



**The Sixth Form College
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Ofsted Inspection Report and Science Good Practice Report

2018

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23 January 2018

Mr Ian MacNaughton
Principal
The Sixth Form College Colchester
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Dear Mr MacNaughton

Short inspection of The Sixth Form College Colchester

Following the short inspection on 14 and 15 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the college was judged to be good in February 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection you have continued to provide good-quality academic education for young people, predominantly school leavers, in Colchester and the surrounding area.

You, with your governors and managers, have established a strong vision for the college. You provide 16- to 18-year-old students with a supportive learning environment in which the majority achieve their qualifications. Managers have planned the curriculum well to provide students with broad programmes of study. These provide them with a comprehensive range of subject choices and support them to progress effectively to their next steps. Your staff provide very good pastoral support which enables students, particularly those who have achieved less well at school, to remain on their courses and overcome issues that have prevented them from learning in the past.

Managers have worked collaboratively with partners in the local area, including local schools and colleges, to provide an appropriate curriculum offer that meets the needs of the locality. The vast majority of students study GCE A levels and AS levels, with a minority studying applied general certificates within their study programme. Students attend the college well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have put into place comprehensive training for all staff and governors. The designated safeguarding lead and the lead safeguarding governor have received relevant training for their roles. Managers provide staff with frequent safeguarding updates, including on the 'Prevent' duty. They use the online safeguarding site well to share information.

Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism so that students are aware of potential dangers and know how to report any concerns. Staff identify any well-being concerns early in students' programmes and use this knowledge effectively to support students to remain in education. Students feel safe and are safe.

Managers have established very good working relationships with external agencies. For example, they attend local authority 'Prevent' meetings and liaise with multiagency groups to provide support for more-vulnerable students.

Managers check appropriately that staff are safe to work with students. Governors have a good oversight of safeguarding through an annual safeguarding report and managers keep them informed of any issues.

Inspection findings

- ④ Leaders have established a thorough process for assessing strengths and areas for development within the college, which includes managers at all levels of the organisation. Managers identify, through the self-assessment process, those areas that they have successfully improved and where they need to sustain improvements, but they do not routinely pinpoint weaknesses. As a result, leaders, managers and governors are not able to monitor accurately progress in the areas that would benefit from improvement.
- ④ Leaders and managers have robust arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers have established a broad range of strategies to support teachers to improve their practice, including an observation process and peer observations. As a result, teachers reflect well on and improve the progress learners make in lessons. Managers have put in place a comprehensive staff development programme that ensures that teachers improve

their practice swiftly. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good in most lessons.

- ④ Most students remain on their courses, and the large majority achieve their qualifications at the end of their course. In a minority of courses, for example the International Baccalaureate, the proportion of students achieving their qualifications has declined and is low. Students achieve their GCSE English and mathematics qualifications well, with the majority achieving high grades, particularly in English, where achievement is good.
- ④ Although most students achieve their qualifications and make good progress, a minority do not make the progress of which they are capable. The proportion of students on advanced-level courses who achieve high grades is low.
- ④ Teachers have high expectations of students and, as a result, the large majority of students participate well in their learning. They encourage students to work independently. Students use the online virtual learning environment well to carry out activities outside of the classroom, such as researching topics in preparation for their subsequent lessons. Students' attendance is good; most arrive at their lessons punctually and ready to learn.
- ④ Most students enjoy their lessons; they develop their confidence well through stimulating and interesting learning activities. Teachers set students challenging targets at the beginning of their course. They monitor students' progress regularly against these targets and identify and intervene quickly if students fall behind with their studies. Students know their target grades; they understand the progress that they are making towards achieving them and what they need to do to improve. Consequently the majority of students make good progress.
- ④ Leaders and managers have implemented good arrangements, including training to support students to develop their English and mathematics skills. Consequently, most students have a good understanding of the importance of mathematics to their future careers, they develop their knowledge well in vocational contexts and are able to complete tasks which are relevant to their intended careers. For example, in a business studies lesson students were able to use data effectively to calculate market share and business growth.
- ④ Teachers improve students' English skills well in academic and vocational lessons. They encourage students to use technical language and they check that students understand and use relevant terms and concepts related to the subjects that they are studying. For example, students in AS-level biology are able to explain the role of antigens and pathogens in the immune system. Teachers encourage students to develop higher-level skills, such as comparing and contrasting documents, to challenge concepts and determine their own ideas. Students work collaboratively to critique and challenge each other's work, for example in developing their essay-writing skills. As a result, the standard of most students' written work is high.
- ④ Managers provide students with good advice and guidance to progress onto the next level of education. Consequently, a large majority progress onto higher

