

Hereford Sixth Form College

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. Hereford Sixth Form College is medium-sized and holds Beacon Status. It shares a campus on the outskirts of Hereford city with a specialist college of arts and a general further education college. The college serves the city of Hereford and the sparsely populated and largely rural county of Herefordshire. Students also travel from neighbouring counties of Shropshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire as well as from the Welsh counties of Powys and Gwent. Nearly a quarter of students travel a considerable distance daily to reach the college. The social and economic environment in Herefordshire is generally favourable; however, pockets of deprivation exist within the city and in the rural areas. Although unemployment is well below regional and national averages, income levels are considerably lower than those regionally and nationally. Only a very small percentage of the local population is from minority ethnic groups compared with regional and national percentages. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE at A* to C grades in Herefordshire in 2007, including English and mathematics, was 51.7% compared to a national average of 46.8%.
2. The college offers provision, mainly at advanced level, in 12 of the 15 sector subject areas, with the exception of construction, retail and commercial enterprise and education and training. The highest number of students study in science and mathematics, arts and media, and language, literature and culture. It offers a general education course at intermediate level comprising a range of GCSE qualifications. The college's mission aims to provide a high quality education to GCE Advanced Level standard with a high level of pastoral care; to support and promote a programme of enrichment activities; to involve parents in the academic and personal progress of students; and to enhance the education provided through links with business and the wider community.
3. In September 2007, 1,726 full-time students enrolled at the college, almost all of whom are aged 16 to 18-years-old. The vast majority study at advanced level. Female students slightly outnumber males. The percentage of students enrolled at the college from minority ethnic groups is slightly larger than the percentage in the population within the college's catchment area.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The college's overall effectiveness is outstanding. A well embedded ethos of commitment to success and the provision of high quality care exist in all parts of the college and the atmosphere is vibrant and purposeful. Students' achievement is outstanding, as are the standards they attain. They make significantly better progress than predicted by their prior attainment at GCSE. Success rates at both intermediate and advanced level are consistently very high and well above average. Students become highly proficient at learning, including using key skills effectively. Too few, however, complete the portfolio element of the information and communication technology (ICT) key skill qualification at level 2 and success rates are low.
5. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers use a wide range of strategies highly effectively to inspire and challenge students. Almost all lessons are good or better. The use of information and learning technology (ILT) in learning has improved to be a good feature of many learning activities.
6. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. Its curriculum provides a rich and varied mix of advanced level subjects and includes an increasingly popular general education programme at intermediate level. This course encourages progression to advanced level well. The provision of extensive, high quality extra-curricular activities enhances academic study and impacts positively on students' personal and social development. The college integrates the development of key skills and health and safety education into the curriculum well. Social and educational inclusion is good with successful efforts to widen participation.
7. The college provides outstanding guidance and support through a broad range of highly responsive support services. Well established procedures are in place and reviewed regularly with prompt and effective action to ensure very high quality support. Academic support is a strong feature of tutorials. A range of targets is in place to challenge students constructively to achieve their full potential. Guidance, both pre-college and on course, is comprehensive, highly informative and helpful.
8. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and senior managers lead by example and staff morale is high. An unrelenting drive for improvement ensures managers and staff maintain and improve high standards. The college strives to provide equality of opportunity and this aspect of its work is outstanding. Quality assurance arrangements are highly effective. Self-assessment is well established and accurate. The college has made many improvements to the learning environment; however, some unsatisfactory temporary classrooms remain. The college caters for more students than it is funded for. It provides outstanding value for money. Almost all students are highly successful.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. The college has outstanding capacity to improve. The college has an excellent record of high and improving success rates and adding considerably to the value of students' learning experiences. The achievement of sustaining and improving these key strengths has taken place during considerable growth in the number of students and a broadening of their entry profile as the college pursues its inclusive approach. All aspects of the rigorous quality assurance arrangements work very effectively to ensure excellent provision. Almost all actions for improvement are effective within tight timescales. Self-assessment is thorough, comprehensive and sharply focused. Its use as a tool to bring about improvement is evident across all aspects of college provision.

