

Birkenhead Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		4–7 December 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- This is an inclusive college which successfully enables learners to raise their aspirations and progress to the next stage of their careers with confidence. Since the last inspection the college has improved success rates year-on-year. Progression rates to university are particularly good for learners who underperformed previously at school.
- Learners make good progress. The vast majority develop good skills, knowledge and understanding within their chosen courses. The college plays a vital role within its local communities in making GCE A-level provision accessible to a range of learners with diverse needs.
- Much teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers are confident and have a strong focus on the development of an aspirational culture for their students. Most lessons offer ample opportunity for learners to develop independent learning skills. Additional learning support is strong and its high quality ensures that all groups of learners have the opportunity to make good progress.
- The college has a strong focus on high aspirations and continuous improvement which are fully embraced by senior leaders and staff. Effective actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment lead to better outcomes for learners. Learners are very positive about their college experience and leave with enhanced ambitions and renewed confidence.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Success rates need to be improved further. In particular, the percentage of higher grades on advanced courses requires improvement.
- The most successful and innovative practice in teaching and learning is not sufficiently spread across all areas to ensure that all teaching is good or better.
- A small minority of provision, which is underperforming, requires urgent improvement.
- There are missed opportunities in lesson planning to enhance learners' understanding of equality and diversity.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on advanced-level courses. Increase the percentage of higher grades on advanced-level courses using some of the successful strategies already impacting in mathematics. In doing this, ensure that in all subjects the more-able learners receive sufficient challenge to enable them to meet their full potential.
- Develop the sharing of good and outstanding practice so that innovative approaches observed in science and mathematics, art and design, and business are spread to all areas and are used to enhance teaching further. In doing this, ensure that the small minority of provision which requires urgent improvement benefits from teaching which is consistently good or better.
- Ensure that teachers take sufficient opportunities within lesson planning and delivery to deepen learners' understanding of equality and diversity, cultural diversity and social inclusiveness.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The majority of learners enter the college with GCSE points scores below the average for enrolment onto advanced-level courses. By the end of their course learners overall have made good progress and some have made outstanding progress. In the subject areas inspected, learners made good progress in developing subject knowledge and understanding. Learners on advanced vocational courses make very good progress. Learners on a small number of courses do not make the progress expected.
- Success rates for advanced-level courses are in line with, and sometimes better than, national averages. Since the last inspection there has been a year-on-year increase in success rates. Current learner performance continues to rise. The achievements of higher grades at GCE A level remain too low.
- For learners taking GCSE English and mathematics courses in 2011/12, the A* to C success rates were high and well above the national average. Success rates for the small numbers of learners on functional skills courses in English and mathematics are also high. Inspectors noted a strong focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills in observed lessons.
- Gaps in achievement between different groups of learners have been significantly narrowed. Learners who have previously underachieved at school or who are disadvantaged make particularly good progress. There is effective tracking of learners' progress and quick intervention if any are falling behind.
- The progress made by learners who are disabled or with special educational needs is good. Highly effective support both in the classroom and in support sessions enables these learners to do as well as their peers.
- Learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. Almost all attend regularly and are punctual. They have very positive attitudes to learning. Many obtain useful additional qualifications and some gain useful workplace experience. In most subjects learners clearly understand what they need to do to progress in their chosen career.
- A high proportion of learners gain a place at a higher-education institution or progress to employment. In 2011/12 nearly two thirds of those who went to university were from families with non-graduate parents or carers. A large proportion of learners move from intermediate to advanced courses during their time at the college. Progression from GCE AS level to GCE A level is also high.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and contribute to positive outcomes for learners. Most lessons observed during the inspection were good and some were outstanding. In the best lessons, teaching and learning are lively and purposeful. For example, graphic design learners worked confidently within a well-supported learning environment to research contemporary artists and apply influences within their own designs.
- Most teachers use questioning effectively in lessons to check understanding. The use of traffic-light cards and mini whiteboards provide teachers with a rapid means of checking understanding and evidence and moving the lesson forward with pace. In a few lessons learners were not sufficiently challenged to provide fuller answers, use appropriate subject terminology and justify their ideas.
- The few lessons that required improvement were characterised by a lack of pace and challenge and the learning activities did not develop higher-order thinking skills. Highly effective strategies observed within subjects like mathematics and business studies are not sufficiently spread across the curriculum to enable all teaching to be good or better.
- Teaching and learning are generally well planned. In the better sessions, plans indicate specific learning goals for individuals or groups. A variety of teaching methods and learning resources is employed effectively to interest and engage learners in their learning and most learners respond enthusiastically.
- The quality of resources to support learning is good and most teachers prepare engaging learning materials. Learners find the college's computer-based resources particularly useful in helping them to continue learning outside the classroom, to track their own progress and negotiate strategies to make up any hours of 'study deficit' recorded on this system. The college acknowledges the need for a greater use of the interactive features of new technologies within the classroom.
- Learners appreciate the good level of personal support and advice available. Tutorials help learners develop their understanding of a broad range of personal and social issues and learners have been actively involved in the formulation of the college's tutorial programme. Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Effective support from learning support staff within sessions enables learners to participate equally as well as their peers.
- Subject teachers and personal tutors fully support individual learners through the use of college-wide review days, individual tutorials and the pastoral notes entered onto the online progress monitoring system. The college provides a range of additional support and revision sessions to help those who are falling behind with their studies. Arrangements for monitoring learners' progress and attendance are rigorous and effective.
- All managers, teachers, learners and parents are able to access the college's online progress monitoring system to view learners' progress and performance reports and a significant proportion of parents access progress reports in this way. Teachers set aspirational achievement targets and learners are aware of their progress towards these targets.
- Assessment and feedback arrangements are good. Teachers provide many opportunities to practise the assessments to ensure that learners understand the requirements of the examination. Teachers provide detailed annotations within marked work and give specific advice and strategies for improvement.
- Learners without GCSE English and mathematics receive good support to achieve these qualifications during their time at college. Teachers take opportunities to develop English and mathematical skills within lessons and usually pay attention to spellings and correct inaccuracies when marking.
- Learners agree that initial advice and guidance have enabled them to make informed choices about the college and their courses. Completion of pre-course assessed work, as part of the college's 'flying start' initiative, is helping all learners to make a positive and informed start to their course. Learners receive good support from personal tutors to help them progress to

