

Rochdale Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		5–8 March 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding-1
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This college is outstanding because:

- Students make excellent progress and most achieve their A-level qualifications and progress to university. A culture of high expectations permeates the college at all levels; students enjoy lessons and their attendance and punctuality are excellent.
- Teaching is energetic and often inspirational and builds students' confidence to achieve their potential. Lessons start promptly with a good pace that promotes a vibrant learning environment and strong work ethic. Teachers use a wide range of interactive activities and skilful questioning to engage and challenge students, and progress in lessons is very good.
- Assessment is outstanding; teachers provide very detailed written feedback on marked work and give clear advice on how to improve. Students' individual progress is monitored very closely; prompt and effective action is taken to improve the performance of individual students who are not achieving their high target grades.
- Particular attention is given to improving the quality of students' written work. Students develop a good understanding of subject specialist terminology and use it well to apply to different contexts and examination questions. Teachers routinely correct students' spelling and punctuation errors.
- Support for students is excellent. Initial assessment is used very effectively to provide highly individualised and focused support. Work outside lessons effectively develops students' independent learning skills.
- Students receive outstanding information, advice and guidance from personal tutors to help them progress to higher education or an apprenticeship but opportunities for work experience to support learning are limited.
- Outstanding leadership, excellent communications and exceptional governance are all focused on a determination to meet the needs of the local community and ensure students do well.
- Performance management is rigorous and transparent with high levels of accountability. Quality assurance processes are thorough and effectively raise standards.
- Students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds work together very well in a culture of mutual respect where individual success is valued highly by the whole college.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the success rates and progress of students in a small minority of subjects.
- Implement fully the existing plans to develop processes and external links with employers and the world of work to enhance students' learning.
- Promote equality and diversity more explicitly in lessons where naturally occurring opportunities arise.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
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- In 2011/12 the college's success rate for its first cohort of students is above the national average of similar colleges. Retention and pass rates are very high. Most students who start on an AS programme progress to the second year and successfully achieve their A-level qualifications.
- The majority of students enter the college with lower than average grades for their GCSE qualifications. Students' progress is excellent and most achieve AS- and A-level grades higher than would be predicted given their starting point when they join the college. In 2012 around 80% of students progressed to higher education including prestigious universities.
- Value added measures place the college as one of the top performing sixth-form colleges nationally. Students on applied AS- and A-level courses achieve exceptionally well. In September 2012 the college enrolled 42 students on an intermediate-level GCSE programme and their in-year progress is good.
- All students who have not achieved a GCSE grade C in either English or mathematics complete these courses. The proportion of students achieving a grade C or higher in English is good but only half of those resitting mathematics GCSE achieve a grade C.
- The vast majority of AS- and A-level subjects have success rates above the high national averages. In psychology, information and communication technology, art and design, health and social care, physical education, English language, law, music technology and modern foreign languages, students' progress is exceptional. In AS economics and sociology students do not achieve as well as they should.
- Male and female students achieve equally well and those students with a learning difficulty and/or disability achieve as well as their peers. In 2011/12 the success rates of minority ethnic students, half the student population, increased significantly to rates that are better than the college average and that achieved by this group nationally.
- Students develop their English skills very well. They gain in confidence and use verbal skills well to present their ideas through class discussions and responding well to teachers' probing questioning. Their use of specialist terminology and broader language skills are very good. Students make significant progress in improving their spelling, punctuation and grammar and this enables them to do very well in their written examinations.
- The standard of students' work is outstanding in several subjects, very good in many and as expected in a minority. The college's achievement centre and subject study areas promote students' research and independent learning. In law, psychology, mathematics and science subjects the more-able students develop very good coaching skills as they act as peer mentors to support those who are struggling with specific topics.
- Students enjoy college and their attendance and punctuality are excellent. Across the diverse college community students attitudes to learning and behaviour are exceptionally good. All students participate in a well thought out tutorial programme and a broad range of enrichment

activities that develop their personal and social skills and prepare them well for their post-college future.