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

10. The college has made good efforts to resolve the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and has sustained and further improved the strengths. Retention rates have improved, although a very few courses have below average rates. Staff development and further investment in ILT resources have resulted in considerable improvement in the use of ILT in learning. Classroom accommodation and specialist resources have improved in almost all cases; however, some unsatisfactory temporary classroom accommodation exists. Many improvements have successfully maximised study and social space within the constraints of the college site; however, space remains an issue at breaks and between lessons.

Key strengths

- excellent progress compared to prior attainment
- very high and improving success rates
- challenging and inspiring lessons
- extensive range of high quality extra-curricular activities
- highly effective support
- outstanding promotion of equality of opportunity
- a well embedded ethos of commitment to success and high quality care
- outstanding leadership.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- insufficient completion of ICT key skills portfolios at level 2
- unsatisfactory temporary classroom accommodation.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

11. Achievement and standards are outstanding. These have continued to improve since the last inspection, when inspectors judged them to be very high. This judgement matches the college's grade through self-assessment. Success rates have improved on courses at all levels to well above the national average, with an extremely high and improving number of students achieving the highest grades. The average number of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points gained both by each student and in each subject is high and makes the college one of the best performing colleges in the country by these measures. Many students enter the college with very good results at GCSE but even so, their performance at GCE AS and A level is significantly better than that predicted by their GCSE point scores. Students exceed expectations in the majority of subjects. They produce high standard work. All students achieve very well, regardless of gender, ethnicity or disability. Pass rates in external tests in ICT key skills are high but success rates are low because the majority of students do not complete the portfolio of evidence required to gain the qualification. Progression to higher education is excellent, with well over three-quarters of students moving on to degree courses. Attendance is improving and is good.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

12. The quality of provision is outstanding, which matches the college's judgement. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Most lessons are at least good and a significant proportion is outstanding. The college uses well established and rigorous lesson observation procedures very effectively to inform self-assessment of the quality of lessons, as well as to support the development of individual teachers. Observers are skilled, experienced and accurate in their judgements.
13. Teachers are highly qualified and have substantial experience in their specialist areas. They combine innovation, productive use of ILT and considerable skill to make lessons enjoyable and inspiring. The level of challenge posed through the demands and variation of activities used and a brisk pace motivates students. Teachers almost always ensure they are all fully engaged in lessons. Students demonstrate very good learning skills. They respond quickly to tasks set by teachers, working highly effectively either independently or in groups. Teachers successfully integrate core key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, as well as wider key skills, into learning.
14. Teachers use assessment very constructively to support learning. Coursework is demanding and set frequently. Teachers return marked work promptly, helping students to use feedback to improve their next piece of work. The priority given to the completion and final assessment of key skills portfolios is too low. Staff use a full range of initial assessments very effectively to identify additional learning needs. Learning support staff and teachers work seamlessly to support students with additional learning needs in achieving their full potential.

15. The curriculum is rich and broad and overall provision is outstanding in meeting the needs and interests of students. A wide range of subjects at advanced level and a general education programme at level 2 are well established. The college responds well to meeting needs of students and employers in line with its sixth form college designation. In developing its curriculum, the college works closely with the two adjacent colleges to avoid duplication and ensure coherence. The high quality, extensive extra-curricular activities improve the range of provision for students. The range includes exciting and highly interesting activities, which work very well to develop students' personal and social skills as well as broadening their horizons. Their awareness of topical and cultural affairs is impressive and they use their views effectively. The student council is active and productive, including improving the college's recycling initiatives. Students contribute to a number of charitable and community projects. Enterprise skills are well developed with an increasing focus on work-related education over and above where this occurs as part of set syllabi. The general studies programme covers health and safety education comprehensively. Sport has a high priority and is enjoyed by many students.
16. Social and educational inclusion is good. Efforts to widen participation from less advantaged areas within the college's catchment area have proved successful. The college is developing this further through several innovative initiatives such as information, advice and guidance targeted at vulnerable groups of pupils in local schools. Higher than average numbers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and they often exceed their expected outcomes.
17. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. A comprehensive range of high quality and highly effective support services is in place. Recent additions to this range include a college doctor, who consults regularly on site, and an anti-smoking clinic. The college has further strengthened the well established procedures for academic and pastoral support by moving to electronic recording of individual students' progress and very tight monitoring of timely completion of all tutorial activities. Tutors use a range of targets effectively to keep students and parents/carers informed of progress, set challenges and encourage aspiration to higher achievement. Frequent meetings assess the progress of students causing concern and supportive intervention is quick and highly effective. Vulnerable students are cared for sensitively and monitored closely.
18. Careers advice is of high quality and broad in its remit. Considerable and highly effective help is in place to support applications to higher education. As a result, a very high proportion of students are successful in gaining places at their first choice universities. Students seeking employment receive a tailored package of activities making use of local and regional contacts to help secure their desired outcome.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

