

Inspection of The Sixth Form College Colchester

Inspection dates:

12 to 15 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Education programmes for young people

Outstanding

Provision for learners with high needs

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Information about this provider

The Sixth Form College Colchester is situated in the city. It provides education programmes for young people at level 2 and predominantly level 3 in all subject sector areas. Around half of all students commute to the college from across Essex. Nearby there are two grammar schools and a large general further education college.

There are 3,133 students on education programmes for young people, predominantly on A-level programmes. The largest subject areas are in psychology, English, mathematics and statistics, sociology and biology. Eight students qualify for high-needs funding. The college does not use any subcontractors.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite, courteous, well-mannered and respectful. Teachers skilfully develop most students' comprehension of fundamental British values. Students consider the views and beliefs of others and treat each other with dignity and respect. Students learn how to express their views professionally. They quickly grow in confidence and become increasingly resilient. Most students undertake charity work or enter skills-based competitions. For example, over 300 students entered the Science Olympiad, with a high proportion of them winning medals. Students quickly become empowered to take ownership of their futures and their place in society as active citizens.

Most students have high attendance and are punctual. Staff monitor attendance closely and follow up on non-attendance quickly. Where students have difficulty attending college due to personal reasons and medical conditions, leaders and teachers make adaptations, where possible, so that students do not miss any learning.

Students are treated with respect by staff and encouraged to do their best. Students work diligently and make good use of the independent study areas available at college. In these busy areas, students maintain good personal discipline over their communications. They are considerate of other students studying and keep noise levels low.

Students value greatly the high-quality teaching they receive. They benefit from high-quality teaching by subject specialists. Teachers use their knowledge and skills to create calm and highly focused learning environments that support and enable students to learn very effectively.

Students benefit from a well-planned and effective careers programme. They are equipped very effectively to make successful decisions to identify appropriate career choices and pathways.

Students quickly learn how to work safely. They wear the correct personal protective equipment and work in a safe manner. Students told inspectors that they feel safe and that the college is a safe environment.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders work and liaise very effectively with stakeholders in the identification of local and regional skills. Leaders have a well-developed understanding of key growth sectors, such as the need for greater digital literacy. This has resulted in a Digital Skills Academy. Students learn to use essential software identified by employers, such as that used for data analysis and communication. As a result, students are better prepared to meet current and future workforce needs.

Senior leaders and governors have a detailed understanding of how they contribute to skills needs in their locality. Governors bring a good range of vocational and professional experience to their roles. They understand the skills agenda and challenge staff to meet local and regional skills gaps, monitoring their progress effectively. Leaders have used local labour market information usefully to shape the curriculum. Course leaders have developed curriculum maps that identify the key employment skills that employers need. These include teamwork, leadership, resilience and good communication skills. Course leaders ensure that these skills are included in the core and additional studies curriculum.

Leaders and managers collaborate closely with other local education providers to ensure that courses meet students' skills development and progression aspirations. Leaders meet frequently with counterparts at the local college and university. This enables leaders to plan courses that avoid competition and duplication. This includes the local provision of T-levels and foundation degree programmes. Students benefit from frequent contact with university staff and gain a deeper understanding of degree programmes and what career pathways are available to them. Visits to universities in the area provide students with additional benefits, such as using the library for academic research and experiencing subject taster sessions.

Leaders do not yet work consistently with employers or other stakeholders to inform and develop the content of courses. Too few course leaders develop curriculum content collaboratively with stakeholders from industry or university.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have been successful in further raising the quality of education. They have diligently focused on all aspects of provision to rectify any weaknesses identified through their effective quality assurance processes.

Leaders are very ambitious for students, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with high-needs funding. Leaders and teachers have high aspirations for what students will achieve and where they will move on to when they leave college. Leaders and managers have developed a specialist A-level academic programme to meet the needs of Colchester and the surrounding area. They have skilfully aligned their entry requirements to ensure that they are inclusive of students who attain lower GCSE grades than other similar providers locally. As a result, leaders have raised the aspirations of students who face disadvantages effectively.

Nearly all students pass their qualifications, often with A* grades. Students develop confidence in their abilities and are well prepared for their next stage in learning or work. Students who progress to university often achieve a first in their degree qualification. The few students who resit GCSE mathematics and/or English pass their qualifications.

Teachers tailor high-quality learning programmes for students with high needs. Leaders have highly effective partnership arrangements. These partnerships ensure that students have a very positive start at the college. Leaders have ensured that programmes are linked highly effectively to students' education, health and care plan outcomes so that they meet their needs and interests closely. Teachers guide students to select appropriate enrichment activities to achieve their learning objectives fully. For example, students wishing to work with animals are helped to complete work experience at a horticultural college as part of their programme. This provides them with useful insight into the career and study options available to them.

Leaders and teachers organise learning logically and sensibly so that students initially acquire a secure understanding of fundamental topics, before building on this to study increasingly complex and demanding concepts. Teachers think very carefully about the order in which students learn and acquire new knowledge and skills. As a result, students promptly acquire a secure understanding of essential information and knowledge and apply what they have learned with increasing confidence. For example, in A-level sociology, students initially learn about education, theoretical perspectives and research methods and then apply this to a range of sociological perspectives. In

A-level statistics, students initially build their understanding of numerical values and probability, before moving on to distribution and hypothesis testing.

Teachers check students' understanding and what they can do very thoroughly before moving on to the next topic. They use assessment skilfully to help students recap previous learning and enable them to commit it securely to their long-term memory. Teachers frequently use mock exams and other assessments to help students prepare for their final assessments. Consequently, students become increasingly confident in their ability to structure and articulate their answers, feeling well prepared for their final assessments.

Teachers continually use subject-specific, academic and technical terms and support students to adopt their use promptly and correctly. As a result, students use appropriate subject terminology with confidence to explain and justify their thoughts and ideas about the subject that they are studying clearly and correctly. For example, in A-level fine art, technical vocabulary is developed to analyse accurately the formal elements of paintings. Students then use this language to explain their work or within essays for their coursework.

Teachers provide students with clear, helpful feedback that identifies what students do well and what they need to do to improve their future work. Students act appropriately on the feedback they receive, and the standard of their work improves over time and is good. Students have a firm appreciation of what they are good at and where they need to improve. They develop the study skills they require to thrive in their courses and next steps.

Teachers create inclusive learning environments. Students feel comfortable asking questions or discussing their findings and contributing to group discussions. They benefit from calm and welcoming environments, which help them learn and thrive. Teachers adjust their teaching methods for students with additional learning needs, for example by providing tailored learning resources in advance of sessions. As a result, students can make good and better progress in their learning.

Leaders' focus on improving teachers' skills is highly effective. Leaders identify good teaching practices and share them successfully. Teachers are confident to try different approaches, making teaching relevant and interesting. For example, teachers use children's building blocks to show the stages in attachment theories.

Governors have a good understanding of the college and the work of the leadership team. They are aware of the strengths and areas for development of the college. Governors' good insight enables them to provide leaders with appropriate challenge that secures improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130680
Address	North Hill Colchester Essex CO1 1SN
Contact number	01206 500700
Website	www.colchsfc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Ian MacNaughton
Provider type	General sixth-form college
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2013
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Shane Langthorne, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Roland White	His Majesty's Inspector
Teresa Kiely	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Giles	Ofsted Inspector
Jaswant Mann	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Minton	Ofsted Inspector
Georgina Ager	His Majesty's Inspector
Chris Bealey	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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