

Bilborough College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

27–30 September 2016

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers at all levels have a clear and effective focus on ensuring that teaching is consistently good and students work hard.
- Highly effective performance management combined with good staff training has led to clear improvements in teaching.
- The vast majority of students make good progress and achieve their qualifications.
- Almost all students who complete their studies progress to positive destinations. The majority go on to higher education and many gain places in highly selective universities. A smaller number of students find employment.
- Teachers demonstrate high expectations and students respond to this by working hard both within and outside lessons.
- Teaching is highly effective in helping students to think for themselves and to work well with their peers.
- All members of the college community, including students, teachers and support staff, collaborate very well. This has created a culture of collective endeavour that supports the progress of students.
- The college has an inclusive culture in which students with diverse identities feel welcome and safe. They show respect and tolerance towards each other.
- Students benefit from a highly effective enrichment programme that broadens their experience and enables them to develop a wide range of skills and attributes that will help them to become thoughtful and productive citizens.
- Arrangements to safeguard students are highly effective. Leaders have responded particularly well to the obligations placed on them by the 'Prevent' duty.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Bilborough College is a large sixth form college in Nottingham. It offers 16 to 19 study programmes mainly comprising A levels, with a small but growing vocational programme. The college attracts students from the city of Nottingham itself and large areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.
- In Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, the proportion of young people who leave school with five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is similar to the national rate but it is much lower in the city of Nottingham itself. Locally, fewer adults are qualified to level 3 or above than nationally. Unemployment in Nottinghamshire is lower than the national rate, especially for males. The proportion of people employed in managerial and professional occupations is similar to the national picture. The largest employment sectors in the area are public administration, education, health, finance, business services, wholesale, retail and manufacturing.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attainment and progress of non-White British students, those with learning difficulties, and those who are from financially disadvantaged backgrounds by:
 - implementing consistently the new risk assessment and support arrangements for these students
 - reviewing carefully the reasons for the underperformance of these groups to identify any factors that lead to slower progress and lower attainment, including progression from Year 12 to Year 13.
- Increase the proportion of students with lower prior attainment who complete the full two-year study programme by analysing the reasons for lower progression from Year 12 to Year 13, and identifying and implementing approaches that lead to improvements.
- Place renewed focus on helping teachers to:
 - provide more challenging activities for students to ensure that they think even more deeply
 - use questioning more effectively so that all students are helped to extend their knowledge, especially those who may be finding topics difficult.
- Increase the proportion of students who participate in well-planned work experience by:
 - targeting more effectively those students who would benefit from this experience
 - strengthening and broadening links with employers to increase the range of available opportunities.
- Strengthen quality assurance processes, particularly lesson observations, to ensure that managers develop a deeper understanding of the impact on students' progress of the different techniques used by teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, governors and managers have taken decisive action to remedy the significant weaknesses identified at the previous inspection in early 2015. Leaders and managers have reversed the decline in standards witnessed prior to 2014. They have established a culture that is characterised by a determination to ensure that all students enjoy their learning and work hard to succeed, although this is not yet fully embedded. Leaders have removed most of the obstacles to improvement that hindered progress for too long.
- Leaders and managers have focused on keeping things simple and getting them right. Teaching has improved substantially, and teachers' expectations of students are now higher. Students are making more rapid progress because they are doing more work than previously, both in and out of lessons. Staff morale has improved, and middle managers and teachers recognise the virtue of students receiving the same consistent message of high expectations in all subjects.
- Leaders and managers have used a judicious combination of high-quality staff development and effective performance management to bring about change. They have provided effective, tailored and interesting training to enable all teachers to improve their practice. A number of teachers and managers who struggled to subscribe to the expectation of higher standards have left the college. Increasingly, teachers and middle managers are held accountable not just for the quality of their teaching but also for the progress of their students.
- The culture of the college is now more critical and reflective, although managers do not always demonstrate this in written self-assessment documentation or in evaluations of teachers' lessons. Nevertheless, they recognise the key areas for further improvement. They base assessments of teaching on a broad range of evidence and not just lesson observations. However, the value of observing teachers when they have been given a fortnight's notice of the lesson to be observed is doubtful.
- A very recent restructuring of middle management has strengthened the college's capacity to improve. New faculty managers are capable, and are much more involved in overseeing the quality of students' day-to-day experiences than was the case under the previous structure. Increasingly, middle managers work well together to reinforce consistent high expectations across all areas.
- Leaders have implemented most aspects of study programmes well. Students benefit from a wide range of qualification options, including an increased vocational offer, and take programmes tailored to their individual aspirations. Students who need to improve their mathematics and English make good progress, and an increasing number are taking a higher-level mathematics qualification. Students receive very good advice on their future options, especially if they are progressing to university.
- The college's links with employers, including students' opportunities to benefit from high-quality external work experience, need further development. However, links with local universities and schools are productive.

