

# The Sixth Form College, Solihull

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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**Unique reference number:** 10055420

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**Inspection date:** 12 December 2018

**Type of provider:** 16-19 academy

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

The Sixth Form College, Solihull was inspected in early February 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

The Sixth Form College, Solihull is a 16–19 academy under the governance of the Ninestiles Academy Trust but with a separate local governing body. It is located in an area of relative affluence, south-east of the city of Birmingham. Around 2,000 full-time students, nearly all of whom are aged 16 to 18, are on study programmes. The large majority of students are on A-level programmes, and the remainder are on level 3 vocational courses. Three quarters of the students travel to the college from Birmingham. Most students have a minority ethnic background. Some of the students from Birmingham live in areas of high social, economic and educational deprivation. Nearly all students in 2018/19 entered the college with GCSEs in English and mathematics at grade 4 or better.

### Themes

**What progress are teachers making in ensuring that students make rapid progress from their starting points?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have introduced new systems for assessing and monitoring the progress of students. From September 2018, teachers assess and report on the progress of all students at key points during the year. Managers ensure that these assessments are based on secure evidence and appropriate standards. Leaders and managers are successfully changing the culture of the college and ensuring a greater focus on the progress that students are making against their target grade. Where students perform below their target grade, managers and teachers are swift to provide support. As a result, most current students are progressing in line with their target grades. Where progress is still slow in some subjects, or with groups of students, managers are taking appropriate action.

From November 2018, managers have conducted regular scrutiny of students' work. They identify the progress students are making and form judgements on the quality of feedback to students. This is having a positive impact on the organisation and completeness of students' work files and providing a more secure basis for further revision by the students. It is too early to see the impact of this work on students' progress, but managers have provided clear guidance to teachers on how to improve the effectiveness of their feedback. During this visit, and a review of a sample of students' work in science, most teachers provided helpful feedback on what students

needed to do to improve. However, in most cases teachers did not ensure that students completed the actions for improvement.

Leaders, managers and teachers did not ensure that students achieved the A-level grades of which they were capable in 2018. Given their GCSE grades, too many students underperformed in biology, chemistry and physics. A smaller proportion of students performed well in AS-level mathematics, information and communication technology, and law.

**What progress are teachers and managers making in ensuring that students experience the same high quality of learning in all subjects?** **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have introduced a new approach to monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This approach is more comprehensive than previous arrangements, and includes learning walks, full observations and work scrutiny. Leaders and managers use the information from these processes well. Managers identify the key strengths and weaknesses. They have designed a programme of staff development which uses the strengths of internal and external practitioners to address the areas for improvement. They provide individual teaching staff with additional support from learning development ambassadors. These actions are starting to improve the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment.

From leaders' own internal reports and from the sample of observations conducted during the visit, the quality of teaching is improving, and managers know where further improvement is required.

Most teachers check learning effectively and use questioning well to test the depth of students' understanding. They provide students with clear explanations and reshape ideas when students do not understand initially. Occasionally, teachers rush their explanations to maintain pace. This means that some students get confused and learn less effectively. Teachers build successfully on students' previous understanding and on the independent reading they have been set before the lesson. In science, teachers support students through well-crafted workbooks and make effective links between theory and practical work. Teachers improve students' extended writing skills in law lessons.

In some lessons, teachers do not use the starting points of students well enough to ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable. For example, during the visit, some students in mathematics and physics repeated work that they had already mastered at GCSE.

**What progress have leaders made in ensuring that the self-assessment is self-critical and that managers fully and consistently implement actions to address identified weaknesses?** **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have produced a whole-college self-assessment report, which is realistic and identifies accurately the areas for improvement and strengths.

Managers have improved their use of information on students' progress and outcomes in supporting their judgements. They now have more accurate and comprehensive judgements on the progress that students are making. This reflects the change in culture since the previous inspection. All staff have a greater focus on the progress that students are making from their starting points.

Senior leaders and managers carefully use the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report as the key focus for the improvement plan. Leaders have developed policies and procedures to address the key weaknesses; the early signs are that these approaches are having a positive impact on students' progress and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, within the improvement plan, leaders describe the actions taken rather than evaluating their impact on students' progress and attainment.

Curriculum leaders produce departmental self-assessment reports which identify precisely key strengths and areas for improvement. However, they do not consistently and explicitly tackle all the weaknesses in their action plans. Curriculum leaders' actions for improvement have completion dates which are too far into the future. As a result, it is difficult for leaders to evaluate the progress that curriculum teams are making, because many of the actions are 'ongoing'. Leaders have a better understanding of departmental progress from face-to-face improvement meetings with managers.

Leaders use the plans as 'live' documents which enable them to respond to issues emerging during the year. For example, in a science subject, leaders have added a new action for improvement because a minority ethnic group was underperforming in a recent key assessment. Early signs are that this action is effective.

**What progress have managers made in ensuring that students understand what is meant by British values and how these relate to their everyday lives? Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have changed their approach to tutorials. They now take place weekly rather than four times a year. As a result, coaches reinforce key messages and topics more frequently, including fundamental British values.

At the beginning of group tutorials, coaches make a connection between the topic of the tutorial and one of the British values. When tutors organise individual reviews with students, they also check students' understanding.

As a result, students generally have a good understanding of democracy, the rule of law, liberty, and mutual respect. Most students relate the values well to their behaviours and the subject they are studying. This is particularly true for those in year 13. For example, an art student spoke of how they researched politically active artists, and how this research related to issues of freedom of speech. Another student used decision-making in the classroom and interactions in group work as examples of democracy, tolerance, and respect for others. A student studying French

said they had compared British values with those in France and the wider European context, and now had a deeper understanding of tolerance and respect.

Managers have evaluated students' understanding through a student survey. Two thirds of respondents said they knew how British values related to their subject. Managers' analysis of the results reveal which curriculum areas had a lower level of positive response and managers expect the areas to rectify this. During the visit, a small minority of students could not recall or discuss British values in a meaningful way.

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