

Oldham Sixth Form College

Inspection report

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Oldham Sixth Form College, established in 1992, is a purpose built sixth form college located in the centre of Oldham. GCSE results for 16- year-olds are slightly below the national average; in 2006, 54.8% of 16-year-olds in Oldham achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C compared to 58.5% nationally.
2. The college draws learners from a wide geographical area mostly from Greater Manchester. In 2007/08, the college recruited from 52 institutions, 58% of learners come from 11 partner schools in Oldham. Significant numbers of students enter the college with a lower than average GCSE points score. Eight of the college's partner schools achieve rates for five or more GCSEs below 34%. The college provides for a diverse community; slightly over half of learners come from economically and socially disadvantaged areas. 39% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds compared to the local minority ethnic population of 20%.
3. In 2006/07, the college enrolled 2,111 learners, almost all were aged 16-18 and studying on advanced level programmes. The college offers an extensive range of A level, AS level and vocational courses at level 3. A smaller range of GCSE and vocational courses are offered at level 2. The college offers programmes in 12 of the 15 sector subject areas.
4. The college's mission is 'to provide the highest quality education for learners in Oldham and the local area so that they are equipped to the very best of their abilities to move into higher education or employment'.
5. In March 2005, the college was awarded learning and skills Beacon status.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: Contributory Grade 1</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. Overall effectiveness is outstanding. Success rates are high and consistently above the national rate. Progression from level 2 to level 3, and level 3 to higher education is very good. Teaching and learning are closely monitored and are outstanding. Teaching is challenging and innovative and students make outstanding progress in all but a small number of subjects. Students benefit from outstanding tutorial and learning support. The curriculum is outstanding; the college provides a broad range of AS and A level courses and a good range of vocational courses at levels 2 and 3 which meet the needs of its students. There is very good participation in a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Leadership and management are outstanding across the college. Self-assessment and quality assurance are effective in maintaining very high standards. Social and educational inclusion are outstanding. The college is a leader in the local regeneration partnership and works very well with local partners to promote educational and social inclusion. Students study purposefully in a harmonious multi-cultural environment with a strong focus on respect and outstanding student success. The college is strong financially and provides outstanding value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

7. Capacity to improve is outstanding. A strong focus is placed on maintaining and achieving very high standards. Senior managers set a clear strategic direction which is clearly understood by all staff. Governors are committed and highly effective. Leadership and management are outstanding. Teamwork throughout the college is excellent and there is a very strong commitment by all staff to meet the needs of every learner. Quality assurance systems are well established and successfully promote improvement. The colleges' self-assessment process is well established and robust. The report is accurate and clearly identifies where there are variations in performance. Managers take effective actions where improvements are needed. Management information is accurate and timely and it is well used by staff. A wide range of data is analysed very effectively to monitor and improve the performance of students. Human and physical resources are employed effectively.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

8. The college has taken outstanding steps to improve. Success rates at all levels have improved since the last inspection. Excellent progress has been made in improving the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning. The principal has continued to take a leading role in educational development in the local community. The college's outstanding approach to social inclusion has continued. As the college has continued to

grow, a minority of teaching rooms remain too small for the numbers of students in classes.

Key strengths

- high success rates
- consistently outstanding value added
- challenging and innovative teaching
- excellent academic and personal support
- very innovative projects to promote increased post-16 progression
- highly effective support for students with additional learning needs
- outstanding leadership and management
- outstanding partnership working and contribution to the local community
- outstanding social and educational inclusion
- outstanding resources and accommodation
- strong focus on quality assurance leading to improvements
- excellent financial management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- students' progress in a small number of subjects.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Achievement and standards are outstanding, this agrees with the college's own judgement. Many learners enter the college with low or average prior attainment levels. The vast majority of students are following long level 3 courses and overall success rates at level 3 are consistently above the national rate. Pass rates on AS and A level programmes are very high. In 2006/07, the pass rate on AS courses was 92% and on A level courses was an impressive 99% with 28 subjects achieving a pass rate of 100%.
10. Students' progress on GCE AS level and A level courses is excellent; learners' achieve much better grades than might have been predicted from their GCSE results. Students make consistently outstanding progress in many subjects. At GCE AS level, a special note should be made of psychology and electronics, in which progress made, as measured by a commercial value added system, was the best of all providers subscribing to that system. However, there is some variation in performance across subjects and in a small number of subjects students make less than satisfactory progress. Action plans are in place to address this issue. Achievement in key skills in information communication technology (ICT) at levels 2 and 3 has improved to above the national rate. There are no distinct differences in the performance of different groups of learners.
11. Success rates on level 1 and level 2 courses are consistently above the national rate. Standards of students' work are very good. Progression to further or higher education is high. Attendance at lessons is good at 93%.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

12. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the quality of provision overall is outstanding. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Challenging and innovative teaching is central to the college's strong improvement culture and consistently high standards. A rigorous internal observation system shows that over 94% of teaching and learning observed in 2006/07 was judged to be good or better. Observations undertaken and documentation interrogated during inspection confirmed the college's judgements. Lessons have excellent pace and a strong focus on student participation and learners participate enthusiastically. Students are developing high skills of oracy and are thoughtful, developmental and reflective in pursuing their academic goals. A wide variety of teaching strategies are used to engage students and encourage their participation including discussion and debate, role-play, group and paired work, and student presentations. The sharing of good practice is firmly embedded. There is an excellent staff development programme which is informed by the outcomes from lesson observations and professional development reviews. The use of ICT in lessons is very good. The college has developed an effective virtual learning environment (VLE) which is increasingly used by

staff and students. Marking is very thorough and developmental; students know how well they are doing and where to improve.