19. Leadership and management are outstanding, in line with the college's self-assessment report. The principal, well supported by his two deputies, provides excellent leadership. The stability of this well established team, together with the high esteem in which they are held by the rest of the college, have helped sustain morale and communication at very high levels. Managers, through working openly with staff and students, ensure that an ethos of commitment to success and high quality care pervades all parts of the college. The college has addressed successfully the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection whilst sustaining further significant improvements in standards. The college has exceeded its key performance targets in relation to recruitment and success rates for the last three years.
20. The strategic development plan supports clearly the college's mission and its commitment to further increase levels of collaboration with its two neighbour colleges, schools and employers. The plan provides an effective framework for operational planning within the college. Outstanding quality assurance procedures underpin strong curriculum management. The arrangements for subject monitoring and review are rigorous and, together with the lesson observation system, provide an extremely secure base for self-assessment and the identification of staff training needs. Self-assessment procedures are thorough and the resulting reports provide an accurate assessment of the quality of provision. Procedures for obtaining the views of students and other key stakeholders are very good. Analysis of questionnaire returns shows that students are extremely satisfied with life at the college.
21. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college has made a thorough and well considered response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA). The excellent range of policies provides comprehensive coverage of all aspects of equality. Managers assess all college policies for equality and diversity impact. The monitoring and analysis of participation, success rates, progression and many other aspects of the college's work by gender, ethnicity and disability are exemplary. The procedures for safeguarding students are rigorous.
22. Governance is good. Governors provide a broad range of experience and operate within a well established framework for governance. They are fully involved in determining the strategic direction of the college and scrutinise matters relating to students' performance and the college's finances rigorously. Financial management is outstanding. Financial monitoring and control procedures are robust. These have enabled the college to maintain a secure financial position over a long period. Staff are well qualified and highly

experienced. The college provides a safe environment and continues to make improvements to its premises but is aware that its portable classroom accommodation needs replacing. The deployment of resources is excellent and value for money is outstanding.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	42	81	64	17	0			
	05/06	25	96	71	25	0			
	06/07	64	100			4	100		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
NVQs	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
Other	04/05	42	81	64	17	0			
	05/06	25	96	71	25	0			
	06/07	64	100			4	100		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	466	79	73	6	6	100	56	44
	05/06	530	85	78	7	4	75	64	11
	06/07	479	91			9	100		
GCSEs	04/05	432	79	78	1	0			
	05/06	504	86	82	4	0			
	06/07	440	92			9	100		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	19	95			0			
NVQs	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
Other	04/05	34	76	62	14	0			
	05/06	26	81	70	11	1	100	61	39
	06/07	20	85			0			

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004/05 to 2006/07, 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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	5533	88	82	6	50	84	59	25
	05/06	6058	88	83	5	52	88	65	23
	06/07	6405	91			68	90		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	2033	94	92	2	28	89	76	13
	05/06	2199	95	93	2	30	93	78	15
	06/07	2525	96			28	89		
AS Levels	04/05	3473	84	78	6	22	77	54	23
	05/06	3787	85	79	6	22	82	58	24
	06/07	3719	87			37	92		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
NVQs	04/05	0				0			
	05/06	0				0			
	06/07	0				0			
Other	04/05	27	67	72	-5	0			
	05/06	72	78	75	3	0			
	06/07	161	87			3	67		