education or apprenticeships. However, the students who do not plan to go onto higher education or apprenticeships do not receive comprehensive information, advice and guidance on employment routes and opportunities. Not enough students experience work-related learning to ensure that they can make informed choices about their next steps into employment.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- ④ they routinely identify key areas of weakness and monitor effectively the planned actions to secure improvement
- ④ they monitor the achievement rates of students on different courses to ensure that all students achieve their qualifications and make good progress from their starting points, including those on the International Baccalaureate
- ④ all students benefit from meaningful work-related learning and effective advice and guidance to ensure that they are well prepared for future employment.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lynda Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector, assisted by the assistant principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with staff, carried out observations of lessons and scrutinised students' work. Inspectors reviewed key documents, including minutes of meetings, lesson observation documentation and relevant policies and procedures.

Appendix

Ofsted Science Good Practice Report

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23 March 2011

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Dear Mr MacNaughton

**Ofsted good practice survey inspection programme:
improving science in colleges**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 March 2011 as part of our science survey.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without your agreement

The evidence base included: observation of seven lessons; meetings with managers, teachers and students; review of students' work and relevant departmental documents.

Features of good practice

- ④ Success and achievement rates on science courses are very high. In 2009/10, International Baccalaureate (IB) and GCE A-level science, achievements were well above national averages. In addition, high-grade pass rates were also good.
- ④ Success rates for AS-level applied science, electronics and physics and GCSE science were lower than the standards set by other science subjects.

- ④ Science students achieve good outcomes in a range of national subject Olympiads and other competitions.
- ④ The standard of work in science lessons and investigations is good and, in some courses, outstanding. For example, in a GCE A-level chemistry lesson, the students made very good progress in relating bonding patterns, physical properties such as melting point and electrical conductance and atomic structure of a range of chemicals to their gross physical properties.
- ④ Progression rates to higher education are high. In 2009/10, over 950 students at the college successfully made applications through UCAS for undergraduate study. Of these, 165 (around 17%) progressed to science courses such as medicine, biomedical sciences, chemistry, physics and environmental sciences.
- ④ Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Teachers are well qualified and experienced and plan their lessons to include a good variety of interesting and challenging small-group work. IB students successfully used an interesting exercise to illustrate the way in which random assortment of chromosomes during sexual reproduction can produce considerable variation in the offspring resulting from one male and one female.
- ④ Practical work and individual investigations are safely carried out and are well planned so that students see the relevance of the techniques that they are learning. Students complete individual investigations in chemistry to a very high standard and enjoy a good range of interesting and relevant investigations and fieldwork in the other sciences.
- ④ Recruitment to science courses is buoyant and has increased over the past few years. This is in no small measure due to the college policy to make sure that all advance level students take five subjects in the first year and four in the second. Many students take science subjects as their main programmes as they aspire to careers in science and technology. However, a good number of students take science courses each year in order to supplement and broaden their studies.
- ④ The range of science courses at advanced level is very good. The IB programme offers physics, chemistry, biology and environmental systems courses. AS- and A-level biology, chemistry, physics, electronics, geology and environmental science are offered along with applied science and AS science in society. At intermediate level, GCSE science is also offered.
- ④ Enrichment activities are well organised and successfully broaden and develop students' appreciation of the wider implications of science and technology.

- ④ Individual support for students is comprehensive. All subject teams provide additional support sessions for students who are at risk of underperforming or who are making less progress than their peers. This early identification of support needs, together with the range of collegewide learning support, is an important part of the way in which students are encouraged to achieve to their potential.
- ④ Senior leaders provide full support for the sciences and have developed a highly supportive ethos in the college. The science teams are confident and are not afraid of innovation. They are well led and self-assessment reports are detailed and evaluative.
- ④ Good numbers of students take science courses and this had led to strong departmental teams and well-resourced laboratories. Science teachers actively pursue professional development and regularly contribute to the rapidly developing and widely appreciated pool of online resources on the college virtual learning environment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ④ ensuring that lessons in AS applied science and GCSE science are planned to meet the needs and abilities of all the students.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science provision.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the relevant funding bodies and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector