management Standard in Schools, the Quality in Study Support Award and the Young, Gifted and Equal Award. The college moved into a new building in June 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Soar Valley College places the individual well being of all its students at the centre of its work. There is a strong concern for, and commitment to, ensuring that each student is supported to achieve their best. Provision for care, guidance and support is exemplary. Attainment has risen significantly over the last three years. Students arrive at the college with attainment below the national average. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, is now above the national average, providing a strong foundation for students' learning beyond Year 11. The individual support given to each student ensures that their progress is carefully tracked and appropriate intervention strategies are put in place if they appear to be falling behind their challenging targets. The college is taking rigorous action to improve the achievement of White British students and those with low attainment on entry to the college. To increase the motivation and participation among these students, considerable changes have been made to the curriculum and these are proving successful. There has been an effective focus on training staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This has included developing a more consistent approach to supporting the development of literacy skills across all subject areas. As a result of these actions, current data indicate that White British students and those with low attainment on entry are now making good progress.

Students have positive attitudes to learning and work hard. Behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the building, creating a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and this enables students to express their views confidently. Lessons are well structured. The most rapid and secure learning occurs when objectives are clear and students engage in challenging tasks that enable them to think hard about what they are doing and apply their skills. However, a few lessons are not planned thoroughly enough to meet the needs of all students and teachers' questioning is not always sufficient to fully check or extend students' understanding. The quality of marking varies between teachers and subject areas so some students do not always get clear guidance on how to improve their work.

The college makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Students are proud of the diversity in the college community and show high levels of respect and tolerance towards each other. The college works extremely effectively in partnership with a range of organisations within the community to enhance learning opportunities and provide greater personal support for its students.

The Principal, well supported by a strong senior leadership team and committed staff, has created a culture of ambition and drive. Since the last inspection there has been

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tangible progress in raising attainment, attendance and improving the quality of teaching and learning in departments where students were not progressing as well as they might. The positive outcomes from improvements in recent years demonstrate Soar Valley College's good capacity for sustained improvement. The college recognises it has a wealth of information about the attainment, progress and well being of each student that requires detailed analysis in order to identify new areas for development to make the college even more effective.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase attainment of all students by
 - ensuring planning in all lessons meets the needs of the full ability range of students within the class
 - strengthening teachers' questioning techniques so that they are better able to monitor and extend students' learning
 - making sure that marking in all subjects gives students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that leaders at all levels make more strategic use of the college's wealth of students' individual data to
 - identify student groups at risk of underachievement at an earlier stage
 - analyse in greater detail the impact of the actions taken to improve student outcomes.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

The college has a relentless focus on preparing students effectively for further education, training or work and as a result prioritises attainment in English and mathematics. The college's position as a specialist college for mathematics and computing has resulted in particularly strong outcomes for students in mathematics, where attainment has risen rapidly and is above the national average. The improvement in literacy skills is reflected in improved GCSE results in English. Attainment in all science subjects has also improved in the last few years and is above national averages. Students with a White British background have had lower attainment than their peers over the last three years despite a number of highly personalised intervention packages set up by the college. This year, changes in the Key Stage 4 curriculum have led to greater success for these students. The current attainment for Year 11 students of a White British background is more closely in line with national attainment levels.

Students made good or better progress in the majority of lessons observed by inspectors. They focus well on tasks set and work well together in groups. Students respond well to requests from staff and behave considerately towards each other. The college has now put in place a number of strategies, including an adaptable, relevant curriculum that is personalised to meet the needs of individual students. This curriculum is already helping to re-engage White British and lower ability students in their learning

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and ensure their progress is in line with their peers. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They benefit from an appropriate personalised curriculum and considerable individual support in lessons.

The college prepares students very well for their futures. It has a single-minded focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and provides numerous opportunities to understand the world of work. The importance of good attendance is promoted successfully and students rewarded. Clear support strategies are in place to improve the attendance of the small group of students with low attendance rates. Parents and carers strongly endorse the help the college provides in this respect. Students are positive, friendly and keen to talk about what they are doing. There is a well understood behaviour policy with structured consequences that students feel are fair. Students enjoy college, participate well in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and take up a number of positions of responsibility both within and outside the college. Soar Valley students have a strong presence in the local community through an extensive sports leadership programme and work on environmental projects. Students have a good appreciation of the range of cultural influences that have shaped their own, and others, heritages. Students socialise extremely well with those from different religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Although students have opportunities for spiritual development in several subjects, including humanities, this is not consistent across the wider curriculum.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is characterised by strong subject knowledge and good teacher student relationships. Teachers make effective use of the excellent information communication technology resources in the new building to interest and motivate students. Teachers plan well structured lessons with starters, plenaries and appropriate learning objectives. The content of the lessons is relevant to students' lives so they are interested and keen to learn more. Students respond well to a range of activities within lessons. They are given opportunities to think independently and particularly enjoy opportunities to work collaboratively. Students use information communication technology effectively to enhance and develop their learning. In the minority of lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, opportunities for active learning are less prominent and extended periods of teacher talk slow the pace of learning. The majority of students are aware of their current performance and their target grades. Teachers give students helpful individual guidance in lessons on how to improve their work, but the quality and frequency of written feedback varies.