higher education and some learners benefit from advice and guidance about entering employment and opportunities for apprenticeships.

- Teachers do not take sufficient opportunities within lesson planning and delivery to deepen learners' understanding of equality and diversity, cultural diversity and social inclusiveness.

Science and mathematics

Good

Learning programmes for 16-18

- Teaching is good and there is some outstanding practice, leading to good and improving success rates in the majority of mathematics and advanced science courses. Across the provision, the achievement of higher grades at GCE A level is low. However, recently, higher grades at GCE AS level have improved as a result of better targeted strategies.
- Lessons are carefully planned and teachers encourage learner participation by using a wide range of learning activities. Teachers develop and check understanding thoroughly. Traffic-light cards, smiley-faces cards and individual whiteboards are used effectively in plenary activities to check learning against the lesson objectives.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge and targeted questions appropriately, providing hints to elicit answers from weaker learners with good use of praise. However, the use of more probing questions to provide extra challenge is variable. In some lessons insufficient extra material is available to provide additional stimulus particularly for the more-able learners.
- Collaborative learning approaches in class are used skilfully across the provision, with learners often completing tasks in pairs or small groups. Collaborative learning is particularly effective in promoting learning when the teacher pre-arranges the teams so that weaker and stronger learners work together.
- English and mathematics skills are thoroughly reinforced. There is appropriate stress on the correct use of terminology and language throughout the provision. For example, in a forensic science class, team exercises were used to determine the suitability of different graphs to represent the relationship between the length of the radius bone and the height of a cadaver. The exercise clearly improved the learners' mathematical confidence.
- Learners are regularly assessed and work is marked promptly. Feedback is usually constructive although on occasions too brief. A good variety of marking strategies is used. Learners make good use of the mark schemes that are given to mathematics learners to guide as well as check their progress.
- Highly effective support is provided to learners both in and outside the classroom. Learners appreciate the frequent after-college classes as well as the widespread informal extra support. Flexible timetabling and staffing enable mathematics support to be directed to targeted learners at key times of the year. The provision is responsive and care is taken to enrol learners on the most appropriate courses using introductory assignments and induction tests.
- There is good use of information and learning technology (ILT). Teachers use interactive whiteboards confidently to develop solutions using learners' input, to incorporate video demonstrations, and to time learners' activities. The virtual learning environment (VLE) contains very good course-related material as well as some excellent extra-curricular resources to engage learners. Learners regularly use the system in their own time to improve their notes or understanding.
- Teachers miss opportunities to extend learners' knowledge of equality and diversity in lessons and there is a lack of identification of such opportunities in schemes of work and lesson plans.