- Students work very well with each other in a harmonious and vibrant environment. The student council actively represents students' views and suggestions for improvement. Many students are involved in voluntary work but work experience opportunities are limited.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- All staff have very high expectations of what students can achieve and this, coupled with a strong work ethic, sets clear boundaries and ensures students settle into college and develop good study habits very quickly. Lessons start promptly and are delivered at a good pace, which promotes an enthusiastic response and a vibrant learning environment. Attendance and punctuality are excellent.
- Lessons are planned very effectively to meet individual students' needs. Teachers use a wide range of interactive activities to engage and challenge students. Students frequently take part in self- and peer-assessment that consolidates their learning and extends their understanding and skills. In a physical education lesson, students prepared the answers to three questions and worked very productively in pairs to teach each other the concepts.
- Many teachers are highly skilled in using questioning to challenge students to develop and explain their responses. Teachers do not accept superficial responses and use a good mix of praise, encouragement and challenge to develop students' depth of understanding.
- The college's literacy strategy is being implemented very well. Teachers have a good focus on improving students' written work and routinely correct mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Presentations and group work develop students' confidence and verbal skills. A strong feature of the college's success is the exceptionally thorough preparation for and development of students' skills for external examinations.
- Teachers use their enthusiasm and expertise particularly well to help students link theory and practice and to build effectively on the topics studied in previous lessons. In dance, students were able to apply theory and previous assessment feedback to improve their performance.
- Resources to support learning are high quality with some excellent examples of well-structured worksheets and study booklets. Interactive whiteboards are used in the majority of lessons to provide information and structure to facilitate independent work. Information learning technologies are used well in several subjects, for example, short video clips to promote stimulating discussion.
- Students find the college's computer-based resources in the subject study areas particularly useful in helping them to complete research and coursework. Specialist resources are excellent in music, science, dance and theatre studies. The achievement centre is an excellent quiet study area that is used well by students for independent work and directed support.
- Assessment is outstanding. Teachers provide very detailed annotations on marked written work and give specific advice and strategies for improvement. Arrangements to complete coursework and assignments are well thought out. Teachers plan excellent opportunities for students to understand the assessment criteria and how to develop their skills to achieve a higher grade.
- Support for individual students, both in and out of lessons, is outstanding. Individual assessment of learning needs is exceptional. Specialist assessment for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is comprehensive and timely. The outcomes are used effectively to develop highly individualised and comprehensive support plans that focus on promoting independence and achievement.
- Students who fall behind with their work catch up through highly effective additional support from subject teachers and attendance at booster sessions. Students requiring more extensive support are referred to the achievement centre where specific action plans and short-term goals are used very effectively to promote and monitor their progress. Teachers also provide additional sharply focused revision classes.

- Communications between subject staff, support teachers and students are excellent. Attendance is monitored closely and reasons for absence are followed up daily. Data are used systematically to identify individual student issues and provide a significant range of effective interventions. Students have good access to a range of external support agencies for help with personal problems.
- The electronic monitoring system is used particularly effectively to record and monitor students' progress towards achieving their target grades, which are set at a high aspirational level. The impact of individual support is reviewed regularly.
- Information, advice and guidance are outstanding. A particularly effective problem-solving approach in tutorials helps students to identify their individual progression routes. Students receive outstanding support from personal tutors to help them progress to higher education. The college's 'honours' programme is raising the aspirations of many able students to apply to prestigious universities.
- Support for students considering progression to employment or an apprenticeship is good. Careers activities include an annual careers fair and access to apprenticeship vacancies through a North West project. Currently, students have limited opportunities for work experience but plans are in place to rectify this.
- A culture of mutual respect and tolerance permeates the college. Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily through teaching and learning. In a few sessions, inspectors observed good examples of teachers skilfully challenging cultural stereotypes but this was not consistent across the subject areas.

