

Birkenhead Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

7–9 December 2016

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

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Governors provide very effective support and challenge to senior leaders. Leaders, managers and governors are relentless in seeking ways to improve and ensure a high-quality learning experience for all students.
- Leaders and managers have very high expectations and have created a culture where staff strive for excellence. Staff are ambitious for their students and this results in students making excellent progress from their starting points.
- Senior managers place a strong focus on continually improving the quality of teaching and learning; they provide teachers with very effective professional development and support.
- Performance management is very effective; in the few cases where staff have under-performed, managers have swiftly put in place support and interventions.
- Teachers and support staff work tirelessly to ensure that students make rapid and sustained progress.
- The college provides an inclusive ethos where differences are celebrated; it uses a range of very effective and innovative ways to support students who have a wide range of diverse needs and barriers to learning.
- Students' achievements are excellent; there have been improvements year-on-year since the last inspection. The vast majority of students on both academic and vocational courses make very good progress, with a high proportion achieving high grades.
- The development of students' English and mathematics skills is exceptionally strong. The proportions of students improving their GCSE grades and achieving grade C are very high.
- Teachers deliver high-quality, purposeful lessons and provide comprehensive feedback that enables students to know exactly what they need to do to achieve their potential and develop the skills they need to thrive in higher education and employment.
- Students' progress, attitudes to learning and broader personal development are all monitored very closely by teachers; students who start to fall behind are identified quickly and supported very well to get back on track.
- Students are clear about their course targets and staff's expectations; the college's core values are consistently reinforced, as exemplified in the excellent standards of behaviour and respect for all members of the college and visitors.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Birkenhead Sixth Form College is on a single site located just outside the main town centre of Birkenhead. In the Wirral area, school leavers' achievement of five GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics at grades A* to C is above the national average. Wirral has a mixture of high-performing and underperforming schools. There are wide differences in deprivation in the borough, with affluent areas to the west and high levels of deprivation in the east. The vast majority of students who enrol at the college are aged 16 to 18 and taking A-level courses. The college offers a wide range of AS-level, A-level and vocational courses with a small number of level 2 courses and GCSE English and mathematics. The college has a very small adult learning provision to meet an identified gap in the local area; the majority of these students are referred by Jobcentre Plus. The college has approximately 1,400 students and provides courses which include health and social care, science, mathematics, sport, psychology, media, English, performing arts, information and communication technology, business, languages and humanities.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement rates on the very small minority of underperforming courses so that all students make at least good progress and achieve their aspirational target grades.
- Ensure that teachers provide opportunities to expand the knowledge of the small minority of students with an insufficiently wide understanding of diversity.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal and the leadership team have maintained an unrelenting focus on developing high expectations of all who work or learn at the college. They instil a culture of improvement where staff and students grow in confidence and are able to reach their full potential. Students develop into young adults with a thirst for learning.
- The responsive and relevant curriculum is very effective in preparing students for their future learning and employment. Local and regional labour market information informs curriculum development; for example, science and mathematics have been key areas for development in response to local employment needs. The development of health and social care provision is effectively responding to local needs in the National Health Service. Close liaison with other local providers and the local authority ensures that the college positions itself well within the local community.
- Students' progress in English and mathematics is exceptionally strong. A variety of successful strategies ensure that students make rapid progress and develop their skills; many improve upon their previous results and achieve a grade C in GCSE English and mathematics.
- A key focus of leaders and managers is continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Managers use the findings from observations of teaching and learning to inform detailed action plans for teachers. They provide very effective professional development and support so that these plans are implemented and make a difference. Opportunities for peer observations and to share good practice are well developed and very effective. Consequently, teachers continually share ideas and strive to improve their practice. Performance management is strong, characterised by swift intervention in the event of any underperformance. Teachers are clear about the standards expected of them and what they need to achieve.
- Managers assess the provision accurately; their self-evaluation process is rigorous, and robust data analysis supports the findings. Senior managers, governors and college staff know the college's strengths and areas for improvement well; they use this information very effectively to plan actions for improvement. Senior managers track robustly all aspects of each student's journey, including tracking their progress, behaviour, support, enrichment and attendance, to ensure that high standards are successfully maintained.
- Suitably qualified teachers work well with the college's support team to provide helpful guidance to students prior to joining the college; this ensures that they enrol on the right courses. Students benefit from effective careers guidance throughout their courses to help them make the right decisions for their future.
- Staff are highly committed to the promotion of equality and diversity in an inclusive learning environment where differences are celebrated. Managers are rigorous in their analysis of the achievement of different groups of students. Prompt support ensures that no significant differences in achievement exist between different groups; for example, initiatives such as the 'fitness to study' programme supports students who start to fall behind with their work. The programme is very effective in helping these students to develop strategies to overcome the diverse range of barriers that impact on their ability to study and learn. The enrichment programme includes a resilience programme which