Business, law and economics

Good

Learning programmes for 16-18

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Consistently good and sometimes outstanding teaching is reflected in the good outcomes for learners. Learners make good progress and some make outstanding progress. In particular, learners with low entry qualifications perform above their predicted grade level.
- In the best sessions learners have ample opportunity to develop independent learning skills. On many courses learners plan their own learning activity around a core scenario set by the teacher. They allocate tasks and monitor their own progress in highly cooperative and carefully planned group work. The teacher acts as a facilitator and learners are highly motivated.
- Sessions are generally thoroughly planned. Staff take account of learners' initial assessment and predicted grades when planning lessons. Tracking is used very effectively in ensuring learners are aware of their progress.
- In the few less-successful lessons pace was slow and learners were less engaged. In these lessons opportunities to provide greater challenge for more-able learners were not fully developed.
- Feedback is detailed. Staff regularly assess learners' progress and give constructive feedback. Excellent monitoring processes enable learners to complete well-planned, detailed assessments which fully meet performance criteria. Staff use available software to record the ongoing progress of learners and produce clear written feedback on how they can improve.
- The use of ILT is well developed on most courses and particularly well developed in law. In a few areas it remains underdeveloped, particularly in providing extension materials and stimulus to challenge the more-able students.
- Staff are highly motivated and have relevant and recent industrial experience. They use this experience to ensure that learners have access to current employment practice. All intermediate BTEC business learners and many GCE AS learners in law have the opportunity of relevant work experience.
- English and mathematical performance is monitored through thorough marking. In most cases teachers correct grammatical errors although in a few cases teachers are missing opportunities to correct basic grammatical mistakes.
- Tutorials are well planned and support the development of learners' personal skills. Delivery of sessions around personal appearances, branding and perceptions strongly underpins learners' success in developing work skills. Learners spoke of how their self-confidence has grown as their courses progress.
- Strong support by teachers enables learners to benefit from outstanding additional support. This additional support is used constructively to enable learners to make consistently good progress. Monitoring of attendance and punctuality is rigorous. Learners benefit from high expectations, strong motivation, care and support by staff.
- Initial advice and guidance are provided prior to enrolment to ensure learners are aware of what is required of them to be successful on their proposed courses. Learners are given the opportunity to produce further evidence of their capabilities at the pre-enrolment stage using the 'flying start' initiative. Progression rates to university and employment are high.
- Equality and diversity are variable. Gaps in the achievement of different groups of students have been significantly narrowed. However, in lesson planning opportunities are missed to reflect the diversity of British society.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good. Strong leadership by the Principal successfully promotes an ambitious vision for the college. Senior managers, fully supported by governors and staff, succeed in realising this vision by promoting teaching, learning and support which enables learners to make good progress in their studies and to improve their economic well-being. Since the last inspection actions to improve successful learner outcomes have been effective.
- Governors provide a good degree of challenge to senior managers and fully understand what the college needs to do to improve. The use of data by governors to assess learners' performance and progress has been sharpened and they are asking searching questions of college management and setting challenging targets. They have a good understanding of performance management and the quality of teaching and learning within the college.
- Rigorous arrangements for quality improvement and self-assessment are now well established. A particular emphasis is placed upon overall college targets for success rates. The college has improved its approach to target-setting at course level by introducing targets for high-grade pass rates, which it acknowledges remain a key challenge. Inspectors judged self-assessment within subject areas and for cross-college aspects to be accurate.
- Well-developed arrangements to manage and assess the performance of staff enable managers to set and monitor targets for all staff in a timely and systematic manner. In most areas these are very effective in promoting improvement and addressing areas for improvement. However, the college recognises that a greater degree of improvement and at a faster pace is necessary for a very small number of courses.
- Actions to improve teaching and learning have enabled learners to benefit from a greater proportion of lessons which are either good or outstanding. Concerns over inadequate teaching are tackled with some urgency. Some improvement plans, following the observation of teaching and learning which require improvement, are not completed in a sufficiently timely fashion.
- Staff are well qualified and they make good use of resources to support learning. A good range of professional development activities enable staff to develop further their teaching skills and subject knowledge.
- A wide range of GCE A-level subjects provides learners with good opportunities to make sensible subject choices which lead to higher education or employment. Within the context of its mission, the college responds very effectively to the need to promote provision which meets local and national priorities such as enabling a higher proportion of learners from low income households to progress to universities.
- A key strength of the college is the role it plays in making GCE A-level provision accessible to a range of learners with diverse needs. For example, a significant number of learners have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good partnership arrangements with the local authority and some local schools lead to initiatives which meet the needs of some pupils who have underachieved in the past.
- The college has developed effective ways in which to incorporate the views of learners to inform the development of the curriculum better and to improve teaching. Detailed feedback is given to learners on how their suggestions have been acted upon. Learners were very positive about their college experience and how successfully the college supports their ambitions and develops their self-confidence.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is variable. The college acknowledges the need to promote equality and diversity across the curriculum, and particularly within lessons, in order to develop a greater understanding by its learners of the diversity of the wider British society. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that policies and procedures are up to date, and effective training arrangements are now in place to update all staff in equality and diversity. Learners from disadvantaged groups succeed at least as well as other learners and there are no significant achievement gaps in relation to pass rates.