The curriculum has undergone considerable change over the last two years and now meets the needs, interests and aspirations of all groups of students. The curriculum is broad and balanced offering a range of academic and more practical vocational courses. The college keeps the balance between these types of courses carefully under review, introducing new courses to suit the needs of their students. For example, an 'access to music' course was introduced for students who enjoyed music, but would not have been engaged by the GCSE course. The college has also focused its attention on developing personalised curriculum programmes, especially at Key Stage 4, that provide flexible learning opportunities for students who find it difficult to engage with their learning. A 'nurture group' has been introduced in Year 7 for a small group of students who need additional focused support in developing the skills that will enable them to learn more effectively. Partnership arrangements, driven by the college's mathematics and computing specialism, are a strength of the curriculum. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly sport, and participation rates are high.

Students, and their parents, are confident that the college is preparing them well for their futures. They are confident that they have adults they can trust and can turn to for help with any problems; they feel safe and well cared for. Students are enabled to make the best of opportunities provided by the college. Sensitive, wide-ranging support is provided for vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers and other pastoral staff work very effectively with outside agencies to give these students constructive individual help to enable them to overcome their

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barriers to learning. Close links with feeder primary schools ensures a smooth transfer of students to the college. Older students receive thoughtful guidance about subject choices, career opportunities and post-16 education pathways.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal provides strong leadership. His commitment to improve achievement for all students through improved teaching, a more appropriate curriculum and high quality individual support and intervention has been effectively communicated and is well understood by staff and governors. Subject leaders are given considerable autonomy and are held accountable effectively for the performance of their departments.

Self-evaluation has identified appropriate areas for improvement and suitable plans have been put in place. However, the impact of initiatives and improvement priorities are not always rigorously checked to ensure that they are delivering the desired outcomes for all students. This limits the opportunities to identify and fully exploit areas for further development. Monitoring of teaching and learning is accurate. There are a number of strategies in place to support improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, including a learning development group and a programme of targeted professional development linked to performance management. These strategies have been successful in increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching in the college.

All requirements for the safeguarding of students were in place at the time of the inspection. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and comprehensive and involve exemplary record keeping. The college has robust systems for assessing risks and ensuring the health and safety of staff and students.

Partnerships are used effectively to support students' learning and well-being with particular strengths in work undertaken with other local schools through the college's specialist status. The mathematics department has been identified as a lead department in the local authority and facilitates the exchange and sharing of good practice in schools across the city. Governors know the college well and provide effective support. They are increasingly confident in challenging the college to raise the outcomes for students and take actions to bring further improvement.

The college has a deep understanding and awareness of its diverse student population and is committed to equality of opportunity for all students. The promotion of community cohesion is central to the college's ethos and is reflected in the exceptional

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atmosphere of tolerance across the college. In discussions, students were keen to emphasise that there is very little tension between students from different cultures and backgrounds. They commented that if incidents occur they are treated with seriousness and resolved rapidly; they trust the college as a place where all are valued and encouraged to learn from each other.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Only 10% of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. Of these parents and carers, the overwhelming majority are happy with their children's experiences in the college. They agree that their children enjoy college and feel safe there. Parents and carers expressed confidence with the way that the college is led, the quality of the teaching and the progress being made by their children.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Soar Valley College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 144 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1285 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	41	78	54	5	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	57	40	85	59	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	66	46	70	49	5	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	63	44	79	55	2	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	57	40	82	57	2	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	48	33	82	57	14	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	22	101	70	9	6	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	48	33	89	62	2	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	23	104	72	6	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	46	32	83	58	12	8	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	23	88	61	8	6	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	54	38	86	60	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	63	44	77	53	3	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 February 2010

Dear Students,

Inspection of Soar Valley College, Leicestershire, LE4 7GY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your college recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and talking to you and were impressed with the maturity with which you answered our questions. Yours is a good college and you are rightly proud of it.

These are the main findings of the inspection.

The standards you reach at the end of Year 11 prepare you well to move on to further education or training.

The majority of you make good progress.

Students with a White British background and those with low attainment on entry to the college made less progress in previous years, but the college has now successfully addressed this and in the current Year 11 all groups are making good progress.

Most teaching is good and you are given opportunities to think independently and work in collaboration with other students.

You work very well together, showing respect and tolerance for your diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Staff take considerable care to make sure you are looked after well and supported while you are at the college.

Your college is led and managed well.

We have asked the college to make the following improvements.

Work with your teachers to make sure that more of your lessons are planned to meet all of your needs and marking gives you better advice on how to improve.

Monitor the college's data carefully to identify pupil groups at risk of underachievement and analyse the impact of actions taken to improve student outcomes.

We would like you to help your college by continuing to work hard and behave well.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection of your college. We wish you every success in the future

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Additional Inspector

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