- Managers analyse in detail the progress of different groups of students and although all groups are making better progress than previously, a few, such as those who are not White British, make slower progress in the first year of their course than their peers. Efforts to close these gaps are yet to be fully effective. The college community celebrates its diversity very effectively. Visitors are welcomed by a wide range of interesting displays promoting respect for social difference, tolerance and inclusivity. Students of all faiths, sexualities and ethnicities value highly the welcoming and mutually supportive atmosphere of the college.

The governance of the provider

- Governance has improved since the previous inspection. Increasingly, governors scrutinise closely the information provided by managers, and ask searching questions to ensure that they understand the progress made in improving the quality of provision. Governors receive detailed and useful reports from leaders on key matters.
- Governors' range of skills is broader than previously, with particularly good representation from higher education and recent appointments from business. Although governors oversee the strategic direction of the college, they do not always distinguish between short-term objectives and the longer-term future and sustainability of the college.
- Governors have received appropriate training on key priorities, including safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers take all aspects of their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously, and their approach to ensuring that students both feel and are safe is particularly rigorous. Record-keeping is comprehensive and up to date, and checks on the suitability of those working at the college go well beyond statutory requirements.
- Managers have implemented the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty particularly well. Risk assessment identifies the key threats and actions that need to be taken to mitigate those threats. Training for staff is exemplary. Students show a particularly good understanding of debates around radicalisation and extremism, and an awareness of the potential threats to their safety. Arrangements to ensure that students do not access inappropriate content online are particularly strong.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The large majority of teachers use their good subject knowledge to develop lessons with well-planned and varied activities that students find interesting and enjoyable. Consequently, students work hard to complete tasks to the best of their ability and most make good progress.

- In most lessons, teachers encourage students to think and learn for themselves. They use pair and group work very effectively to encourage students to analyse, criticise and improve each other's work. As a result, students become more independent and make good progress without constant reference to the teacher. This is particularly evident in art, economics, English language, chemistry and mathematics. In a chemistry lesson, for example, students working in pairs deduced the chemical structure of alcohols by analysing their names.
- Students receive a large amount of relevant and useful homework, with one student moved to tell inspectors that 'chemistry homework is legendary'. They complete homework tasks diligently and submit their work on time. Teachers' feedback on students' homework, assignments and classwork is detailed and personalised. Students value teachers' comments and use this information well to improve the quality of their future work. Students working on individual projects in subjects such as art make rapid progress partly because of excellent feedback and suggestions from their teachers.
- In lessons, teachers provide very good help for students to develop practical and employability skills. In the majority, students develop a good range of soft skills very effectively including presentation, collaboration, note taking and self-reflection skills. Students in many subjects, especially art, performing arts, media and science, benefit from practical skills development directly linked to their future career aspirations.
- Teachers monitor the progress of A-level students very well. They quickly identify students at risk of falling below their target grade and direct them to support classes. These classes include sessions to support the development of their study skills and specialist subject support workshops where students can receive help on a one-to-one basis. Consequently, most of these students are able to get back on track.
- Staff provide excellent support to help students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities to succeed. Students are encouraged to declare additional learning needs prior to or during enrolment, or at any point during their studies. If a teacher becomes concerned that a student may have a learning difficulty, they can refer them to the additional learning support team. Additional support staff quickly assess the needs of each student and swiftly provide any necessary assistance. The college has a dedicated study room in which students who need extra help can complete work and receive specialist support, and they value this resource highly.
- Teachers produce good-quality print and electronic resources that students use well both within and outside lessons. In addition, managers have purchased a range of high-quality online resources that students find helpful. Classrooms, workshops and laboratories are very well equipped. For example, music technology students benefit from state-of-the-art equipment and learn in a realistic working environment. These resources enable students to make the most of lessons and continue to make progress in their own time.
- Students develop their understanding of the values that underpin British society through a well-conceived tutorial programme. Consequently, they develop a good understanding of diversity themes and are well prepared for their participation in adult life.
- Teachers' use of questioning requires improvement. They do not always take into account the wide range of students' abilities in the classroom and, consequently, some of the least able students do not make enough progress on more challenging topics.