Science and mathematics Learning programmes for 16-18

Good

- Teaching and learning are good. This contributes to the success rates on mathematics and science courses that are at or above the high national averages; most students make good progress given their attainment when starting college. Teachers frequently stress examination requirements to enable students to improve their performance. However, too many students on AS physics and mathematics courses do not progress to the second year.
- Students enjoy lessons and their attendance is excellent. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well and regularly check students' understanding using very good directed questioning techniques. They often probe students more superficial answers to ascertain more detailed reasons behind their responses, provide hints to elicit answers from weaker students and use praise well to develop students' confidence.
- Teachers provide a good range of additional sessions outside the classroom that challenge the more-able students and promote independent learning. In a few classes, students who have completed tasks are not always directed to complete the extension work that is available. The excellent working environment in the mathematics and science study areas is used very effectively for research and consolidating students' understanding.
- Information learning technology is used very well in a few lessons, for example, the use of amusing animations to demonstrate how forces move objects. In mathematics the interactive whiteboard is used well by teachers and students in developing and interpreting graphs. Students appreciate the availability of material on the virtual learning environment for independent study.
- Students can begin their study of advanced-level science and mathematics subjects with a grade C at GCSE, a lower entry requirement than in most colleges, and the excellent support enables most to succeed. Teachers use initial assessments well to identify those students likely to struggle and appropriate intervention strategies are put in place very quickly. These include targeted booster and drop-in sessions, individual student meetings and revision classes.
- Students' progress is monitored very closely through frequent assessments so that specific problems within a topic are quickly identified. A peer mentoring system, where the more-able

students support those who are struggling with specific concepts, is very effective and valued by both those receiving and giving the help. Any gaps in achievements of different student groups are identified quickly and action is prompt and effective.

- Teachers' constructive written feedback frequently includes clear indications of the work necessary to enable students to improve and directs them to the appropriate support. Well-designed workbooks help students assess their own progress against their learning objectives. The timing of assessments is managed effectively although a few applied science students recently required new deadlines to get them back on track.
- Practical lessons develop good experimental and analytical skills with a strong focus on health and safety. Laboratories are modern and well equipped. Science teachers ensure students have sufficient mathematical skills through class activities and extra sessions. Students enjoy the variety of enrichment activities but there are too few external links to provide subject enhancement in applied science.
- Teachers emphasise and develop students' use of scientific terminology and their written language skills. In biology, teachers pay very close attention to correcting students' mistakes in spelling and grammar through extended writing tasks that prepare them well for their examinations.
- Teachers encourage students to work collaboratively and acquire good research skills. In several classes students with queries were expected to consult their peers and notes before asking the teacher for support in finding a solution. Students work harmoniously together although equality and diversity are insufficiently promoted in lessons.

Humanities and social sciences Learning programmes for 16-18

Outstanding

- Teachers have high expectations of their students and most successfully achieve their A-level qualifications and progress to university. Success rates on most AS subjects are at or above the national average and students make at least good progress. In psychology, studied by almost half the cohort, students make outstanding progress. Students enjoy their lessons; attendance, punctuality and behaviour are excellent.
- Teaching is consistently good across the wide range of humanities subjects with many outstanding aspects which contribute to the good achievement. Psychology lessons are particularly lively and engaging. Teachers plan their lessons very well and they are taught at a good pace; this motivates students to learn effectively and extend their knowledge and understanding. Occasionally, the classroom seating arrangements restrict students' interaction and learning from each other.
- In lessons teachers use a range of activities, including structured booklets, video clips, mind maps and effective questioning techniques to develop students' understanding. For example, in a government and politics lesson on constitutional change the teacher skilfully elicited detailed responses from students through probing questioning. In a psychology lesson on obedience students developed very good evaluation skills using well-resourced and relevant video clips.
- Subject and pastoral support is frequent, highly effective and responsive to individual students' needs, which enables them to make excellent progress outside lessons. Study areas are used effectively to facilitate students' independent work and very specific targeted support sessions with enthusiastic teachers. Sharply focused revision classes during or at the end of the college day support examination success. Outside lessons, students value the immediate support provided by any subject teacher when they ask for help.
- The monitoring of students' progress is outstanding. Students work towards ambitious target grades and their progress is monitored frequently by subject teachers and at regular review meetings with personal progress tutors. Students who are not achieving their target grade attend structured booster classes or revision sessions to improve. All subjects have a very

effective intervention strategy to identify specific student groups and put in place targeted support so that all students achieve their full potential.