- The college complies with its responsibilities for safeguarding learners. Any incidents are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Learners feel safe and valued and they appreciate studying in a place where they experience no bullying or harassment. A positive atmosphere of mutual respect among students is evident around the college.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Birkenhead Sixth form college**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learning programmes
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science and mathematics	2
Business, law and economics	2

Provider details

Provider name	Birkenhead Sixth form college
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16-18 and 19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1,208
	Part-time: 483
Principal/CEO	Kathryn Podmore
Date of previous inspection	May 2009
Website address	www.bsfc.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Full-time	NA	NA	100	1	1,080	37	NA	NA
Part-time	NA	NA	3	99	1	18	NA	NA
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Number of learners aged 14-16	n/a							
Number of community learners	n/a							
Number of employability learners	n/a							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ n/a 							

Additional socio-economic information

The Wirral Metropolitan area presents a distinctive contrast between an affluent western region and an eastern region made up of areas with significant deprivation. There are large variations in levels of people who are not in work from over 56% in parts of Birkenhead to less than 3% in other areas. The geographical pattern of disadvantage impacts on the college's recruitment pattern but a more significant influence is the pattern of selective education. The presence of six selective secondary schools and two independent schools, with selection at 11+, means that the college's intake at age 16 is skewed towards the lower end of the ability scale. Thirty-eight per cent of college students are recruited from four 11 to 16 partner high schools in Birkenhead, the remainder from secondary schools with sixth forms across the Wirral. GCSE results for partner schools are variable, with some significantly below national benchmarks, although the Wirral schools average A* to C pass rate (inclusive of English and mathematics) in summer 2011 was 64.4%. The 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) rate for Wirral is 9.31% with a disproportionate percentage located in eastern Wirral and the Birkenhead area.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Patrick Geraghty HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the assistant principal for performance and standards as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the subject areas listed in the report above.

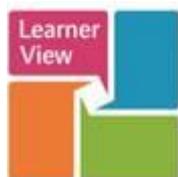
What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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