- A small minority of the most able students are not always challenged to work to their full potential in lessons and do not make as much progress as expected. Often, teachers plan extension tasks but do not use them, or they plan extension activities that simply require more of the same from students, rather than providing greater challenge.
- Teachers do not track the progress of vocational students well enough. Teachers have their own bespoke methods for tracking their students but these are not consistently good. There is no easy way for leaders to monitor the overall progress of these students.
- A few teachers do not do enough to develop students' subject-specific vocabulary in lessons and, for a few students, this limits the clarity and precision of their written work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students arrive at lessons on time and ready to work as a result of the college's culture of high expectations. On the rare occasions when students arrive late, teachers challenge them effectively and this helps to prepare them for future employment. Attendance is satisfactory.
- Students behave extremely well, both within lessons and in communal areas around the college. They focus well on their learning and most spend a substantial amount of their own time in further study of the topics they have covered in class. Students are proud of their achievements and are articulate and self-confident. They are respectful of each other and, as a result, the college offers a welcoming and inclusive environment in which students feel happy and safe.
- Managers and staff have developed a wide range of additional activities in which many students participate, often leading events themselves. The enrichment programme has five overarching themes: interacting with others, being active, taking notice of the world around them, learning new skills and giving. Students are encouraged to participate in activities that cover all five themes, and this helps many to develop a broad range of skills and abilities that prepare them well for participation as active citizens.
- Students receive good advice and guidance prior to joining their programmes. Many participate in taster sessions before choosing subjects, and all benefit from pre-enrolment interviews in which they discuss their career aspirations and abilities with appropriate members of staff. As a result, students embark on study programmes that match their ambitions and aptitudes. For example, those wishing to pursue a career in engineering take mathematics and physics programmes, and those wishing to pursue medicine take appropriate science A levels. Where students take vocational programmes, these also match their career aspirations. Ongoing careers advice and guidance are impartial and helpful, especially for those planning to go to university.
- Staff help students to keep themselves safe through a tutorial programme that includes relevant information on such things as abuse, bullying and online safety. Students develop a clear understanding of the risks posed by those who might seek to draw them into extremist behaviour. Students feel safe and are safe, and know whom they should contact if they have any concerns about themselves or their friends.
- College staff and students promote the principles of diversity well. For example, science classrooms contain displays about prominent female scientists. The student lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) group is active and LGBT students report feeling safe, happy and secure in the college.

- The proportion of students who participate in meaningful work experience is too low, especially for those following vocational programmes. Until recently, the only students to participate in work experience were those who pursued it themselves. Although staff have supported these students well to secure relevant and useful placements, too many students chose not to take part. Managers are aware of this and have taken steps to strengthen this aspect of study programmes by targeting students who would benefit from work experience, but it is too early to judge their success.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- In the large majority of AS- and A-level subjects, students make at least the progress expected of them and consequently achieve at least the grades expected. In a few subjects, including computing, electronics, product design, drama, performance studies, German and Spanish, they make substantially better progress from their starting points than might be expected.
- The number of AS- and A-level subjects in which students make slower progress has reduced and is now small. However, the small number of students following vocational programmes do not make quite as much progress as they ought, particularly those who study certificates in applied science and law and those who take extended diplomas in performing arts.
- The proportion of AS-, A-level and BTEC diploma students who achieve their qualifications is in line with the high rate of other sixth form colleges. However, although the number is small, too few of those who take BTEC certificates are successful.
- A high proportion of students who resit GCSE English and mathematics qualifications successfully gain A* to C grades and this rate is higher than in other colleges.
- Students are enthusiastic about their learning. They participate with energy and passion in lessons and speak positively about their experiences. They produce good-quality work both in lessons and through homework tasks. Their enthusiasm and hard work contribute well to their progress and attainment, and prepare them well for exam success.
- Students undertake subjects that align appropriately with their career aspirations. As a result, the vast majority of students progress to higher education with many gaining places at highly selective universities. The large majority of those who do not progress to higher education gain appropriate employment, including on apprenticeship programmes.
- The small number of students looked after achieve somewhat better than their peers. However, overall, students from non-White British backgrounds, those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those from financially disadvantaged backgrounds make slightly less progress and attain slightly less well than others. Managers did not identify these gaps until too late in the 2015/16 academic year and, consequently, interventions were too late to make a significant difference to outcomes. They have now implemented a well-considered monitoring system to track the progress of students from high-risk groups so that they can identify any underperformance at an early stage and intervene quickly to support them, but it is too early to judge the impact of these actions.

- For students who join the college with GCSE results that are below average, progression from Years 12 to 13 is lower than might be expected. Although initial advice and guidance are good and help students choose appropriate qualifications, retention of these students is slightly lower than in other sixth form colleges and fewer students who are eligible to progress to Year 13 choose to do so.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130787
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,764
Principal/CEO	Chris Bradford
Telephone number	01158 515 000
Website	www.bilborough.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	1,531	1	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	1							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of teaching, learning and assessment, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Russ Henry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alan Hinchliffe	Her Majesty's Inspector
John Berry	Ofsted Inspector
Thomas Fay	Ofsted Inspector

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