- All teachers place a strong emphasis on developing students' English and mathematical skills, as appropriate. Students develop their understanding and use of appropriate terminology, subject related vocabulary and concepts very well. They are adept at applying these to new contexts and examination questions. In the best lessons teachers use very effective and probing questioning to develop students' depth of response and extend superficial answers.
- Assessment is regular and students value their teachers' feedback. Homework is set frequently and marked promptly. Assessment criteria are reinforced consistently. Teachers' written feedback clearly identifies how students can improve their work and they often go over essays in lessons to enhance and clarify their written comments. In most cases grammar, spelling and punctuation are corrected.
- Students from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds work cooperatively together with a very strong work ethic in lessons and the study areas. Issues of equality and diversity are integrated well into topics but teachers do not always ensure that they use diverse examples which relate to students' own experiences.

English and modern foreign languages Learning programmes for 16-18

Outstanding

- Achievements on most advanced-level English and modern foreign language courses are outstanding and the majority of students make exceptional progress in relation to their starting point. The large majority of GCSE English students achieve a grade A* to C.
- Teaching and learning in English Language are exceptionally effective in ensuring the majority of students achieve high grades. Students learn the principles of linguistic analysis through challenging exercises, thorough examination preparation and regular practice in writing accurate and relevant answers. They demonstrate a very good understanding of technical terms and apply these appropriately to a variety of texts.
- Students enjoy lessons and their attendance is excellent. They benefit significantly from enthusiastic and very knowledgeable teachers who use interesting activities that engage students in a range of literature. Regular assignments and detailed teacher feedback effectively develop their writing and examination skills.
- Teachers make strenuous efforts to help students make the transition from GCSE to advanced-level study. Well-designed task and response sheets ensure that students are able to express themselves appropriately and many exceed their target grade. In several lessons students move confidently from identifying key ideas to applying these and then evaluating their effectiveness to the text being studied.
- The drive to improve the structure of students' written work and to develop their prose skills is relentless and consistent from all teachers. Coursework is of a very high standard because students understand their set texts and can write engagingly. Investigations of spoken language are thoroughly researched and competently written. Creative writing is excellent and shows good understanding of genre.
- GCSE English students are making good progress, having completed the controlled assessments. Teachers set tasks that are interesting and relevant, and which closely match the knowledge and skills required for the examination. Students are attentive, answer questions enthusiastically and respond well to short tasks and impromptu writing exercises which prepare them for performance under examination conditions.
- In foreign language lessons teachers and students use the target language well for both formal and informal exchanges. Classes are small, allowing students to benefit from much individual attention. Opportunities for students to practise their speaking skills in class are excellent. Audio resources in the achievement centre help students improve their listening skills.

