

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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21 June 2017

Mr Stuart Merrills  
Acting Principal  
Bolton Sixth Form College  
Town Centre Campus  
Deane Road  
Bolton  
Lancashire  
BL3 5BU

Dear Mr Merrills

### **Short inspection of Bolton Sixth Form College**

Following the short inspection on 22 May 2017 and 23 May 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 provider was judged to be good in January 2014.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

You, your senior management team and governors have improved further the quality of provision since the last inspection and have ensured that students continue to receive high-quality education. You and your senior management team have restructured the provision since the last inspection and now only provide education at the town centre campus. Innovative timetable changes have ensured that you are able to meet the needs of the increased number of students attending the single college site.

Significant but prudent investment in college facilities means that students and teachers use good-quality learning resources to develop students' learning in and outside of the classroom. Careful budgeting has ensured that the college remains in a strong financial position.

The whole college community, including governors, staff and students, embraces diversity. The culture and ethos of the college promotes inclusivity. Students' behaviour is exemplary and they display high levels of respect and tolerance towards their peers and staff. Students are motivated, enjoy their classes and are keen to learn. Attendance is high and very few students are late for classes.

You and your senior management team have successfully addressed the majority of areas identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection. You, governors and senior managers rigorously monitor the impact of improvement actions and

stringently hold managers to account for the quality of provision and outcomes for students. Senior managers swiftly and accurately identify underperformance using a wide range of data.

The promotion of equality and celebration of diversity is now a strength of the college. Managers and staff are committed to developing students' understanding of equality and diversity and have implemented successfully a range of strategies to embed equality, diversity and the values of living in a modern society into the curriculum.

Teachers have received comprehensive training to support them to develop students' mathematical skills. Students display a growing confidence in their understanding and application of mathematical skills.

Achievement rates, for most courses, have increased steadily since the last inspection and are now high. Achievement rates on a few courses, particularly at A level, remain stubbornly low. Achievement of high grades has improved since the last inspection and high grades for vocational programmes have improved considerably. However, while high grades have improved, a small minority of students on A-level programmes, particularly the most able and those on mathematics and science programmes, do not achieve the grades of which they are capable.

You, your senior management team and managers work assiduously to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, the pace of improvement has been too slow. You and your team recognise that teaching, in a minority of lessons, is pedestrian and is targeted at middle-ability students. You have introduced a range of actions to increase the level of challenge in classes but the impact of these actions is not yet fully evident. As a result, a small minority of students, particularly the most able, do not reach their full potential or achieve their minimum target grades.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, managers and governors ensure that effective and swift action is taken to ensure the safety of staff and students. A simple and effective electronic system allows students to raise quickly any concerns regarding safeguarding. Leaders, managers, governors and designated safeguarding officers respond quickly and rigorously to safeguarding incidents. They refer students promptly to a wide range of external agencies for specialist support.

Staff and governors receive comprehensive and regular training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Themes of safeguarding, 'Prevent' and the values of living in a modern society are embedded thoroughly into the curriculum. Students have a good understanding of these themes and, as a result, feel safe and are kept safe. Students explain articulately how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation and have rehearsed a college 'lock down' to practise the steps to take in the event of a terror incident.

## Inspection findings

- The senior management team, governors and managers know the college well. They work tirelessly to continuously improve the quality of provision and outcomes for students. Committed and experienced governors challenge leaders well and effectively hold them to account. Governors rigorously scrutinise actions to address underperformance. They support and challenge leaders and managers through the 'course review' programme to improve the quality of provision across all areas of the college. However, a number of courses such as mathematics and science, which were identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection, remain subjects with poor student performance.
- Performance management of staff is rigorous. Teachers regularly self-assess their individual performance against student outcomes and progress. Improvement actions are set for all teachers to enable them to improve continuously their teaching practice. Where underperformance is identified, teachers are supported to improve their practice. For those teachers who do not improve their practice quickly or well enough, leaders initiate formal performance management procedures. A small number of staff have exited the college following performance management.
- Self-assessment processes are rigorous and use a range of data exceptionally well to identify accurately the strengths and areas for improvement across the college, particularly in identifying underperformance in subject areas.
- Although most students achieve their qualifications, a small minority do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable. Managers increased college entry requirements in 2016/17 to ensure that students are better equipped for the rigour of academic study. The recording and monitoring of the progress of current students show an increase in the proportion of students meeting or exceeding their target grades compared to this point in 2015/16.
- The large majority of continuing professional development activities to improve teachers' teaching practice have improved, in most instances, the quality of lessons. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not of a consistently high standard across all subject areas. Students are committed to their learning, are productive in classes and successfully complete tasks and activities. However, a small minority of teachers do not challenge students, particularly the most able, well enough. A small minority of lessons are pedestrian, targeted at middle-ability students and lack sufficient pace to challenge students' learning or develop higher-order thinking skills effectively. Consequently, progress for a few students is slow.
- Feedback to students following assessment is substantive and reflective, providing thoughtful advice to help students improve the quality of their work. However, academic targets for a minority of students, particularly the most able, do not challenge students rigorously enough. Consequently, these students do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Students develop good employability skills. All students on vocational programmes attend meaningful external work experience that they relate well to their programmes. Students on A-level programmes work enthusiastically with

the local community and employers to develop work-related skills. For example, art and design students produce commissioned artwork and sell their designs at a local market. The 'World of Work' programme successfully equips students with the skills needed for future employment.

- Teachers develop students' literacy and English skills very well. Students apply technical language confidently and accurately. They are highly articulate and communicate well with their teachers and peers. The standard of students' work is high, displaying fluency and thoughtfulness.
- Staff are developing their understanding of the teaching and application of mathematics in their subject areas and are using these more frequently and confidently in lessons. Students are developing a growing understanding of mathematical skills and are starting to apply these accurately in lessons.
- Leaders and managers rigorously track student destinations, including those of early leavers. Almost all students study a higher-level course at university or enrol on an apprenticeship when they leave college. The proportion of students progressing to prestigious universities is increasing.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- underperforming courses are monitored closely to reduce the proportion of courses in the 'course review' programme, particularly those that persistently underperform, such as science and mathematics, to further improve the quality of provision across all subjects
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is of a consistently high standard across all subjects in order for all students to reach their full potential
- teaching and learning, particularly for the most able, challenges students to make good or better progress and achieve the high grades of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors were assisted by the acting principal, as nominee. We met with senior managers, members of the governing body, managers, teachers and students. We reviewed students' assessed work and electronic tracking systems. With members of your staff, we observed teaching, learning and assessment. We reviewed key documents, including those relating to strategic

planning, self-assessment, teaching, learning and assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of students by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, from your own student survey and by seeking the views of students during on-site inspection activity.