effectively supports students' mental well-being.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a wide range of skills, experience and links to the community, which they use effectively to help the college develop its vision. They provide highly effective support and challenge to the principal and leadership team. Governors effectively use information about all aspects of students' experiences at the college, including achievement, progress and attendance, to celebrate improvements and challenge senior managers appropriately. Governors are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the college and are relentless in their monitoring of the very few underperforming subjects.
- Governors are highly committed to the college's culture of high aspirations for staff and students and ensure that students from a wide range of different backgrounds receive a high-quality learning experience.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The college has appropriate safeguarding procedures that are fully and consistently implemented. Where concerns are raised, managers respond quickly and effectively, making appropriate referrals to external agencies where necessary. Arrangements to ensure the safe recruitment of staff are rigorous.
- All staff and governors carry out safeguarding training, including in the 'Prevent' duty, and have a good understanding of how to keep students safe. Risk assessments are comprehensive and detailed, with systems in place to ensure e-safety and the vetting of visiting speakers. Good links are in place with external safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty partners in the community and these inform staff training.
- A wide range of activities take place to promote students' awareness of safeguarding. Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe and how to identify the behaviours linked to radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers are skilled, enthusiastic, highly committed and dedicated to supporting their students; they set high expectations for what their students can achieve. They know their students very well and use detailed assessment information to plan highly structured, productive and purposeful teaching that promotes the development of independent learning skills. The vast majority of teaching motivates and challenges students and, as a result, students make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Teachers skilfully use very effective questioning techniques to encourage students to think deeply. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and provide supportive feedback that enables the vast majority of students to learn from their mistakes and improve the standard of their work.
- Teachers monitor students' progress and achievement relentlessly. They identify areas for development swiftly and work collaboratively with students to make improvements. Homework and tasks undertaken beyond the classroom are highly effective in developing pupils' autonomy and initiative. Teachers promote students' reflection and self-

assessment very well. Regular tests and formal assessments develop students' depth of understanding and recall, which prepares them effectively for the demands of external examinations. As a result, in the current year, almost all students are making sustained progress and many are exceeding their target grades.