- Teachers work hard to both challenge the most able and to support those who are struggling with aspects of advanced-level work. Students' progress is monitored very closely and very effective strategies are in place to support specific groups and individuals who are not achieving their full potential. Support is readily available in all subjects and students' participation in extra sessions is very high.
- English teachers offer lunchtime enrichment activities for all students including a debating club and the production of the college magazine. Subject specific enrichment, such as theatre trips, exchange visits and cultural activities, is not sufficiently well developed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding. The Principal, ably supported by senior leaders and governors, has shown excellent leadership in developing a well-focused strategic direction. He has engendered a culture of high expectations and students' success. The relentless focus on individual students' progress ensured outstanding outcomes in 2012, which exceeded the college's demanding targets.
- The college contributes significantly to the local community, improving the proportion of young people achieving A-level success in Rochdale and supporting social mobility. It is an inclusive college that meets the needs of local school leavers. Many students have low levels of prior attainment and make excellent progress.
- Excellent communications provide a continued focus on raising standards. The senior team are highly visible and accessible to staff and students. Managers act swiftly and appropriately to ensure that any staff changes have minimum impact on students' learning.
- The governors have used their wide experience and skills in education and business exceptionally well to support the college's development in the local community. They reflect the diversity of the college well and work closely with senior leaders. Governors have a keenly honed understanding of the college's performance and provide a high level of informed challenge.
- Performance management is rigorous and focuses strongly on improving students' experience and outcomes, even where they are already good or better. Teachers have detailed information on their performance following lesson observations and from reviews of data on the progress of students that they teach. This information informs their well-focused action plans and professional development. Inspectors saw many examples of how teachers had developed successful classroom strategies, such as successful and prompt starts to lessons and how to add value to students' learning through developing their English skills.
- Processes for evaluating the standards of teaching and learning and taking action to eliminate weaker practice are successful. The middle leadership team meetings provide a fertile ground for the sharing of good practice and teachers have good opportunities to discuss effective delivery of their subject. Newly qualified teachers receive exceptional support for developing their skills. Teachers complete short projects, for example, 'getting the most out of your able students', and share these with the rest of the staff. Lesson observation reports give insufficient detail about students' progress and the promotion of equality and diversity.
- The college's quality assurance and self-assessment processes have successfully secured improvements in the weaker subjects. Staff analyse students' outcomes closely, including a detailed evaluation of their progress at individual student, class and staff levels; this ensures effective identification of areas of strength and weakness. Students' views are incorporated well into self-assessment and they are supported to contribute to management decisions. However, they are not given enough information about how the college has responded.
- Subject improvement plans show clear links to weaknesses identified in self-assessment and identify appropriate actions. Subject leaders' progress in meeting their targets is monitored rigorously at quarterly review meetings with the Principal. While the whole college self-

assessment report does not have an associated action plan, the issues identified are clearly addressed.

- Managers have worked well with partners to develop the college's curriculum to meet the needs of local school leavers wishing to progress on an advanced-level academic education. The college offers a broad range of AS- and A-level qualifications and a few GCSE courses. Students have very good enrichment opportunities. A recently appointed employability coordinator is developing the college's links with the world of work.
- Students work in a harmonious and purposeful environment where they feel equally valued. The college, through its close attention to the progress of individuals has closed very rapidly the achievement gaps between different groups. The equality and diversity coordinator is bringing fresh approaches to raising awareness and a more consistent way to promote key aspects.
- Students feel safe. The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Policies are in place and vetting procedures and central records meet requirements. The college has good procedures to identify its vulnerable students, for example, those in public care, and monitors their progress and welfare closely. Staff and governors receive regular updates to their training in safeguarding and plans are in place for ensuring that recently appointed subcontracted staff are aware of college procedures. The very few complaints have been handled well. When a student reports concerns, the college acts swiftly and involves external agencies appropriately to ensure the best possible outcome.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Rochdale Sixth Form College		
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learning programmes
Overall effectiveness	1	1
Outcomes for learners	1	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	1	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	1

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	2
Mathematics and statistics	2
Humanities	1
Social Sciences	1
English	1
Modern foreign languages	1

Provider details

Rochdale Sixth Form College	
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16-18
Number students in the previous full contract year	Full-time: 844
	Part-time: 0
Principal/CEO	Julian Appleyard
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Website address	www.rochdalesfc.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection		
Main course level	Level 2	Level 3
Total number of students	16-18	16-18
Full-time	42	933
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency	

Additional socio-economic information

The college opened in September 2010 with the key purpose to provide AS- and A-level courses, including a small number of applied subjects, for local school leavers. It works closely with the town's general further education college to avoid duplication of provision. Rochdale has a population of 212,000 and unemployment is higher than the national average. Across the borough there are significant levels of deprivation and a higher than average proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups, primarily of either Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage. Just over half of school leavers achieve five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. The vast majority of the college's students are from Rochdale and the surrounding area. Currently the college recruits around 20% of Rochdale school leavers. The college's mission is to inspire and motivate students to realise their academic potential and have the opportunity for greater choice in life.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Bev Barlow HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the assistant principal teaching and learning as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors analysed data on students' achievements over the two years that the college has been open to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone

calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed lessons, support sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the college. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the subject areas listed in the report.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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