13. The curriculum is outstanding. A broad range of 49 GCE AS and 47 A level courses are offered and these fully meet the needs and interests of students. A strong and effective programme of level 2 courses are offered with high progression rates to level 3. A large proportion of students are recruited from areas of disadvantage. The college has established excellent external links to augment the curriculum including good employer engagement and a comprehensive work placement programme. The curriculum is enriched by numerous college trips, excursions and visits abroad. Students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of recreational and sports activities. Links with partner high schools are very effective in promoting progression to post-16 education; for example, the Junior University project, managed by the college on behalf of the local learning partnership, is aimed at promoting greater progression to both further education and higher education within Oldham. Using one-to-one mentoring of school pupils and supplemented by a wide variety of resources, it has had a crucial impact on increasing local progression rates. In every respect it represents the very best practice in community responsiveness and an example of education as a catalyst for local regeneration.
14. Students are provided with outstanding academic and personal support. Pre-enrolment advice and guidance is of a high quality and well tailored to the individual needs of each school. Induction is very well managed. Students with additional learning needs are identified early and receive outstanding support from the highly skilled additional learning support team. They make excellent progress. Support for learners with dyslexia and other additional and specific learning needs is excellent, these learners also make exceptional progress. Learners with physical disabilities are very well supported with both the use of assistive technologies and very good links for external support. Students are set challenging targets which are well monitored. The themes of Every Child Matters are covered in a well thought out group tutorial programme. One-to-one tutorial support is highly valued by students. Parents are kept informed. The careers education and guidance programme is extensive and provides very good support, both for students seeking to progress to higher education and for those seeking employment.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

15. Inspectors agree with the college's self-assessment report that leadership and management are outstanding. The principal provides outstanding leadership and management and is a leader of educational development within the local community. The senior management team ably supports the principal and have established a strong focus on driving up standards and continuous improvement. There is an open and supportive management style. The culture of trust and mutual respect is highly valued by staff and

- students. Teamwork is excellent. The quality of provision is outstanding. Curriculum areas are well led and managed with clear lines of accountability. Governors take great pride in the college, they are committed to the work of the college and monitor its financial and academic performance well.
16. The college is held in very high esteem in the local community where it plays a leading role in providing excellent education and progression opportunities for young people. A strong characteristic of the college is its commitment to and involvement in the local regeneration partnership. The college has become a local leader in this process and works with a variety of local partners to promote educational and social inclusion. Its partnership with the local further education college is an example of best practice within the sector. Local partnerships are now having a dynamic impact on increasing the opportunity of young people to develop their skills and widen their educational opportunities.
 17. The colleges' approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college provides a harmonious multi-cultural environment with a strong focus on mutual respect and student success. The promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college monitors equality of opportunity, difference is celebrated and diversity is promoted. Equality and diversity and Every Child Matters themes are embedded within the tutorial programme and are part of the ethos of the college. Staff have a thorough knowledge of the diverse community in which they work. Requirements for safeguarding children are met in full. The college meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2002.
 18. Quality assurance is firmly embedded and robust and leads to improvement. Success rates at all levels were high at the last inspection and have continued to improve. Learners from an ever more diverse range of backgrounds make outstanding progress. The self-assessment process works well, it is fully understood by staff and highly effective in leading to improvement. The self-assessment report is evaluative and key strengths and areas for improvement are clearly identified. The system of observation of teaching and learning is rigorous and leads to improvements. The management information system provides accurate and timely data which is well used by all staff to closely monitor all aspects of learners' performance.
 19. Financial management is outstanding. Excellent accommodation and resources are used effectively and efficiently to support learning. However, as the college has continued to grow, a minority of teaching rooms remain too small for the numbers of students in classes. Teachers are well qualified and participate in the wide range of training and development opportunities made available to them.
 20. Success rates have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The progress made by the vast majority of students compared to their previous attainment is outstanding and exceptional in many subject areas. The college gives outstanding value for money.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

		16-18				19+			
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	04/05	170	82	66	16	6	83	42	41
	05/06	61	84	68	16			42	
	06/07*	40	80	N/A				N/A	
Other	04/05	170	82	66	16	6	83	42	41
	05/06	61	84	68	16			42	
	06/07*	40	80	N/A				N/A	

* college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

		16-18				19+			
Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	04/05	656	86	74	12	7	86	53	33
	05/06	635	87	80	7			53	
	06/07*	669	89	N/A				N/A	
GCSEs	04/05	552	86	78	8	7	86		
	05/06	557	88	83	5				
	06/07*	556	90	N/A				N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	50	84	73	11				
	05/06	15	93	83	10				
	06/07*	19	95	N/A				N/A	
Other	04/05	54	85	64	21				
	05/06	63	75	72	3				
	06/07*	94	85	N/A				N/A	

* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	04/05	6,184	81	75	6	35	77	58	19
	05/06	6,036	84	77	7				
	06/07*	6,070	87	N/A		13	62	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1,715	95	90	5	21	90		
	05/06	1,898	96	91	5				
	06/07*	1,997	95	N/A		10	60	N/A	
AS Levels	04/05	4,091	76	69	7	14	57		
	05/06	3,325	80	73	7				
	06/07*	3,347	84	N/A		2	50	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	342	71	65	6				
	05/06	393	72	65	7				
	06/07*	11	45	N/A				N/A	
Other	04/05								
	05/06	420	70	67	3				
	06/07*	715	79	N/A		1	100	N/A	

* college data

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