- Teachers support students very well in developing their English and mathematics skills in lessons and through bespoke courses. For example, academic writing lessons are very useful for those students who struggle to write essays or find it difficult to interpret the language used in examination questions. Academic subject and vocational teachers consistently reinforce the use of Standard English and, where relevant, develop students' mathematics skills. Students use technical ideas and the correct terminology with confidence and precision.
- Students benefit from regular additional subject support sessions to help them gain confidence and make rapid progress. Both the academic mentoring provided by local higher education students and the additional subject-specific courses on offer are highly valued by students who are enthusiastic about the positive impact these have on their learning and progress.
- Students develop their employability skills very effectively through a variety of well-planned enrichment activities, work placements and work-related activities, trips, visits and guest speakers. Work fairs and careers events, arranged by the college, help students make contact with potential employers and develop their understanding of what skills and attributes employers require. These activities help students develop their knowledge and understanding of the next steps into employment and/or higher education.
- Students benefit from excellent, well-maintained facilities and high-quality learning resources, including the drama studio, science laboratories and the extensive subject-specific information technology in the learning resources centre. The accommodation is zoned into curriculum areas and each has a clear subject identity with attractive and engaging displays.
- Teachers are excellent role models and reinforce the college's core values, including high standards of personal conduct.
- Support for students is excellent. All students with potential support needs, identified either at enrolment or at any point during their time at the college, complete a detailed and thorough assessment. Students requiring additional support are identified quickly by teachers and support staff so that swift and effective interventions can be put in place; this process is effective in building students' confidence, keeping them on task and enabling them to make rapid progress. Support for students with high needs is very effective and these students increase their levels of independence and confidence. A dedicated support team develops learning strategies and support plans that ensure most students who receive support achieve equally as well, and sometimes better than, their peers.
- Teachers help students very effectively to develop an understanding of tolerance and respect. Some teaching does not capitalise on opportunities to help develop students' wider understanding of diversity issues pertinent to the subject or their broader life experiences.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- A central very successful focus of the college is on improving the personal development and employability skills of all students. This ensures that they have the confidence to develop their future employment goals and become confident young adults.
- The standards of behaviour shown by students within college and the local community are excellent. Students are clear about what is expected of them and they embrace the college's core values. They are respectful to their peers, teachers, support staff and visitors. Students are keen to learn and improve their skills. The vast majority of students have good attitudes to their learning and participate enthusiastically in lessons. Consequently, students enjoy their learning and make excellent progress.
- Students develop excellent employability skills through a broad range of enrichment activities, work-related activities and work experience. Teachers are effective in helping students understand the demands of the workplace; for example, the college's student disciplinary procedure is robust and closely follows that found in employment. Teachers encourage teamwork and peer assessment, helping students to reflect on how they can improve their work. Students' attendance and punctuality are excellent.
- Students with high needs develop quickly as autonomous and confident learners; they value the support they receive and can identify the impact it has on their studies and self-esteem.
- Well-qualified teachers provide high-quality careers and education guidance, ensuring that students follow study programmes that build on their prior attainment. They help students develop clear and ambitious plans for their future. Students are clear about their next steps in education and/or employment and have a clear understanding of their wider progression opportunities. They are aspirational and keen to progress.
- Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. They know who to report their concerns to and do so when they think one of their fellow students is at risk. Students are also knowledgeable of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism. They are confident to identify the key characteristics and changes in an individual's behaviours that could provide a potential cause for concern, including students who become isolated or those who make changes to how they dress and/or behave with their peers. Students speak keenly about British values, which they demonstrate in their actions and attitudes.
- Senior managers have created an innovative and effective programme which benefits students by promoting their understanding of both their physical health and emotional well-being. Students can describe what they have learned on the programme, how they have changed their behaviours and the impact this has had on helping them remain at college and achieve good grades. For example, many students say they now switch their mobile phones off earlier in the evening, get more sleep, take regular exercise and eat more healthily, resulting in a positive impact on their lives beyond college.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- The vast majority of students on A-level courses make excellent progress from below-average starting points, achieve their qualifications, improve their confidence and self-esteem and are motivated to progress to higher-level courses, training or employment.
- As a result of highly effective teaching, support and guidance, overall achievement rates are high and have improved each year since the college's last inspection. Almost all A-level students pass their qualifications and many achieve high grades, with the majority gaining grades higher than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. In a very few A-level subjects, students' achievements are not at the very high rates of all other college courses; actions are in place to improve these very few underperforming subjects. Students on vocational courses make very good progress, with the vast majority achieving high grades, many from low starting points. On a very small number of adult courses, achievement rates are below the national rates.
- A very high proportion of students enrolled on GCSE English and mathematics courses succeed in improving the grade they gained at school and achieve a grade C or higher when they resit the examination at the college. The relatively small proportion of students who start the college having secured high grades at GCSE achieve well; the majority continue their studies and attain high grades in their A-level courses.
- Most students have positive attitudes to learning and a thirst for knowledge. They produce high standards of work, including coursework that is frequently graded higher than their target grades. They develop high levels of independent learning and analytical skills, as shown in the questions they ask teachers during lessons and in their written responses to examination-style questions.
- A very high proportion of students progress to higher education, many of whom are the first in their family to go to university. The vast majority of the students who do not go to university gain employment or progress to an apprenticeship.
- The well-planned and detailed care and support plans in place for students have a strong beneficial impact on ensuring that they make excellent progress and achieve their qualifications. Students in receipt of high-needs funding make excellent progress, develop their independence and achieve their qualification aims.
- Students who had previously been entitled to free school meals or who qualify for the college's bursary scheme achieve better than their peers. Students who receive additional learning support achieve as well as, and sometimes better than, their peers.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130494
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,415
Principal/CEO	Kathryn Podmore
Telephone number	0151 652 5575
Website	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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	70	67	1,201	66	-	-
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	62							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency/Skills 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 assistant principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews 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 college.

Inspection team

Stephen Miller, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Beverley Barlow	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gail Yeadon	Ofsted Inspector
Kathy Passant	Ofsted Inspector

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